

south african Jewish Report

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south african Jewish Report

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Krawitz: A voice for South African Jews

TALI FEINBERG

When community and business leader Philip Krawitz received a victorious judgment from the Western Cape High Court last week, a moment from 32 years ago came to his mind. “I clearly recall newly elected President Nelson Mandela addressing the Jews of Cape Town at the Marais Road Shul, on the first Shabbat after the 1994 elections.”

Krawitz said that Madiba told the community to “‘stay home or go home’ implying that he understood the centrality of Israel in the lives of Jews, and our right to ‘go home’ if we decided to make aliya”. “However, he also made the point that if we were thinking of emigrating to anywhere other than Israel, we should ‘stay home’ and help build South Africa.”

This is what Krawitz’s family has done through Cape Union Mart, the business his grandfather, also named Philip, first opened almost 100 years ago. Today, the retail group employs more than 3 000 people and has more than 250 stores across its brands.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* in his first interview since the judgment was handed down on 4 September, Krawitz explains why, as a proudly South African business, he went to court to interdict defamation and lawless protests.

“If we don’t stand up for our Constitution and the rights provided to every South African, then our democracy will be severely compromised,” he says. “We have the right to freedom of belief, and the right to operate businesses in a safe environment.”

The judgment “vindicates our faith in the judiciary and the independence

of South Africa’s law courts. It is also a triumph for democracy: it endorses the right to protest, providing the protests fall within the ambit of the law. That is a policy we have always respected and held dear.”

For almost three years the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and its supporters have staged protests outside Cape Union Mart stores and defamed Krawitz, accusing them of complicity in a “genocide” in Gaza, including the killing of babies.

Krawitz says he and his team are delighted that the judge has ordered the protesters to stop making defamatory statements about him as executive chairperson of Cape Union Mart, the company, and its brands.

Considering the wide-ranging judgment “covering every argument that we put forward, we feel it might

have been more appropriate to award costs in our favour, rather than having each party cover its own costs”, he says.

Recalling Mandela’s words to the community, he says, “I was there when he made those remarks, and I will never forget them. We therefore felt it important to take a stand against those trying to badger us into cutting our connection with Israel. For that reason, we decided to say, ‘So far, and no further!’ Thank heavens, we have a Constitution and judges who endorse that right.”

While Krawitz emphasises that the right to protest “is a fundamental democratic right enshrined in our Constitution”, he says “the court has made an extremely important point, expressing that pre-emptive to the right to protest is the right to dignity and respect. Apart

from contravening numerous aspects of the Gatherings Act, the protesters continued to propagate lies.”

Providing that protests are within the law, and are based on fact, “we have no argument against their legal right to protest”, says Krawitz. But it is “grossly unfair to target companies because of any perceived affiliations with which people may not agree”.

Shopping centres like the V&A Waterfront and Canal Walk allowed protests to continue after the judgment was handed down. Regarding this, Krawitz says, “We have excellent, long-standing relationships with all the shopping centres in which we are tenants. We pay our rentals on time, and expect that we should have unimpeded access to our premises in environments where shoppers feel comfortable and relaxed.”

Cape Union Mart has already been in touch with landlords of certain centres and provided them with copies of the judgment. “We will be discussing a way forward with them in the near future.”

Krawitz says that Cape Union Mart employees have been “absolutely amazing” in dealing with the protests and targeted harassment. They are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, black, white, straight, and LGBTQI+, and “they have worked together in the same harmonious spirit that has permeated our company through nearly a century. They have been at the frontline during this conflict, and we are extremely grateful to them for their loyal support.”

Cape Union Mart is a family business and “has always been the extra guest at our Shabbat table”, quips Krawitz. “We are an extremely close family, and we have all been united around handling this very unpleasant challenge.”

Continued on page 3>>

Cutting the Jerusalem rug



South African royals get into the groove in the middle of the Machane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem last week.
See story on page 9.

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Happiness in the age of AI

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



The 2025 World Happiness Report found that almost one in five young adults around the world had no one they could count on for support. A 2026 study published in *Social Science & Medicine* found that people who felt connected with their local community experienced greater well-being and less loneliness over time.

We need other people. We need to feel that we belong.

That need runs deeper than psychology. It comes from the *neshamah*, our soul. G-d has created us to connect: to know and be known, to care and be cared for, to feel part of something larger than ourselves.

Artificial intelligence (AI) brings this into sharp focus. AI is an extraordinary tool. It can transform businesses, improve productivity, solve complex problems, and help us work in ways we could scarcely have imagined a few years ago.

But it is still a machine. It has no soul. That matters because, disturbingly, growing numbers of people are already turning to AI for companionship and emotional support. A machine can converse, and can even sound caring, insightful, and empathetic. But there

is nothing there. It is empty of true emotion. It has no soul. Its expressions of connection are artificial.

Human connection isn't simply about having someone to talk to. It is about being part of a circle of mutual responsibility: being there for others, and knowing they are there for us. It is not merely having people around us that matters. There is something powerful about knowing: these are my people. This is my community. This is where I *belong*.

For 185 years, that idea has been at the heart of South African Jewish life.

When Cape Town's first Jewish community was established in 1841, one of the first priorities was to establish a shul. As Jewish communities spread across the country, and later moved from small towns to cities, and from one suburb to another, shuls remained the central hub of community life.

So much has changed since 1841. But that has not.

Our shuls are still the beating heart of our community – where we find meaning and inspiration, comfort and support; warm and inviting places that make us feel at home. Shuls are an island of connectivity, love, and real human connection – places where we feel part of something greater than ourselves.

They are where we connect to our Creator and His plan for the meaning of our lives. Shuls connect us to our rabbis and rebbetzins, who are there to guide and teach, to care, and to hold our community.

Our shuls are the most powerful driver of the cohesion and vibrancy for which our community is famous. They are where community is lived week after week: where we pray to Hashem and learn Torah together, celebrate together, support one another through illness and loss, build friendships, raise our children, and share responsibility for one another.

Pirkei Avot teaches, "Do not separate

yourself from the community." It is a profound insight into what human beings need in order to flourish.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur bring all of us back to our shuls.

So this year, let us make that return the beginning, not the end, of our connection for the year ahead. Make it a new year's resolution to become a more active part of your shul. Come more often. Bring your children. Learn. Pray. Volunteer. Get involved. Be there for others – and allow others to be there for you.

Because, especially in the age of AI, the

things that make life worth living remain profoundly human: faith, love, responsibility, friendship, family, belonging, and community. No machine can build those for us. No machine can meet those deep needs. No matter how intelligent our machines become, we will always need one another.

In a world offering ever more sophisticated substitutes for human connection, let us invest more deeply in the real thing. May Hashem bless us all with a good and sweet new year, strengthened by the loving bonds of community and connection.

Adidas apologises for campaign with Israeli veteran amputee after calls to boycott

Adidas has apologised for featuring an Israeli former soldier and amputee in a campaign advertising its service for people with missing legs, which sparked calls for a boycott.

Shalev Biton, who lost his left leg during the 2021 Israel-Gaza conflict, appeared in a promotional video for the sportswear company's Single Shoe service.

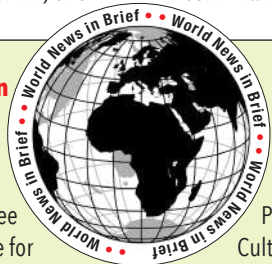
The programme was introduced in Europe earlier this year to allow amputees to buy just one shoe.

The campaign, filmed in Hebrew, showed Biton trying on a single sneaker at a store in Israel and running outside. It didn't mention his army service or how he lost his leg. Biton was in a military vehicle that was hit by a missile while on a protective patrol of villages on the Israeli side of the Gaza border, according to Israel's Channel 12.

After the video circulated widely online, pro-Palestinian activists called for a boycott of Adidas, referencing Gaza's high number of amputees created

by Israeli attacks since October 2023. Adidas apologised for the campaign on Monday in a statement on the Adidas Arabia Instagram account, but the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, part of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, said the apology was insufficient. It demanded that the company "immediately remove the Israeli soldier from all Adidas promotional material and channels".

Biton said on his Instagram account that he had



A Palestinian boy who lost his leg in Gaza, seeing the Israeli Adidas advert

Photo: Saeed M M T Jaras and Anadolu via Getty Images

received "an insane wave of hate" over recent days. In an appeal for support, he told viewers, "I want to feel that you are here with me."

Adidas and Biton could not immediately be reached for further details.

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Echoes of the soul: A shofar meditation

Torah Thought

There is so much noise we create within ourselves – our worries, expectations, fears, and ideas about how life needs to be.

Rosh Hashanah invites us to take the crown off our own heads and coronate the true King. To transform the *ra'ash*, the noise, of the year into Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year. To quiet ourselves enough to hear something deeper.

The shofar wakes us from our unconscious patterns and breaks through the boundaries of our constricted thinking. Its sounds can become a journey of healing for the soul.

The first sound is *tekiah*, one long, clear, unbroken note. It represents clarity, tranquillity, and surrender. Take a slow breath in and out. Imagine the *tekiah* clearing away the noise of the year – the worry, fear, and need to control everything. Allow yourself to surrender. You don't need to know how everything will unfold.

Say quietly, "Hashem, I place my life in Your hands. Wherever life takes me, help me discover You there." Feel the inner silence that comes when you no longer need to control everything.

Then comes *shevarim*, three broken sounds. *Shever* means broken.

The shofar begins to cry. There are parts of ourselves that have become distant during the year. Moments when we lost touch with who we really are, with others, or with Hashem. The broken sound gives us permission to feel that distance. Take another breath. Allow yourself to feel whatever needs to be felt – disappointment, pain, longing, regret. Not with judgement, but with tenderness. If tears come, let them come. Ask Hashem simply, "Bring me home. Help me become close again."

Then comes *teruah*, short, urgent sounds, like an alarm calling us to move. Emotion must become action. Ask yourself: What is one thing I want to change this year? Perhaps greater patience. More kindness. More presence. Deeper prayer. More Torah. A more conscious Shabbos. More time listening to your soul. Don't choose 10 things. Choose one. Let the *teruah* awaken within you the courage to begin.

Finally comes *tekiah gedolah*, one great, expansive, unbroken sound. We return to wholeness. Breathe deeply. Release the remaining noise. Feel Hashem within you and

around you. Feel yourself held within something infinitely greater than yourself. You began with noise. You passed through surrender, brokenness, and awakening. And now, for a moment, there is simply presence.

May the sound of the shofar awaken within us a year of clarity, healing, courage, and connection.

Rabbi Shmuel Ozhekh
Ohr Somayach Cape Town



May Hashem bless us with a sweet new year, and may we experience the ultimate *tekiah gedolah* – the sound of freedom, redemption, and peace.

Shabbat and Yomtov Times

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Durban	17:28	18:19	18:20
Bloemfontein	17:48	18:38	18:39
Gqeberha	17:48	18:41	18:41
Plettenberg Bay	17:57	18:50	18:50
East London	17:40	18:32	18:32
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Families believe plane crash was apartheid crime

NICOLA MILTZ

Nearly 60 years after her father boarded a South African Airways (SAA) plane from Port Elizabeth that crashed into the sea, Robyn Lichter still cannot say how he died or where his remains lie. Nor why one of South Africa's most enduring aviation mysteries continues.

She was just 11 when her father, prominent Johannesburg businessman Joseph Blankfield was among 20 passengers and five crew aboard the Vickers Viscount "Rietbok" that plunged into the Indian Ocean near Kayser's Beach, outside East London, on 13 March 1967.

Officially, no bodies were found. The aircraft wasn't recovered. No definitive cause of the crash was ever established.

Four of the passengers were Jewish, Blankfield, Audrey Rosenthal, Max Melmed, and Norman Sosnow.

On Friday, 4 September, Melbourne-based Lichter, 71, stood before the Khampepe Commission of Inquiry into stopped Truth and Reconciliation Commission

investigations and prosecutions, and tried once again to highlight the murky details.

She presented a detailed submission on behalf of the families of the 25 people aboard and that of SAA investigator Captain James Boyd, who died mysteriously shortly after the crash.

"The last two years have spurred me to intense investigation that's revealed the horrific truth of an apartheid crime. The handling of the bodies, no dignity for victims or families were haunting. I believe in our duty as Jews to bear witness and to keep their memory alive," Lichter told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

"We don't know what brought the plane down," she said. "The incident was shrouded in secrecy; there were so many inconsistencies and irregularities, and files, documents, and recordings went

missing. All we want is an investigation to uncover the truth."

"This was an apartheid-era crime and we, the victims' family members, believe there was a definite cover-up."

She told the commission the families believe State Security was involved.

Two passengers have become central to the theory that there was a cover-up.

One was Professor Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk Bruwer, African Affairs adviser, speechwriter, and close friend of prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd, and a senior figure in the secretive Afrikaner Broederbond. Verwoerd had been

which the families believe was never adequately investigated", Lichter told the *SA Jewish Report*.

For her, this sprawling mystery began with the most ordinary of family moments: going to the airport to fetch her father.

Blankfield, a successful plastics manufacturer and co-founder of Bellavista School in Johannesburg, had travelled to Port Elizabeth on business and was coming home earlier than expected. Lichter, her mother Myra, 45, and brothers Mark, 15, and Paul, nine, climbed into her father's new yellow Pontiac and drove from their Victory Park home to then Jan Smuts Airport.

"I just remember waiting and waiting," she said. "The flight was delayed. People were hovering around."

Eventually, the relatives were ushered into an office.

"There was a bunch of us crammed into this office and they told us the plane had crashed. One woman collapsed, crying, distraught. Her daughter was on the plane. She felt so awful for us because we were so young."

They never gained any certainty about what had happened to Blankfield.

"My mom, who was a very strong woman, remained tormented up until the day she died at 94, not knowing what happened to my father.

"From the beginning, a shroud of silence was thrown over the investigation and all involved were sworn to secrecy," said Lichter.

"As a child, when you haven't got a body or answers, I used to dream my dad would walk through the door and say, 'I've sorted it all out. Don't worry, I swam and got home.'"

The official inquiry, headed by Justice Cecil Margo, couldn't determine the cause of the crash, although it said it could not exclude the possibility that Captain Benjamin Lipawsky had suffered a heart attack and control of the aircraft was lost.

There was no black box.

"Although this event has been portrayed as a tragic accident, too many unexplained suspicious occurrences led the families and many others to believe something more sinister took place," Lichter said in her affidavit.

Among the most disturbing concerns were the victims themselves. Lichter told the commission that information on the night of the crash indicated an official report stating that 21 bodies had been

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found. There were numerous reports to this effect, she said, before the account changed and families were told no bodies had been recovered.

At least two families, including Bruwer's, were allegedly contacted and told to come and identify their loved ones, only to be turned away.

Other disturbing accounts followed: a torso reportedly washed ashore, underwent a post-mortem, and was buried in an unmarked grave; another badly damaged body reportedly washed up in Queensbury Bay; and a third, believed to be that of British Jewish passenger Norman Sosnow, 23, was reportedly found floating off the East London coast, with no official documentation indicating what then happened to his remains.

Former naval personnel claimed the aircraft itself had been located. A former navy diver later said the wreck was found and an underwater camera showed passengers still strapped into

their seats.

The official record said that very little wreckage was recovered and the main wreck could not be reached.

Former Security Branch policeman and author Alan Elsdon alleged that the disaster was "the result of calculated foul play, deliberately obscured by the government". His allegations remain unproven, but his affidavit is among material relied upon by those seeking a renewed investigation.

None of these strands, individually or collectively, proves sabotage. What they do, the families argue, is demonstrate why the Rietbok crash cannot simply be consigned to history as a settled aviation accident.

Lichter told the commission her hope was for the crash to be recognised as an apartheid-era crime and for the case to be referred to a dedicated prosecutor at the National Prosecuting Authority.

Krawitz: A voice for South African Jews

>>Continued from page 1

He says he is extremely proud of his daughter Martine Vogelmann, "who has been at the forefront of our measures to counter the lies and unlawful actions that we've faced". Her indignation at the slurs against her parents "sets an example for the next generation to pursue", he says.

She has been joined by in-house head of legal, Simone Sulcas, and the two have ensured that rather than knee-jerk reactions, the family and the business have acted within the bounds of the law.

Since the judgment was handed down, Krawitz has received "more than 500 messages from all over the world, congratulating us. People who I barely recall have reached out, thanking us for standing up."

He says it's been "a long, and expensive battle, but the world should know that Jews will never again be singled out for discriminatory treatment because of their moral and religious affiliations".

He extends "a huge thank you to everyone who supported us every step of the way, and especially to Martine, Simone, and our legal team".

The Krawitz family has always been "proudly and openly Jewish, while fiercely protecting our privacy as an unlisted family business. Attempts to intimidate our family were an example of punching below the belt", he says.

From his earliest days in business, "religion was a non-issue". Staff, suppliers, and customers ran the full gamut of religious practice. He clearly remembers having to rent premises in his name for the company's Muslim tailors, who were not permitted to rent premises in white areas.

"I numbered many Muslims among my circle of friends," says Krawitz.

"I always hoped that here in South Africa, we could show the world how we all live in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation. We cannot solve the challenges of the Middle East. We can, however, show how Jews and Muslims live side by side in South Africa.

"I still harbour that belief, and hope that we can put the conflict of the past few years behind us, and show the world how we are still the Rainbow Nation."

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Cape Union Mart judgment – ‘a win for all South Africans’

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish community is celebrating the Western Cape High Court judgment in favour of Cape Union Mart. They see it as a victory against a tirade of antizionist and antisemitic hate that has escalated in recent years.

In the landmark judgment on Friday, 4 September, Judge Judith Cloete stopped the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and its supporters from defaming, targeting, and harassing Cape Union Mart, its brands, and its executive chairperson, Philip Krawitz.

The executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD), Daniel Bloch, says the judgment provides an important measure of reassurance.

It's reassurance that Jews "have the same rights as all other South Africans to participate fully in society, to own and operate businesses and organisations, and to maintain their Jewish identity, beliefs, and legitimate connections to Israel without being subjected to targeted harassment, intimidation, or defamatory conduct".

Criticism of any government, including Israel's, is a legitimate part of democratic discourse, says Bloch. "What isn't legitimate is the targeting of Jewish individuals or Jewish-owned businesses through serious, damaging allegations that are unsupported by evidence."

Independent practising attorney David Polovin agrees that the judgment is "an important legal victory and a deeply encouraging moment for South African Jews who identify proudly with Israel. It upholds the principle that attachment to Israel doesn't diminish anyone's entitlement to dignity, reputation, and the protection of the law."

He says that Krawitz's determination to defend those rights deserves recognition. His victory offers "reassurance and encouragement to others who share his convictions", says Polovin. "The judgment demonstrates that the courts can provide meaningful protection when political hostility crosses into defamation and unlawful conduct."

Bloch adds that protest campaigns "must be grounded in fact and conducted within the bounds of the law". The campaign against Cape Union Mart "has highlighted the broader dangers that arise when political activism is accompanied by



misinformation or unsubstantiated claims", he says.

The court interdicted the PSC and its supporters from making any claim that Krawitz, Cape Union Mart, and its brands are funding "genocide", the Israeli army, or the conflict in Gaza, and claiming that they are killing children or are complicit in the killing of children.

They are also restrained from publishing defamatory statements saying that Krawitz, Cape Union Mart, and its brands "support a genocide in Gaza" or describing them as "Killers Way", instead of the brand K-Way.

They also may not claim that Cape Union Mart is associated with the State of Israel in any way.

convictions make them fair game for unfounded accusations of 'funding genocide' or 'killing children.'"

Shimron Shapiro, the lead attorney at S Shapiro Attorneys, says this is an extremely important judgment, not just for the Jewish community, but for South Africans at large.

It reminds us that "the right to freedom of expression, while important in a democracy, isn't limitless, and that one cannot defame a business or an individual by making serious allegations based on unsubstantiated hearsay".

The PSC says it will continue to protest outside Cape Union Mart stores, but from his very first affidavit, Krawitz said he didn't want to curtail anyone's right to protest. All he asked was that protests were conducted lawfully, and that they don't defame him and Cape Union Mart.

"The applicants are in no way attempting to prevent the respondents from exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom to assemble. The relief sought doesn't curtail those rights," he said in June 2025, when he filed the case.

"This judgment takes nothing away from anybody's right to protest, to boycott, or to criticise Israel," says Joshua Schewitz, executive director of the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council. "What the court has confirmed is that when you accuse a named individual of funding mass killing, the onus is on you to prove it. Unverified claims circulated online don't meet that standard."

Schewitz notes that protest action resumed outside Cape Union Mart stores on Saturday,

5 September, within a day of the ruling.

"'Funding' was the reason given to the public for two years of protests outside those stores. That reason has now been tested on oath, and it failed," says Schewitz. "Once the funding allegation falls away, and a court has now removed it, we are entitled to ask what is left: a retailer that has never donated outside of Southern Africa, and a Jewish businessman who supports Jewish charities."

If there is an explanation for continuing this campaign "other than the fact that Krawitz is Jewish", the PSC should place it on record, says Schewitz.

He says the judgment carries wider significance for the business community.

"Jewish business owners now have clarity. A person's faith and charitable giving aren't evidence of wrongdoing, and no business should have to prove its innocence against allegations built on nothing. This doesn't seem to stop the PSC from protesting, and that is a concern."

Bloch says the Cape SAJBD is currently involved in several legal matters, including cases concerning alleged defamation. "Each matter will, of course, be determined on its own facts and legal merits. Nevertheless, the principles affirmed in the Cape Union Mart judgment are significant, and may provide important guidance and precedent in our ongoing efforts to protect individuals and organisations where political campaigning crosses the line into unlawful conduct."

He emphasises that this isn't solely a Jewish community issue. The judgment "reinforces an important principle of South Africa's constitutional democracy: the right to political expression and protest doesn't provide a licence to unlawfully damage another person's reputation, livelihood, safety or fundamental rights".

The Cape SAJBD encourages members of the community who encounter protests to remain calm and avoid confrontation. "Where conduct becomes threatening, intimidating, violent, or otherwise potentially unlawful, community members should prioritise their safety, document events where it's safe and appropriate to do so, and report the matter to the Cape SAJBD and the relevant authorities."

Spokesperson for South African Friends of Israel, Bafana Modise, says "this is a victory for thousands of South Africans who work for Cape Union Mart, safeguarding their jobs. It's a victory for the Jewish people, to know that South Africa remains a safe place for business and for their families."

It's also a victory "for our economy, and for the business community in this country to know that business will be protected against foreign agendas".

Pastor Thom Thamaga from Simunye Israel, who has written extensively about the case, says the judgment "draws an important line between the constitutional right to protest and the supposed 'right' to destroy another person's reputation through allegations that cannot be substantiated".

He says South Africans must remain free to protest, criticise Israel, support Palestinians, organise boycotts, and express political views with which others may strongly disagree. "But freedom of expression cannot mean freedom from accountability.

"Persistent targeting of a business with no proven connection to the wrongdoing alleged against it risks ceasing to look like legitimate political protest and beginning to look like harassment", says Thamaga.

The judgment "reminds all of us that political passion doesn't transform an unproven allegation into a fact. South Africa desperately needs that principle right now."

He asks if Cape Union Mart would have been targeted in this manner if its owners weren't Jewish.

"We would rightly reject the targeting of a Muslim-owned South African business because of terrorism committed elsewhere by people claiming to act in the name of Islam. We would call that collective blame and prejudice. The same principle must apply to Jewish South Africans."



Visiting Jewish Cemeteries

It is customary to visit the graves of family before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur

VISITING TIMES

Westpark: Sunday – Friday from 07h00 to 16h00

Brixton: Sunday – Friday from 07h00 to 16h00.

Braamfontein: Please contact the Westpark Cemetery office to make the necessary arrangements.

The community is encouraged to visit this cemetery in groups of at least two.

There will be no drive-through traffic to graves on Sundays.
No exceptions can be made.



HPCSA backs down on Mofokeng finding

NICOLA MILTZ

A finding of unprofessional conduct against controversial doctor and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Johannesburg mayoral candidate Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng has been set aside by the High Court in Pretoria after the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) refused to defend its own ruling.

The dramatic reversal followed intervention by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), which advised the HPCSA that Mofokeng enjoyed immunity from “legal process” for words spoken or written while performing her duties as a United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur. The HPCSA subsequently concluded that this immunity extended to its own professional-conduct proceedings and abandoned its opposition to Mofokeng’s High Court challenge.

The court order overturns the HPCSA’s finding that Mofokeng brought the medical profession into disrepute through inappropriate language on social media, as well as the R10 000 fine imposed on her.

However, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), whose complaint led to the disciplinary action, stressed that the application was unopposed and that the court was never asked to determine whether Mofokeng’s conduct met acceptable professional standards.

“Any other South African doctor who said that would have answered for it,” said SAZF national spokesperson Rolene Marks. “She held a UN title, a government department wrote a letter, and the finding vanished. Nobody has explained what changed.”

The controversy arose from inflammatory

social media posts by Mofokeng while she was serving as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health.

In January 2025, in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and developments surrounding the Gaza ceasefire, Mofokeng posted: “F** you Netanyahu.”



When UN Watch executive director Hillel Neuer criticised the remark and called for UN action, Mofokeng responded, “You white man. Evil scum. Voetsek.”

The SAZF subsequently lodged a complaint with the HPCSA.

In September 2025, the First Medical and Dental Committee of Preliminary Inquiry found there was evidence of unprofessional conduct by Mofokeng and imposed a R10 000 fine for “bringing the profession into disrepute for using inappropriate language on social media”.

Mofokeng challenged the decision in the High Court, seeking to have both the finding and penalty reviewed and set aside.

But before the merits of that challenge could be tested in court, the HPCSA decided not to oppose her application.

At the heart of that decision was DIRCO’s intervention.

The HPCSA had approached the department

for advice on whether Mofokeng enjoyed immunity arising from her role as a UN special rapporteur.

In a letter dated 2 June 2026, DIRCO director-general Zane Dangor advised the HPCSA that special rapporteurs were regarded as “experts on mission” under the Convention

on the Privileges and Immunities of the UN and were immune from legal process for words spoken or written while performing their duties.

The HPCSA subsequently informed the SAZF that, taking the DIRCO letter, UN correspondence and its own legal advice into account, it had concluded that Mofokeng enjoyed immunity from

“legal process” for words spoken or written while performing her UN duties.

It therefore resolved not to oppose Mofokeng’s High Court review and agreed to an order setting aside its earlier finding.

For the SAZF and UN Watch, however, this raises a fundamental question: whether Mofokeng’s social media insults could legitimately be considered words spoken or written in the performance of her mandate on the right to health.

Dina Rovner, legal adviser at UN Watch, said the organisation had written to UN Secretary-General António Guterres challenging the reliance on Mofokeng’s UN immunity to shield her from disciplinary proceedings.

“Special rapporteurs don’t have blanket immunity. They have functional immunity, which covers their words spoken or actions taken specifically in carrying out their mandate, and those limits are very clear in the UN Convention on Privileges and Immunities,”

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Rovner said.

She said the purpose of such immunity was to enable Mofokeng to carry out her mandate of promoting the right to physical and mental health.

“It is not a licence to insult or disparage people online, which of course has nothing to do with her mandate on the right to health.”

Rovner described allowing Mofokeng to avoid a disciplinary process on immunity grounds as “a complete abuse of her position which undermines the immunity convention”.

She also pointed to recent remarks by Guterres, who said certain special rapporteurs were “out of control”.

For Rovner, that explanation doesn’t remove the need for accountability.

“He needs to go further, he needs to reprimand or fire rapporteurs when they cross the line,” she said. “He should make it absolutely clear that immunity has limitations and won’t cover profane language and disparaging comments or

insults on social media.”

Rovner also raised concerns about Mofokeng’s political involvement, saying UN special rapporteurs were required to serve as independent and impartial experts and signed an undertaking to that effect when taking office.

She said UN Watch had asked Guterres to address Mofokeng’s involvement with the EFF, both before she took up her UN position and, according to the organisation, while she was still serving as special rapporteur, arguing that this raised questions about the independence required of mandate holders.

In an opinion article published this week in *BusinessDay*, student activist Kamohelo Chauke questioned public-interest law centre Section27’s decision to represent Mofokeng, asking why an organisation traditionally associated with providing legal assistance to marginalised people was representing a politically connected professional seeking election as mayor of the country’s largest city.



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south african

Jewish Report

Ringling the ‘fairy bells’



Our New Year, Rosh Hashanah, isn’t a festival of pure, unadulterated celebration, like the one many of us mark on 31 December in the Gregorian calendar. It is a deeply introspective time, filled with prayer, the piercing call of the shofar, and yes, family time and celebration around the festival table.

While 1 January may be the start of a new year and the moment for a few chosen resolutions, Rosh Hashanah asks something deeper of us. It’s about looking back at the year we’ve had, acknowledging the things we aren’t proud of, and beginning the work of repentance before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Suffice to say it is a deeply spiritual day and time in our year, one that we generally take seriously. And every year, in our special Rosh Hashanah edition, the *SA Jewish Report* seeks out spiritual leaders to provide our readers with guidance and food for thought. And we have certainly done ourselves proud with our spiritual thought leaders this year.

However, as deeply spiritual as this time is, it is also a time of togetherness, family, bonding, reconnecting with friends, and renewing our personal commitments.

And perhaps that is why the small things seem to loom so large at this time of year. When we are already taking stock, the hurtful look, the missing invitation, the uncomfortable seating plan, or the phone call that never came can suddenly feel much bigger than it needs to be.

Having said that, while this is ultimately a joyous time with a wonderfully positive offshoot, it can also bring sadness and a fair few *faribels* (petty family grudges or minor grievances), or as my sister used to call them when we were kids, “fairy bells”.

You know as forgiving as our community can be, our people can and do harbour grudges too. These are probably the biggest waste of time, energy, and brainpower in our lives. Seriously, if your third cousin once removed has invited you to second-day Rosh Hashanah since you were kids, but you didn’t crack an invitation this year, it is not the end of the world.

If so-and-so seats you at the end of the table next to Mrs X, who they should know you don’t get on with, you don’t need to moan and groan about it for six months. Even five minutes is way too much.

If you sit with two specific women at shul every Rosh Hashanah and they find their way to other seats, it isn’t worth feeling upset and being convinced they’re doing it on purpose. You don’t know why they’ve moved. And if they do, in fact not want to sit with you, is it worth being upset and angry about?

You always get a ride to shul at the beginning of Rosh Hashanah with Mr W and this year he didn’t call to ask if you wanted a lift, so you have to walk. Is this grudge-worthy? Is it worth stewing over? Is it worth a second thought? No, it will provide a little extra exercise, and we can all be grateful for that because it adds to our healthy living. And we will certainly make up for the calories added in our mammoth festive Rosh Hashanah meals.

Cousin N always has a massive first-day Rosh Hashanah lunch, and you love being there. When the invitation didn’t come, you told everyone who would listen how upset you were because you were always so close as kids. Weeks later, after much wasted energy and badmouthing, you discovered they had gone to Israel for the *chag* because their children were now living there.

Did you go back to everyone you spoke to about this beforehand and tell them you regret what you said? Unlikely. Did you even feel bad about what you said?

This time of year is all about looking at how we live our lives and trying to find ways of doing it better. *Faribels* are truly an unnecessary evil. The time spent on them could be far better spent trying to help people or doing good. Perhaps finding something positive to think or talk about would be a whole lot better for you. Life is too short for *faribels* and silly grudges.

Instead of finding reasons to be miserable, we could be helping people who don’t have a place to go on *yomtov* to find someone to invite them. You see, one thing is for sure, being alone over Rosh Hashanah isn’t easy. It can be painful and lonely.

I was so excited to hear that ChaiFM had created a campaign (for want of a better word) to help find people to invite those who don’t have a place to go. For me, this epitomises what our *chaggim* should be all about. They should be about caring for each other, ensuring our community members aren’t left alone. It’s about providing a seat at our tables for those who need it. While the *faribels* are perhaps part of who we are, this is far more about what makes us tick and what we want to be.

When you give someone a gift and you see their joy, the gift of creating that joy is more worthwhile than receiving the present. And so is being able to pair people who have nowhere to go on *yomtov* with a friendly family. Seeing someone welcomed into a warm and loving home when they would otherwise have stayed home in an empty house is huge.

While there are many in our community, and in my own family, who do this automatically, not everyone does. And there are many people who spend festivals on their own. So being able to do this is a pure *mitzvah*.

I do get that during the span of a year we all do things we aren’t proud of. We may not have phoned people back when we promised to. We may have said things that are unkind or possibly hurt someone. We often have an opportunity to do right by people, and it is worth doing what we can to fix things. Not because it will be better for our slate with G-d, but because we can.

Most of us don’t want to hurt others. Most of us want to be good people. And we can be. This is the perfect time to get rid of *faribels* and rather work at how we can look at things through positive lenses and try and help, rather than find fault in them.

Shabbat shalom and Shana tova!
Peta Krost
Editor

Reading the tea leaves on SA-US relations

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



Once spent an evening with Thomas Friedman, the famous political commentator, *The New York Times* Middle East correspondent, three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of the bestselling book *From Beirut to Jerusalem*.

Friedman described the changes in his life from covering bomb blasts, assassinations, massacres, and invasions in Lebanon, to becoming the *Times*’ chief diplomatic correspondent and later chief White House correspondent.

In his previous posting he could cover his stories in gore and blood. In the press briefing rooms at both the Department of State at Foggy Bottom and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House, he would try to interpret the nuances of words and the encoded messages that the American president or secretary of state wanted to send to the world but never say directly to camera. Friedman much preferred the grit of the Middle East, where messages are sent with bullets and bombs, to the inflections in linguistic hieroglyphs.

Admittedly, the Trump presidency has done away with the niceties of diplomatic speak. News from the White House Press Briefing Room is now in-your-face, often sarcastic, and regularly incredulous.

But in the world of international diplomacy, messages are sent in signals, and each side gathers around the porcelain to decipher the tea leaves.

I think the signals are clear. A failing South African economy, rising unemployment, a deeply wounded African National Congress (ANC), crumbling in the polls before the 4 November municipal elections, and a collapsing Ramaphosa legacy have sent the president scrambling to try repair some of the enormous damage that he and his anti-Western foreign policy have wrought upon our nation.

The appointment of former National Party negotiator Roelf Meyer as ambassador to the United States was the first indication that Ramaphosa was seriously willing to attempt to thaw relations with the US. The Americans reciprocated with an *agrément* (a willingness to accept the new ambassador) within days. Meyer’s departure for the US was so hasty that he needed to be summoned back shortly afterwards for formalities and a security check. I still wonder whether they will ever discover that he was a member of the National Party?

But a far more significant signal was sent in July 2026 when both the South African government and the ANC failed to send a representative to the state funeral of the Iranian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran, which had been the ANC’s financial benefactor, had suddenly been dropped. The only South African who appears to have made the pilgrimage to pay homage to the brutal mass murderer of Iran was former Economic Freedom Fighters member of Parliament Mbuyiseni Ndlozi. Scandal and controversy swirled around his attendance and his public utterances, as questions were asked about who paid for the former politician-now struggling podcaster’s funeral junket.

The ANC had turned its back on its paymasters and South Africa had snubbed one of its closest allies with their failure to attend the week-long funeral dirge that ran from Tehran, through Qom, then travelled to Iraq for sacred processions in Najaf and Karbala, and concluded with a holy burial in Mashhad.

The wind was shifting. In August 2026, President Cyril Ramaphosa invited Rabbi Doron Perez, chairperson of the World Zionist Organization, for a meeting where Perez and his wife could thank Ramaphosa for his supposed assistance in prioritising the return of the body of their son Daniel from Hamas captivity.

South African-born Captain Daniel Perez was an Israeli tank commander who was killed by Hamas on 7 October 2023, and his body held hostage by the terrorist organisation in Gaza. Ultimately, his remains

were returned as part of the American-facilitated exchange of Hamas terrorists for living and dead Israeli hostages captured by Hamas during its genocidal raid on Israel, which killed 1 200 people in a single day and sparked a war that would devastate the Gaza Strip.

Some have criticised the Perez family for allowing Ramaphosa to whitewash his image by giving him credit for the expedited release of Daniel’s body. Ramaphosa is the only democratically elected head of state to have chanted the genocidal war-cry “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”, a slogan interpreted by most as calling for the destruction of Israel.

But being willing to sit with the head of the World Zionist Organization and allowing that encounter to be both photographed and released to the public was an important signal, which cannot be underplayed.

The US, meanwhile, extended South Africa’s free trade benefits under AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

Ramaphosa is shaping his own foreign policy, which appears at odds with that of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) with its pro-jihadist and radical anti-Western ideological stance orchestrated by Director-General Zane Dangor. Whispers in the corridors in Pretoria are that Dangor’s days may be numbered.

But South Africa loves to play both sides of the equation. Last week, DIRCO announced that it had filed a new motion against Israel at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, but failed to release these new legal documents to the press. It was performative.

Some believe that this action was Dangor playing his hand to counter the conciliatory moves emanating from the Union Buildings.



Meanwhile, a delegation of South African royals is currently in Israel, doing the unthinkable – actually assessing the situation for themselves. That follows a visit to Israel by abaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo, which angered DIRCO so much that it felt the need to expel the deputy Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Ariel Seidman.

Of course, the visit to Israel in late 2025 by Nelson Mandela’s granddaughters Zamaswazi Dlamini-Mandela and Zaziwe Dlamini-Manaway also deeply damaged the South African one-sided narrative on the Jewish State.

Like Thomas Friedman, but far less accomplished, I too sit here reading the tea leaves. Maybe they are signals, maybe the wind is changing, but possibly I should just swap my Five Roses for a cup of Rooibos.

- Howard Sackstein is a political commentator and chairperson of the SA Jewish Report, but writes in his personal capacity. He has a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a Master’s in political advocacy and international conflict resolution.



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ROSH HASHANAH	Sunday, 13 September 2026	OPEN MOTSE CHAG
FAST OF GEDALIAH	Monday, 14 September 2026	OPEN
EREV YOM KIPPUR	Sunday, 20 September 2026	3PM
YOM KIPPUR	Monday, 21 September 2026	CLOSED
EREV SUKKOTH	Friday, 25 September 2026	4PM
SUKKOTH	Saturday, 26 September 2026	CLOSED
SUKKOTH	Sunday, 27 September 2026	OPEN MOTSE CHAG
EREV SHMINI ATZERET	Friday, 2 October 2026	4PM
SHMINI ATZERET/ EREV SIMCHAT TORAH	Saturday, 3 October 2026	CLOSED
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9/11 etched into people’s minds 25 years later

LEE TANKLE

Ask someone who was in New York on 11 September 2001 where they were when the first plane struck the World Trade Center and chances are they won’t have to think for long.

Twenty-five years later, the details of that morning remain etched in the memories of those who witnessed a day that changed New York, and the world, forever.

Cindy Eden, who was working in New York at the time and watched from a rooftop as the towers fell, says she can’t forget the times she spent in the buildings, or all the people who were lost.

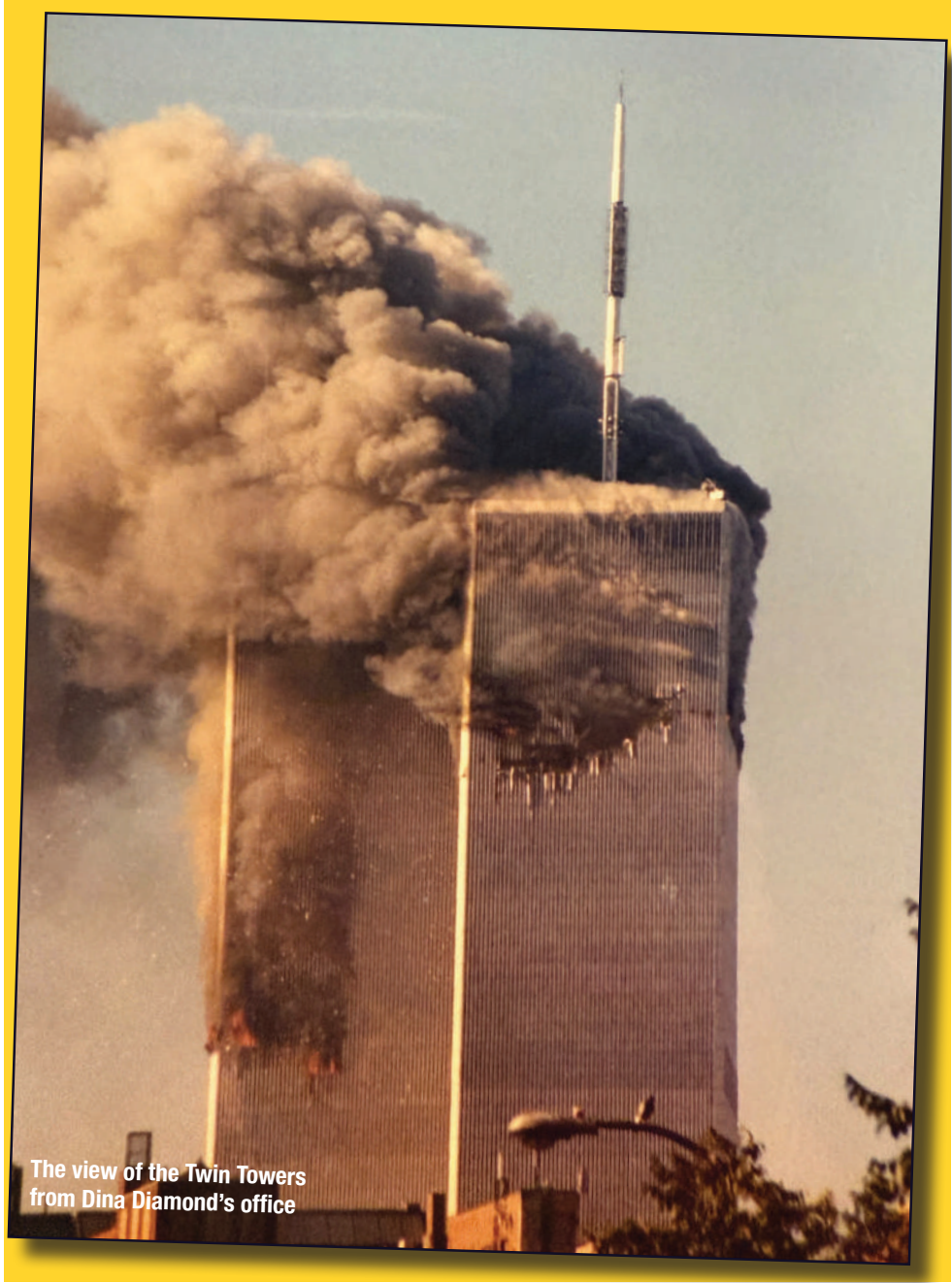
“I spent a fair amount of time at the World Trade Center. On the 107th floor of the North Tower was Windows on the World and a bar known as ‘the greatest bar on earth’. Thursday nights were salsa nights, and we danced there more than once, a hundred storeys above the city. Knowing what that room became on 11 September, and that so many people who worked or simply happened to be there never came down, is a grief that hasn’t gone away. It becomes something you carry,” she said.

“I was about to become a mother for the first time when the towers fell. I remember feeling the strangeness of carrying a future on a day that felt like an ending. What I remember most 25 years later isn’t the smoke or the fear – it’s the quiet that followed, the kindness that showed up inside it, and knowing exactly which room, on which floor, I used to dance in.”

Elise Jankelowitz was in the United States for her elder brother’s wedding in Chicago and was spending a few days in New York. She was staying at the Marriott Hotel in the World Trade Center when everything changed. She is still haunted by the memory of her and her brother running for their lives. After waking to the first plane hitting the first tower, they were initially told to remain in their hotel room before being ordered to evacuate. They ran down 15 flights of stairs and, once outside, witnessed the second plane hit.

Fearing the towers would collapse, they headed towards Battery Park and the Hudson River, where they were engulfed in thick dust and sheltered near the water. Eventually, they escaped Manhattan by ferry to Staten Island, passing firefighters heading in the opposite direction, an image that’s remained with her ever since.

“We could hear planes above us and taxi drivers shouting that there were still aircraft unaccounted for and that Manhattan was under attack. At that point, I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, this is it. This



is the end of our lives’,” said Jankelowitz.

Graphic designer Caren Green, who was living in New York at the time, was on her way to work when she heard on the radio that a plane had just flown into the Twin Towers. She said that day was one of the catalysts that led her to return to South Africa in 2003.

“I just realised that the world wasn’t as safe as you thought it was. People would say, ‘Oh, South Africa, you could get shot’, but in some ways I felt safer in South Africa because it felt like something you could control. In New York, there was this overwhelming sense of having no control. Wherever there were large groups of people, you wondered whether there could be a bomb or some kind of terrorist activity. It just felt very, very different,” she said.

Green joined her colleagues at work watching the unfolding attack on television before going to the roof with her boss,

where they witnessed the second plane hit the Twin Towers. She described the moment as surreal, “almost like watching a movie”.

Tami Morris started a new job on 11 September in New York. While getting ready, she turned on the TV as she did every day to check the weather, and suddenly saw the Twin Towers being attacked.

“It was my first day of work, and I didn’t want to be late, so I got dressed and started walking to the office. As I walked, there was this strange feeling on the streets and a sense of panic beginning to set in,” she said. “As I got closer to my office in the Meatpacking District, I could see more chaos unfolding.”

She arrived at work and didn’t know what to do with herself, and neither did anyone else.

“We eventually walked towards the Hudson River, trying to find somewhere

we could see the towers from. From there, we could see them and I actually watched the towers come down. We were standing on the edge of Manhattan looking at the towers when it happened,” she said.

“What I find particularly striking now is how much the world has changed. 9/11 was an enormous global event and afterwards there was a very real fear and understanding of terrorism. For my generation, it became part of our history because we lived through it,” she said.

Dina Diamond, who was working at a real estate development firm in New York at the time, remembers walking out of the subway and thinking what a beautiful day it was. She arrived at her office, on the 40th floor at Fifth Avenue and 40th Street in Midtown Manhattan, to find colleagues gathered at the windows. From the office, which had a clear view downtown, they could see smoke pouring from one of the Twin Towers and were told that a plane had struck it.

“As we were looking out the window, we saw the second plane fly into the second tower. And it looked like glitter falling off the building, but it was glass. We just saw stuff and people falling off the building and the plane exploding into the building, which was a crazy, surreal thing to see.”

Diamond said that seeing the events unfold took away the rose-

WE JUST SAW STUFF AND PEOPLE FALLING OFF THE BUILDING AND THE PLANE EXPLODING INTO THE BUILDING, WHICH WAS A CRAZY, SURREAL THING TO SEE.

coloured glasses she had for New York and New Yorkers.

“New York was always seen as this powerhouse, almost an indestructible entity and the centre of the universe. But I think that was shattered forever on that day. After 9/11, travel changed, security requirements changed, and there was this realisation that nowhere is truly safe. We had seen things happening in Israel and South Africa, but you never imagined something like this could happen in New York City,” she said.

“It was a huge lesson that nowhere is untouched. There are forces that will try to do terrible things, but at the same time, people come together to do good. So many people lost their lives that day, and it reminded me that you have to live each day, appreciate what you have, and help others when there is a crisis.”



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SA royals champion stronger ties with Israel

CLAUDIA GROSS

At a time when relations between the South African and Israeli governments remain deeply strained, a group of royals has returned from Israel calling for greater cooperation between the countries.

The 12-member delegation included Queen Sinokuhle Matiwane of the AmaMpondomise Kingdom, eight princesses, and two princes, representing several traditional communities. The visit at the beginning of September focused on healthcare, water, agriculture, technology, innovation, and cultural ties.

Princess Bhelekazi Siphokazi Mabandla of the AmaBhele kaJamangile Traditional Community said she returned from Israel more determined than ever to strengthen ties between the countries.



South African royalty in Israel

"My role is to make sure that the relationship between South Africa and Israel is restored," Mabandla told the *SA Jewish Report*. "And to see Israel as a strategic partner for the continent and for our country and our communities."

Mabandla had previously visited Israel shortly after 7 October 2023, but the latest visit gave her a different perspective because she was travelling with a new delegation and had the opportunity to see more of the country.

Her interest in Israel is driven by opportunities for practical cooperation. She highlighted Israeli expertise in agriculture, water management, land management, and technology as areas that could benefit rural South Africans.

Mabandla is based in the Eastern Cape, where many communities face development challenges. She said Israel's approach to using available resources and developing new solutions had made a strong impression on her. "There is so much that we could benefit from. Water management, land management, agriculture, using what you have."

The delegation's coordinator, Princess Fundiswa Babalwa Zote of the AbaThembu Kingdom, said water was one of the most important issues discussed during the visit.

"There's no water in our communities," she said. "We've been speaking to Innovation: Africa to see how we can collaborate and use some of the Israeli technology to bring water to our people."

The non-profit organisation Innovation: Africa uses Israeli solar and water technology to provide clean water and electricity to communities in Africa. The delegation's interest in water solutions formed part of a broader focus on practical development.

According to Daniel Jacobi, executive director of the South African Friends of Israel, the visit followed that of AbaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo in December 2025. That visit established relationships that led to an invitation for other recognised traditional leaders to visit Israel.

"The sole purpose of them coming to Israel was exchanging culture and seeing the cooperation opportunity and potential to strengthen their relationship and a better understanding of Israel," Jacobi said.

South African traditional leaders hold cultural and community authority alongside the country's elected political structures. Their role is particularly significant in rural communities.

The latest delegation included mainly female traditional leaders, who met with Israeli organisations and officials and visited healthcare, humanitarian, cultural, and religious sites.

They visited Save a Child's Heart, an Israeli humanitarian organisation that provides life-saving

cardiac treatment to children from developing countries. The organisation has treated more than 8 500 children from 75 countries since its establishment in 1995.

The South African royals met children from several African countries and danced to *Jerusalem* with them. Save a Child's Heart spokesperson Daniel Campos, said the delegation was enthusiastic about interacting with the children.

Zote also expressed interest in greater medical cooperation between South Africa and Israel, saying initiatives such as Save a Child's Heart demonstrated how cooperation could benefit communities across Africa.

At Magen David Adom's national headquarters in Ramla, the royals were shown the organisation's National Human Milk Bank, emergency dispatch centre, National Blood Bank, and specialised emergency vehicles.

They also saw how Israeli emergency medical operations function during wartime.

Other visits included Hadassah Medical Center, Yad Vashem, the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, the City of David archaeological site, and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and the Galilee.

"As Christians, it's been important that we come to the holy land and to relive the Bible and walk the Bible," Zote said. She described visiting Jerusalem as "amazing" and singled out Magdala, believed to be the birthplace of Mary Magdalene, as one of the highlights of the trip.

The visit to Israel took place against the backdrop of the deterioration in relations between the South African and Israeli governments since the Hamas attack on 7 October. South Africa has taken a strongly critical position towards Israel

and instituted proceedings against it at the International Court of Justice in December 2023, accusing it of "genocide" in Gaza. Israel has rejected South Africa's allegations. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries have remained severely strained, with both expelling the other's diplomat.

The royal delegation's visit therefore represented a different form of engagement.

Mabandla said political disagreements shouldn't prevent cooperation. "Diplomacy is about dialogue and cooperation," she said. "We can disagree. It doesn't mean you don't disagree with diplomacy."

She urged South Africans to take the opportunity to learn more about Israel directly. "People must take time to learn or take time to visit if they are able to," she said. "To visit the region and see things for themselves."

Mabandla was particularly struck by the involvement of Jewish communities from around the world in Israeli institutions. She said she repeatedly saw buildings and facilities bearing the names of families and communities that had contributed towards them. That experience changed how she viewed the relationship between communities and their country of origin. "I said I'm really going to take that and personalise it in my own life."

Mabandla was moved by the welcome they'd received from ordinary Israelis. She recalled people approaching the group after learning they were from South Africa and thanking them for visiting.

She said those interactions stood out because they weren't government officials or political representatives. "They were ordinary people that have nothing to do with government," she said. "So it was real."

For Zote, the visit ended with a message of friendship and faith. "May G-d bless the city of Jerusalem. May G-d keep her. May G-d bless Israel and keep Israel in perfect peace," she said. "We love you."

Mabandla intends to return to Israel and continue working towards stronger relations between the countries. "I will use my voice in diplomacy, which is my love language, and I will not stop until my last breath," she said.

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Hit songs give a glimpse into the Israel psyche

OPINION

I've been in Israel making good use of public transport. Whether it's a taxi or bus, more often than not, the radio is on and after a while, you start recognising the songs. So what are Israelis listening to almost three years after 7 October?

On the latest published Israeli chart from Galgalatz, the popular music station of the Israel Defense Forces-run Army Radio, the number one song is *Avi HaTahol*, by Israeli singer Roei Adam. It's also number one on Spotify's weekly Israel chart. The song takes its name from a famous tough-guy gangster character in the Israeli television series *The Arbitrator*, but the song isn't about war or tough guys. It's about a breakup and a man who can't move on even though his ex-girlfriend already has.

Elsewhere near the top of the Galgalatz chart are *Eich Shehi Rokedet* (The Way She Dances) by Eden Hason, Ofek Adanek, and Agam Buhbut; *Yalda Metorefet* (Crazy Girl) by Bar Tzabary; and *Monolog* (Monologue) by Ness & Stilla.

Ness & Stilla are perhaps the most striking example of how, in the almost three years since 7 October, Israel's soundtrack has changed dramatically.

In November 2023, the Israeli hip-hop duo released *Harbu Darbu* (War and Blows), an Arabic-derived expression associated with mayhem or fighting. Written out of the anger that followed 7 October, it became one of the defining Israeli songs of the early war. Now they're near the top of the charts with a fast, playful song about a couple arguing and failing to listen to each other.

In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the music was filled with war, grief, G-d, survival, and togetherness. Today, those themes are sharing space with love, dancing, heartbreak, and ordinary life.

Music can tell us something about where a society is. Like the films people watch, the jokes they tell, and the words they use, songs don't simply reflect what people are thinking and feeling. They can also help shape them. Earlier this year, researchers Yuval Benziman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Roy Katz of Reichman University published a study examining the music most played on Israeli radio during the first three months after 7 October. One of their most interesting findings was what Israelis didn't listen to.

In times of trauma, people often turn to familiar music, finding comfort in nostalgia. But Israelis largely did the opposite. Eight of the 10 most-played songs during those first three months were created after the war began and responded directly to it. It was as though the old songs, and perhaps even the old language, were no longer enough to explain what had happened. The most-played



Singer Roei Adam who has a number one song on Galgalatz

was Eyal Golan's *Am Yisrael Chai* (The People of Israel Live), released less than two weeks after the Hamas attack. Its message was one of Jewish survival, faith, unity, and the hope that the hostages would come home.

Other new songs spoke about the Nova festival, southern Israel, and a country that was bleeding. But two of the 10 most-played songs had predated 7 October and suddenly acquired new relevance. Their titles tell you why: *Getting Over Depression* and *Things Will Get Better*. The former was re-recorded with a defence force band after the war began.

The researchers describe a society in shock, trying to make sense of a reality for which its existing cultural vocabulary seemed inadequate. And G-d was everywhere. Five of the 10 most-played songs had a religious or faith orientation. Israelis sang *Shema Yisrael*. They sang about redemption, prayer, and someone watching from above. At a moment when their physical security had collapsed, the music reflected a search for another source of protection, meaning, and hope.

Mizrahi music was also prominent. Most of the 10 most-played songs were Mizrahi or performed by Mizrahi artists. Mizrahi, literally "Eastern", broadly describes music rooted in the cultures of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, mixed over time with Israeli pop and other influences. For decades, this music was largely excluded from mainstream Israeli radio, whose early musical establishment was predominantly Ashkenazi and European. However, from the 1980s onwards, Mizrahi music gradually moved from the margins to the centre.

So 7 October didn't create that transformation, but it revealed how complete it had become. When Israelis needed music to express a national trauma, the old predominantly Ashkenazi soundtrack for national mourning was no longer the automatic choice.

For all the grief, those first post-7 October songs were also remarkably hopeful. Again and again they moved from darkness towards light, from pain towards recovery. They spoke about being together, bringing

people home, and believing better days would come. Almost three years later, perhaps the change in the soundtrack tells us something about what those better days look like. Israelis are listening to songs about dancing and falling in and out of love again.

I don't think that means they've moved on from 7 October. Spend any time here and it's difficult to argue that they have. The

war, reserve duty, bereavement, and the arguments over what happened that day remain part of everyday conversation.

But perhaps something more complicated has happened. The extraordinary has become ordinary. War and ordinary life now occupy the same space. A person can spend weeks on reserve duty and come home to take his children to school. Israelis argue about Gaza or Iran over lunch and dance at a wedding that evening. Grief and normality don't take turns. In some ways, life in Israel has always been like this.

Culture isn't an opinion poll. A song reaching number one can't tell us how Israelis will vote or what they think about the war. But it can tell us something about

what people need. Immediately after 7 October, Israelis needed new songs to name what had happened. Now, love, dancing, and arguments between partners are filling the charts again. Faith is still there. So is the Mizrahi sound that has come to dominate Israeli popular culture. And underneath it all, 7 October hasn't gone away. Israelis have simply learned to live alongside it.

• *Paula Slrier is an international journalist, war correspondent and speaker who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Her work focuses on geopolitics, modern conflict, information warfare, and the battle for truth.*



PAULA SLRIER

Tech life in Israel since 7 October

OPINION

MARK GINSBERG

In the months after 7 October a joke circulated in Israeli tech circles that the country had produced more wartime demo videos than product launches. It was funny in the way that gallows humour always is, and like most good jokes, it wasn't true. Israeli startups kept shipping code, closing rounds, and hiring through the worst of it. The question isn't whether the tech sector survived. It did, loudly. The more interesting question is what changed on the way through.

The war rewired who works where and why. Before 7 October, most of Israel's tech talent lived in greater Tel Aviv, worked in glass offices, and complained about traffic on the Ayalon. Tens of thousands of those same engineers spent 2024 logging into Slack from hotel rooms in Eilat or Airbnb rentals in Haifa after being evacuated from the north. The offices emptied; the work didn't stop. The peace process and regional stability that once made Israel an attractive investment destination took a hit, and that reality twisted how founders pitch their companies abroad.

Military service swallowed people whole. The chief technology officer of a startup I know spent eight months in Gaza, came home, and shipped a major product release within six weeks. That pattern repeated across the industry. Reservists returned to find their teams had held the line, in some cases growing revenue while the founders were in uniform. The reserve duty burden, which pulled roughly 300 000 Israelis into active service, forced companies to decentralise decision-making in ways that turned out to make them run better.

The technology sector in Israel has long been a pillar of the country's security architecture, a relationship that deepened rather than frayed under pressure.

What the headlines missed is the part that matters most to the people living it. The war didn't break the weekly rhythm. Friday-night dinner still happened, often with chairs filled by strangers who had nowhere else to go. Evacuees from the south found themselves at tables in Jerusalem; displaced families from Kiryat Shmona ate with hosts in Tel Aviv. The tech community

organised itself into mutual-aid networks that had nothing to do with venture capital and everything to do with the reason most *olim* moved here in the first place.

A friend who runs a cybersecurity firm told me his most productive quarter in 2024 was also the quarter his wife was eight months pregnant and he was doing reserve duty three weeks out of four. He is not exceptional. He is representative. The coexistence of war and ordinary life isn't a contradiction in Israel. It's the operating system.

There's a reason South Africans understand Israeli resilience in a way that many other audiences don't. Both countries know what it means to build something under conditions that the rest of the world considers unworkable. Both have communities that send their children to serve in uniform, worry about them, and welcome them home to kitchens that smell the same as they did before they left. That shared experience matters now more than it has in years, because the information environment surrounding the war has made it harder, not easier, for far-flung Jewish communities to know what is actually happening on the ground.

The coverage reaching overseas audiences often carries more weight than facts. Groups tracking networked disinformation have documented how state-backed campaigns exploit the confusion of wartime to twist narratives in real time, and the same infrastructure that distorts reporting on Israel's military operations also distorts the picture of daily life here. The tech worker writing code between reserve duty stints, the family hosting strangers for Shabbat, the kibbutz rebuilding its children's playground: these are the stories the algorithms don't surface.

• *Mark Ginsberg is a writer covering Israeli technology and society. His work has appeared in the Times of Israel.*



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How the image of Holocaust survivors changed

CLAUDIA GROSS

For decades after the Holocaust, many survivors rebuilt their lives without being heard. Their transformation into respected witnesses and symbols of resilience took generations.

That change was the focus of a webinar hosted by the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre last week. Dr Shay Pilnik, founding director of the Emil A and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at New York's Yeshiva University, traced how survivors came to be viewed differently after 1945.

Pilnik, a grandson of three Holocaust survivors, said the story of survival didn't end with liberation. It continued through the rebuilding of families, communities, religious institutions, and lives. He cited sociologist William Helmreich's research and his book *Against All Odds, Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America*, which examined how they became entrepreneurs and built businesses.

"Many of them were fearless," Pilnik said. He recalled one survivor explaining that after surviving the NKVD (Soviet Secret Police), the Gestapo, and concentration camps, bankruptcy no longer seemed frightening.

The ability to rebuild existed alongside what psychologist Yael Danieli calls a "conspiracy of silence". Pilnik said survivors often wanted to speak about what had happened, but found that others didn't want to listen or believe them. Some survivors remained silent with their children. They feared traumatising them and questioned why they should burden them with stories that wider society had rejected.

Pilnik said this created two parallel experiences. Survivors were rebuilding their lives while also carrying the psychological effects of what they had endured. He examined how this was particularly visible in Israel, where in the early days society often placed great emphasis on armed resistance during the Holocaust.

Pilnik said the distinction was reflected in the Hebrew concepts of *Shoah* and *gevurah* (strength), referring to the Holocaust and heroism. He pointed to Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Uprising monument as a symbol of the contrast.

According to Pilnik, this helped create a narrow understanding of resistance. Survivors could be judged for not having fought, despite the circumstances in which they had been imprisoned. He cited the early use in Israel of the slur "*sabon*", meaning soap, to describe Holocaust survivors as weak or passive.

At the same time, Pilnik stressed that many survivors demonstrated agency

after reaching Israel. Tens of thousands were recruited into the Israeli army during the War of Independence, and many fought and died. He described Yitzhak Zuckerman, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance, as an important example. After the war, Zuckerman helped establish the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. For Zuckerman, rebuilding meant more than establishing a new life; it meant preserving evidence and educating future generations about what had happened.

Pilnik said the understanding of resistance too has changed. It is no longer limited to taking up arms. Creating calendars, observing Jewish holidays, maintaining religious practices, and producing art can also be understood as forms of resistance. These acts allowed people to retain identity and dignity under conditions designed to dehumanise them.

He discussed artist Esther Lurie, who survived the Holocaust and created the portrait *The Girl with the Yellow Star*. Pilnik said the work demonstrates both humiliation and defiance.



Dr Shay Pilnik and his grandmother Fruma Hazanovsky, who survived the Holocaust in a number of ghettos and camps in Lithuania

The shift in attitudes became particularly significant during the Eichmann trial in 1961. He highlighted Rachel Auerbach, a Holocaust survivor and member of the Oyneg Shabes documentation group, who helped document Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the war, she worked at Yad Vashem and advocated for survivor

testimony during the Eichmann trial.

Pilnik contrasted this with the Nuremberg trial, where evidence relied heavily on Nazi documents, statistics, and other records. Survivor testimony placed Jewish voices at the centre of the Eichmann proceedings.

He described the trial as a watershed. It helped Israeli society recognise that people who had lived through the Holocaust couldn't simply be judged from the safety of later generations.

Pilnik also examined rebuilding within the religious world. He discussed Rabbi Aharon Kotler, a Holocaust survivor who helped develop a yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey. It grew from 14 students around Kotler to about 150 students by the time of his death, and later became a much larger institution with influence across the Jewish world. For Pilnik, this illustrated that rebuilding after the Holocaust was both physical and spiritual.

With the number of living survivors declining, Pilnik said that, in 2026, the responsibility for telling the history of the Holocaust can no longer rest mainly with them. He pointed to museums, archives, books, digital technology, and new forms of testimony as ways the stories can continue.

Artificial intelligence and holograms

are already being explored in Holocaust education. Pilnik said he didn't know exactly how future generations would communicate the subject. He was confident, however, that interest in Holocaust history would continue growing. Many younger people increasingly understand that the Holocaust is a past they must learn about even when they cannot meet survivors themselves.

Asked about resilience, Pilnik returned to the importance of rebuilding and family. As the grandson of three survivors, he said he saw how memories of lost parents, siblings, and children remained with them.

He also described a special relationship between survivors and grandchildren. In his experience, grandchildren could sometimes provide an attentive ear when survivors had struggled to find one earlier in life. Pilnik connected this continuing impulse towards life with the Jewish expression *I'chaim* (to life). He said it could be understood as a commitment to continue despite catastrophe.

Survivors' stories include suffering, but also family, education, creativity, religious life, work, and the rebuilding of communities. As Pilnik put it, the role of sharing these stories is changing. The survivors are disappearing, but the responsibility to remember them is not.

Being Jewish isn't a choice; it's a birthright

OPINION

MICHAEL JANKLOWITZ



I was born and raised in a small town in South Africa named Benoni. At its height, Benoni was home to more than 600 Jewish families. We had a wonderful, large shul, a Jewish school, and a thriving Jewish community.

Over the years, the Jewish congregation slowly began moving out of Benoni, setting their sights on the larger

Rynsoord following years of vandalism.

However, I remain here in Benoni. Although I had moved to Johannesburg in my 20s, I returned to my birthplace in around 2019.

I feel it is of the utmost importance to leave a lasting heritage of our people and our faith in a town where



Michael Jankelowitz with his dad trying out the new mini tractor outside his family's business in Benoni

Jewish people once flourished. I will therefore be establishing a permanent monument and commemorative plaque at our cemetery to tell the story of the Jewish people who arrived in Benoni in the early 1920s and went on to build and establish one of the most prominent and vibrant Jewish communities in South Africa.

When a community disappears from a town, its history shouldn't disappear with it.

In Judaism, remembrance is deeply important. When a synagogue closes and passes into other hands, the sacred objects and religious life move with the community. But the memory of the people who built, worshipped, and lived there should remain. Jewish communities throughout the world have recognised the importance of preserving cemeteries, historic buildings, plaques, and monuments so that future generations can know that Jewish life once flourished in places where it may no longer exist.

For decades, Jewish families were part of the fabric of Benoni. They established businesses, educated their children, built institutions, worshipped together, celebrated

together, and contributed to the wider community. Their lives formed a significant chapter in the history of the town and in the history of South African Jewry.

I plan to establish a monument to those families, the children, the generations, the traditions, the faith, the friendships, and the lives that made up the Jewish community of Benoni.

It's a way of saying, We were here. We lived here. We built here. We worshipped here. We raised our families here. We contributed to this town. And although the community has largely disappeared, our history must never be forgotten.

The monument will stand as a permanent reminder that Benoni was once home to a remarkable Jewish community.

For those of us who remain, it is our responsibility to preserve that memory.

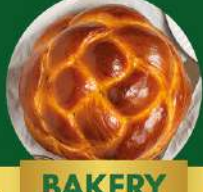
We may no longer have our shul, our school, or the community we once knew, but we can ensure that the story of the Jewish people of Benoni remains.

To be born Jewish isn't a choice; it is a birthright. And with that birthright comes the responsibility to remember those who came before us and to set an example to the world, of what Judaism really means.

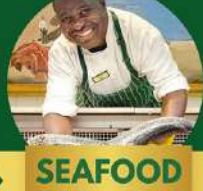
• Michael Jankelowitz has a career in residential property, development and commercial real estate, but says his most meaningful work is rooted in preserving the history of the community he calls home.



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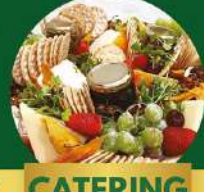
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How the phone took over our shopping

OPINION

ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK



Almost six in 10 South African online shoppers now buy on a smartphone. The phone has become our main shopping device, cramming small shops and vast online marketplaces into the device we carry everywhere.

That change has helped online retail reach R1 in every R10 spent with South African retailers. Online spending reached about R130 billion last year and is expected to climb to R159 billion in 2026, according to the “Online Retail in South Africa 2026” study.

The study was conducted by World Wide Worx in partnership with Mastercard, Peach Payments, and Ask Africa. Its broad view of shopping habits comes from Ask Africa’s Target Group Index, based on 23 910 consumer interviews.

The research found that 57.9% of online shoppers use smartphones. Laptops are a distant second at 26%, while desktop computers and tablets are each used by around one in 10.

That doesn’t mean the app is the new store. Shopping on a phone doesn’t require a retailer app. The Ask Africa research found that web browsers beat apps in 42 of the 48 shopping categories measured. Browsers can be used on computers or phones and, given the dominance of smartphones, browser shopping clearly remains a central part of the mobile experience.

In clothing, 28.4% of online shoppers buy through a browser and 17.9% through an app. For groceries, the split is 15.6% to 11.2%. Retailers therefore need mobile websites that work as smoothly as their apps. Occasional customers shouldn’t have to install an app before they can buy a shirt or order groceries.

Clothing is the leading online retail category, bought by 36% of online shoppers, well ahead of groceries at 21.2%. It helps explain why Shein has become South Africa’s second most widely used online retailer, reaching 21.5% of shoppers. Takealot remains well ahead at 35.3%, while Checkers Sixty60 follows at 15%.

Shein offers a seemingly endless clothing catalogue and prices that encourage shoppers to add one more item. Takealot combines a wide product range with local delivery and collection points.

Checkers Sixty60 has changed South African shopping culture. It turned the weekly supermarket run into an order that can be placed in minutes and delivered in less than an hour. It also taught customers to expect live driver tracking and precise delivery updates. Any retailer still promising delivery in seven working days and sending vague notices that an order has been dispatched now looks hopelessly out of date.

Convenience remains a stronger attraction than price. Almost a quarter (22.8%) of online shoppers strongly agree that convenience is more important, while 15.7% say they go online for lower prices. Delivery charges can overturn that calculation on a small order, but saving time has become part of the value of a purchase.

The phone has also turned product research into part of the shopping trip. Almost 30% strongly agree that the internet helps them research products before buying, and 24.7% consult several sources before making a significant purchase.

Customer reviews now have more influence than anything a brand says about itself. Reviews are the biggest influence on an online purchase for 28.4% of shoppers, followed closely by price promotions at 26.9%. Only 5.4% say brand advertising would give them the greatest reassurance when buying an unfamiliar product.

Clear returns and refund policies are four times more influential than brand advertising for an unfamiliar

purchase. Retailers can spend heavily getting a product onto a shopper’s screen and still lose the sale when the reviews are poor or the returns process is vague.

A separate World Wide Worx survey of 1 400 existing online shoppers examined how they choose platforms, pay for purchases, and view newer forms of shopping.

It found that almost 30% now buy from local platforms at least once a week, up from 21% a year ago. South African platforms remain the primary shopping channel for 43.6%, compared with 10.6% who mainly shop through international platforms.

In other words, low prices are attracting buyers, but the experience is failing to turn that traffic into trust.

The phone may make it easy to reach the checkout, but payment failure can end the purchase. Three in 10 respondents had experienced a decline during the previous year despite having enough funds or credit. Among them, 39.3% abandoned the purchase and 17.3% went to another retailer.

No payment method dominates. Instant electronic funds transfer leads at 16.4%, followed by debit cards at 15.3%. Shoppers care mainly about speed and security, and will use the method that gives them both.

One in three online shoppers has bought something through a WhatsApp link, rising to almost four in 10 among those under 35.

That means an app used for family groups and voice notes has become a substantial retail channel. It gives small businesses a way to sell online without the cost of an ecommerce site, provided they can persuade buyers to trust the person behind the message.

Artificial intelligence (AI) faces a tougher sale. Only 26.4% are comfortable allowing an AI service to complete purchases within rules and spending limits they set, while 50.9% are uncomfortable. Shoppers may accept help finding the right product, but most still want their own finger on the buy button.

The largest opportunity lies among the millions who already have a phone and an internet connection but have yet to buy online. Internet access reaches 79.1% of South African adults, while only 34.2% shop online.

Among those already buying online, 69.6% expect to increase their spending over the next year. Much of that growth will play out on the smartphone, where every retailer is only a few taps away from every competitor.

• *Arthur Goldstuck is chief executive of World Wide Worx and principal analyst of the “Online Retail in South Africa 2026” study.*





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What do I actually want?

OPINION RABBI LEVI AVTZON

It’s fascinating how much we know about everybody else’s life. We know which minister is in trouble, which footballer moved where, which celebrity marriage is falling apart, and all sorts of details about people we’ve never met and who don’t even know our name. But do we know ourselves? I know what motivates the president. Do I know what motivates me?



There’s an old story about a man so famously forgetful he could barely find his own shoes in the morning. Terrified one day that he would forget himself entirely, he tied a red string around his toe before getting into the bath, so that when he climbed out he would see the string and remember who he was. Halfway through the bath, the string worked itself loose and drifted onto the foot of the fellow next to him. He climbed out, looked down, saw a bare foot with no string, and panicked. Then he spotted the man beside him wearing it. He walked over, smiled with relief, and said, “Ah, now I know who you are. But who, in the world, am I?”

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the time of year when we talk to G-d a lot. We ask for health, money, our children, peace in the family, a good year, a sweet year, a Jewish year. Please G-d, this and that and the other. But there is another conversation that needs to happen over these days, and that one is with ourselves, and it might be just as important as the one with our Father in Heaven. If I’m asking G-d for a good year, do I know what I mean by good? If I’m asking for a sweet year, what would make it sweet? If I want this to be a more Jewish year, what would make it more Jewish? Do I know what I want?

Imagine a genie who gives you exactly what you ask for. What would you ask for? Less financial pressure. A child doing better. A calmer home. Better health. A difficult relationship sorting itself out. These are mostly things we want to change around us. They still don’t quite answer what we want our life to look like, and what our own contribution will be to actualise that dream.

Take marriage. Most married people would say they want a good one. Nobody gets married hoping for 20 years of low-level irritation and arguments about who left the cupboard open. But what does good actually mean to me? It might mean that I don’t scream every time my spouse irritates me. It might mean that I forgive their faults with some of the generosity I manage to find for my own. It might mean I stop expecting

them to think exactly like I do, learn to speak in a language they can hear, and remember that being right and being married are usually not the same skill.

The same is true when I say I want to be a good parent. Does it mean my children get into the right schools and make me look competent, or that they know they can tell me the truth? Does it mean they behave nicely in public, or that I have enough patience at the end of the day to actually listen to them? I can pray all day to be a good father, but at some point I need to talk to myself about what a good father actually looks like.

Because there is no magic spell on Rosh Hashanah morning. The next day we wake up with the same spouse, the same children, and the same personality. The finances haven’t changed substantially either, maybe a little less because we gave a nice donation in shul. So what is changing? Me. The picture I have of what I want, and how passionate I am about creating it. G-d can bless us with an incredible year, but we still have to live it.

One of my favourite stories about the Lubavitcher Rebbe is about Rabbi Dr Tzvi Hersh Weinreb. In 1971, Weinreb was a young psychologist in Maryland, working through some big questions about direction. He called the Rebbe’s office without giving his name and said he wanted to speak to the Rebbe. As he explained his questions to the secretary, he heard the Rebbe in the background say that there was a Jew in Maryland he should speak to, and his name was Weinreb. Weinreb, stunned, said, “But my name is Weinreb.” The Rebbe answered that if that was the case, he should know that sometimes a person needs to speak to himself. Weinreb said he came back to that advice again and again for the rest of his life.

I love that story because there are times we are looking everywhere for answers and haven’t actually sat down and spoken to ourselves. We ask people what they think. We google. We discuss. We worry. We talk to G-d. But somewhere in there I need to ask myself some questions too. What do I actually want? What matters to me? What kind of person do I want to be? What kind of home am I trying to create? Give some words to the wishes, instead of just repeating that I want things to be “good”.

We cannot control what the year will bring. But that doesn’t mean we have no idea where we want to go. A more Jewish year needs to mean something specific in my home. More Shabbos, more learning, more prayer, more charity, more family time, more joy around being Jewish, so our children don’t grow up thinking it is one long list of things that made their parents tired.

We have a much bigger say in what the year ahead will look like than we sometimes think. We are partners with G-d in creating the life He asks of us and the life we wish for in our deepest truth. We are asked to dream. We just need to make sure we dream while awake.

To a good and sweet year. And may we know what that means.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfeld Shul.



Preparing for the high holy days in a world of AI

OPINION RABBI YUVAL CHERLOW



There is a well-known Chassidic parable about a rabbinic master who said that he’d learnt three lessons from an infant and seven lessons from a thief. From the baby he learnt to feel satisfied by what was given, not to stay quiet, and to cry when one wanted something. From the thief, he learnt that the real work takes place at night when no one is watching, that one must be willing to take great risks to get what one wants, to take notice of the little details in order to achieve an objective, to work hard, to be loyal to partners, and to be patient and try again if one isn’t successful the first time.

This rabbinic tale always struck me as inspirational. It is based on a principle we often see in Chassidic storytelling; that there is something to learn from every interaction and everything in the world around us. Of course, the interactions that are more present and more constant in our lives should be the sources of greater inspiration and lesson-building. In this way, our daily lives are an ongoing search for meaning and we have the chance to gain strength and direction from nearly every occurrence presented to us.

I would think that if that Chassidic master were alive, he would be compelled to look at probably the greatest technological and lifestyle phenomenon in our world today, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), and would ask how it can impact our path to *teshuvah* (repentance).

Let’s begin by focusing on the known negative aspects of AI. It is, by definition, artificial. It isn’t real and it is creating worlds, impressions, and virtual realities that are, in essence, fake. Most dangerously, these fake worlds are often, and increasingly effectively, masked as real. AI exists as a creative tool that has answers to the most difficult and vexing questions of the human condition, and presents itself almost as devoid of bias or failure. We are led to believe that the AI models are here only to serve our interests and where it fails, it isn’t a failure of the model but only of those who input the requests.

AI succeeds in replacing some of the most valuable human attributes, hard work and dedication, by providing complex solutions to problems in seconds. Coming to those very same conclusions would previously have taken hours or days of research and verification. AI has the power to deceive in truly dangerous ways and make us think we care, or don’t care, about things that should or should not have value in our lives. Truth as a concept is no longer what it was in the pre-AI world.

We hear examples every day of how this development is changing our lives in ways we certainly aren’t always comfortable with.

In this sense, AI serves as a valuable metaphor to prepare for this introspective time of year. Because repentance is just as much about understanding the inherent dangers in our world that we need to avoid as it is about pursuing the good. Avoidance and not falling victim to evil temptations are a critical aspect of the *teshuvah* process and at the very heart of purifying our souls, both practically and spiritually.

But to focus exclusively on the dangers and pitfalls represented by AI would also be a major mistake because there is a great deal of good in this modern revolution.

Ultimately – and hopefully it will always remain so – AI is guided by human interactions, prompts,

and questions. The success of our chat results are impacted by fine-tuning our inputs. When treated with reason and caution, entry into the world of AI can expose us to a universe of discovery and new perspectives and motivate schools of thought, activism, and practice that we might have never considered before. Unlike human interactions, AI can be built to never forget and doesn’t judge our thirst for other perspectives but rather works with us to answer the deepest of questions. Its access to worlds and trains of thought previously far beyond our immediate capacity can certainly inspire us and help us fine-tune who we are as moral and ethical beings.

This avenue of opportunity reminds me of the first lessons of the remarkable work of Jewish moral thought, *Mesilat Yesharim* (The Path of the Just), which teaches that the first traits we need to embrace as Jews are caution, diligence, and purity. AI can be oriented along those paths, and it is incumbent upon us to recognise that opportunity when we confront this technology and all its power.

Recognising the very deep complexity that exists within this modern revolution, AI is perhaps one of the greatest metaphors for the good and bad that exist in our modern world and is therefore a deeply apt area of thought as we approach our *tefillot* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

AI, like we as people, can be applied for evil; to deceive, to take advantage, to waste critical resources and time – and even worse. But it is also a tool for repair, to better our world, to build relationships, to explore and strengthen our minds and our connections to spirituality and religion.

Like everything in the human experience, and certainly when it comes to Jewish identity and connection with Hashem, achieving true repentance and purity demands a high degree of

personal restraint and judgement of what is right and wrong, good and bad, safe and dangerous. But if we properly equip ourselves, our children, and our families with an appreciation for the power of this tool, and then use it as a mirror and metaphor for who we are as individuals, perhaps it will help us better achieve that level of *teshuvah* we all so desire, and enter us into a new year where we will be blessed with happiness, justice, and all that we hope for.

• Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is the director of the Tzohar Center for Jewish Ethics and a founder of the Tzohar Rabbinical Organization.



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Looking back to look forward

OPINION

MIKE ABEL

Every Rosh Hashanah, we wish one another *Shana tova*. A good year.

It is such a simple wish. Two words we have said to one another for generations, often without thinking too deeply about what we are actually asking for.

What is a good year?
And, of course, the wish is directed forwards. Towards the year to come. Towards whatever lies ahead for us over the next 365 days.

Is it a year without sorrow? Without disappointment? Without fear or uncertainty? Is it a year in which everything goes according to plan? If that is the test, most of us have probably had very few truly good years.

Life doesn't work like that. Even our happiest years contain sadness. Our hardest years contain moments of extraordinary joy. People arrive and people leave. Children grow up. Parents grow older. Businesses rise and fall. Friendships change. We lose people we thought would always be there.

And still, every Rosh Hashanah, we say it again. *Shana tova*. May it be a good year.

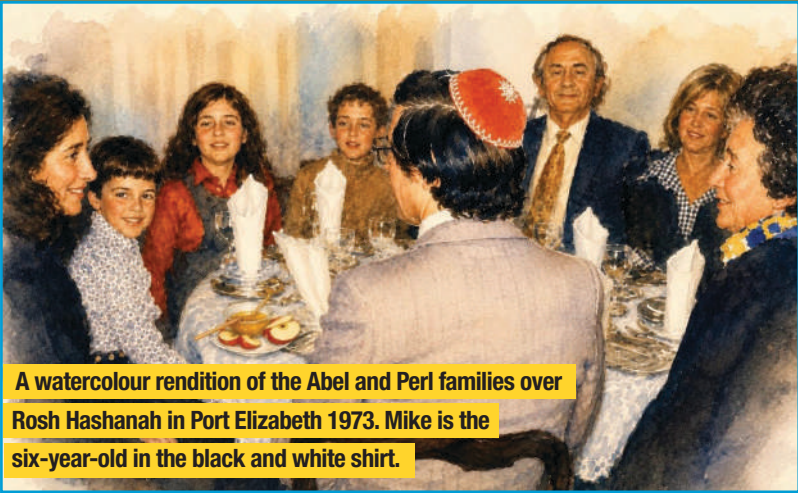
I've been thinking about those words differently this year, perhaps because I find myself at an interesting point in my own life. I turn 60 in January, which is an age that once sounded incredibly old and now seems, quite reasonably, rather young.

I remember my dad's 40th birthday when I was a child. It was a big occasion and 40 seemed to me to be the very definition of middle age. And here I am, almost 20 years older than he was then.

Over the past few months, I have also been doing something I never really intended to do. I've been writing about my childhood.

Not about my career. Not about business or advertising or leadership or any of the things that have occupied so much of my adult life. I've been writing about being a little boy growing up in Port Elizabeth in the 1970s and 1980s.

About Walmer, the suburb where I lived. About riding bicycles and going to the



A watercolour rendition of the Abel and Perl families over Rosh Hashanah in Port Elizabeth 1973. Mike is the six-year-old in the black and white shirt.

movies. About my mother and father. My grandparents. My friends. Shabbat dinners. Family holidays. School. Corner cafés. Fish and chips wrapped in paper. The smell of coffee roasting in Russell Road. The sea. The aloes. The strange, funny, difficult, and wonderful characters who populated the small universe of my childhood.

I've called the book *Being Abel in a World of Cain*.

Whether anybody eventually wants to read it is another matter entirely.

But something unexpected has happened to me while writing it. I have discovered just how much of our past remains available to us.

A smell can bring back a room. A song can return someone to you. A remembered expression on your father's face can suddenly make him present again.

You can hear your mother's voice.

You can sit once more at a Friday-night Shabbat table surrounded by people, most of whom are no longer here, and somehow, for a few moments, they are. There is sadness in that, certainly. But there is also enormous joy.

We are often warned not to live in the past, and rightly so. Nostalgia can become a place of retreat. The past wasn't perfect either. Mine certainly wasn't. Childhood contains cruelty and fear and embarrassment alongside wonder and innocence. The South

Africa in which many of us grew up was itself profoundly unjust, and remembering one's own happiness can never mean forgetting somebody else's pain.

But acknowledging that doesn't require us to surrender our happy memories. There is true nourishment in remembering what was good.

Perhaps especially when the present is difficult.

These haven't been easy years to be Jewish. Talk about understatement. There is an anxiety in Jewish communities around the world that many of us haven't experienced before. We have watched events unfold that have shaken assumptions we thought were settled. We have heard awful language we hoped belonged to another time. We have worried about antisemitism, about our children, and about what kind of world they will inherit.

It would be very easy to enter another year carrying only that weight. But Jews have never understood memory that way.

Memory is one of the beautiful foundations of Jewish life.

We remember leaving Egypt. We remember receiving the Tablets. We remember Jerusalem. We remember destruction and exile and persecution. We remember those who came before us.

But Jewish memory isn't only a catalogue

of suffering. Although, occasionally, we could be forgiven for thinking so. And Jewish guilt is also a thing.

We remember around tables. We remember songs. We remember recipes and jokes and melodies and peculiar family customs whose origins nobody can quite explain.

We remember grandparents. We remember being children.

We remember being loved.

And perhaps those memories matter because they remind us that darkness is never the whole story. A better time doesn't prove that another better time will come. But it reminds us that it can. That distinction matters.

Hope is not the belief that nothing bad will happen. Jewish history would make such a belief absurd. Hope is the refusal to believe that what is bad now is all that there will ever be.

Perhaps that is why, as another Rosh Hashanah approaches, I find myself looking backwards in order to look forwards.

I think about the people who made me. Some are still here. Most aren't.

I think about my parents, my grandparents, and great-grandparents. About those who crossed oceans and started again. About people who knew hardship far greater than anything I have experienced and nevertheless built homes, raised children, laughed, argued, celebrated, worked, and sat down together on Friday nights.

They didn't know what was coming next. Neither do we.

That may be the great conceit of adulthood: the belief that because we understand more of the world, we somehow control more of it.

We don't.

The little boy riding his bicycle through Walmer didn't know what his life would become. The almost-sixty-year-old man writing about him doesn't know either. And perhaps that's okay. I believe it is.

Rosh Hashanah doesn't ask us to know what the coming year will bring. It simply asks us to enter it.

To reflect. To account. To repair where we can. To forgive where we should. To appreciate what we have. To remember where we came from. And then, despite everything, to hope.

So this year, when I say *Shana tova*, I think I will mean something slightly different. I won't be wishing you a year untouched by difficulty. None of us can promise another person that. Nor should we expect it.

I will be wishing you a year in which the good outweighs the bad.

A year in which there are good and special people around your table.

A year in which you notice the ordinary things while they are happening, because one day they may become the memories you treasure most.

A year in which you remember those who sat at the table before you.

A year in which our children feel safe and loved.

A year in which we find reasons to laugh.

A year in which we remain curious about tomorrow.

And when tomorrow occasionally looks frightening, perhaps we can allow ourselves to look backwards for a moment. Not because we want to return there, but because somewhere in the lives we have already lived, there is evidence that there has been goodness before.

And therefore there can be goodness again.

Shana tova.

May it be a good year. And may we have the wisdom to recognise the good while we are living it.

• *Mike Abel is the founding partner and executive chairperson of M&C Saatchi Abel and The Up&Up Group, South Africa.*



The election that matters most

OPINION

RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN

We find ourselves in the midst of an extraordinary election season. The result of this election will determine our fates for the months and years ahead. Understandably, much thought and energy are being invested in making the right decisions about our future.

I'm not referring to the midterm elections in the United States, crucial as their outcome may be for the Jewish community. Many will be watching the results closely on 3 November, including the important Michigan Senate race and numerous other contests that could alter the balance of power in Washington.

Nor am I referring to Israel's election on 27 October. We are following that contest with keen interest, many of us holding strong views about who is best suited to lead the country, which coalition might provide the greatest stability, and how peace and security might finally be restored.

Closest to home, of course, are South Africa's local government elections on 4 November, just one day after the American midterms. These will affect us most directly. We must choose wisely if we want roads without potholes, water that flows when we turn on our taps, and an uninterrupted electricity supply. We want an end to corruption and graft, and public representatives who care more about their constituents than their own pockets. But this isn't the election that will determine our personal fate directly.

The election I'm referring to takes place on the weekend of 12 and 13 September, with the second round on Monday 21 September, and the final results issued on Friday 2 October. On these sacred dates, we make choices about our personal lives that can affect us throughout the coming year and far beyond. And in this election, each of us is both the voter and the candidate.

The process begins with the two days of Rosh Hashanah, reaches its climax 10 days later on Yom Kippur, and concludes with the issuing of the Divine writs on Hoshana Rabbah, towards the end of the festival season.

"On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on the fast of Yom Kippur it is sealed." we recite in the haunting Unetaneh Tokef prayer, often with tears in our eyes as we face the open Holy Ark. Traditionally attributed to the 11th-century Rav Amnon of Mainz, this moving *piyyut* (liturgical poem) depicts each human being passing before the Divine Judge, "like sheep before the shepherd".

We get so caught up in the chazan's fearful words – "Who will live and . . . who will be enriched and who will be impoverished" – that, in the emotion of the moment, we can easily miss the most important sentence of the entire prayer, "*Teshuvah* (repentance), *tefillah* (prayer), and *zedakah* (charity) can remove the severity of the decree."

This is the time of year when we can choose. We can influence the road ahead, whether it will be full of pitfalls or smooth and beautifully surfaced. And whatever

challenges await us, we can determine how, and with whom, we will travel. Will we face one challenge after another, or will it be plain sailing all the way?

We can choose to fill our lives with the flowing waters of Torah. Will we immerse ourselves in its teachings during the months ahead, allowing its values and directives to shape the way we live?

Will we remain plugged in, constantly connected to the ultimate Source of power, acknowledging that life, health, sustenance, and happiness all come from Him?

We must also choose to conduct our financial affairs with absolute integrity, refusing to succumb to greed or to pursue unlawful or unethical sources of income.

The election campaign is already in full swing. Don't wait for election day. In these remaining days of Elul, throughout the Ten Days of Repentance and even after Yom Kippur, until the final verdict is issued on Hoshana Rabbah, every day offers another opportunity to cast our vote. Let us fill this precious time with introspection, honest personal reckoning, prayer, generosity, and meaningful resolutions.

Choose wisely. Choose goodness. Choose life.

Shana tova.

• *Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul and the chairperson of the South African Rabbinical Association.*



Remembering those in need on Rosh Hashanah

OPINION

RABBI JONATHAN FOX

Rosh Hashanah is a time of reflection, prayer, and hope for the year ahead. As we stand before Hashem and ask to be blessed with health, security, and prosperity, we are also reminded of our responsibility towards those less fortunate and who can no longer care for themselves.



The elderly and needy in our community are particularly deserving of our attention at this time of the year. For many, the festive atmosphere of Rosh Hashanah can highlight loneliness, financial hardship, or vulnerability. A warm meal, a visit, a thoughtful gift, or simply knowing that someone cares can make an enormous difference. Judaism teaches us that our relationship with Hashem cannot be separated from our relationship with other people. The true spirit of the *yamim noraim* (days of awe) is therefore expressed not only in our prayers, but also in the kindness we show to others.

We are very blessed in South Africa to have communal organisations and shuls that work throughout the year to ensure that the elderly, needy, and lonely aren't forgotten.

Organisations providing aged care, welfare assistance, food support, and community services play a vital role in identifying those who need help and ensuring that assistance reaches them with dignity and sensitivity. Shul communities and rabbis regularly reach out to people who need hospitality.

Around Rosh Hashanah, these organisations and shuls often go beyond their regular responsibilities. They help provide festive meals and food parcels, assist families experiencing financial difficulties, arrange care and support for the elderly, and bring companionship to people who might otherwise spend the festival alone. Their work allows the broader community to participate in the *mitzvah* of caring for those in need.

Yet the responsibility doesn't belong only to communal organisations and shuls. Each of us has the ability to make a difference on a personal level. A phone call to a relative or friend, an invitation to someone who would otherwise be alone, a donation to a worthy organisation, or an offer to help a struggling family can transform someone's Rosh Hashanah.

As we ask Hashem to remember us for blessing, let us remember those who need our help. By caring for others, we turn the prayers and ideals of Rosh Hashanah into action, and help create a community in which nobody is forgotten.

• *Rabbi Jonathan Fox is group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha.*





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How King David navigated a time of transformation

OPINION

RABBI RICKY SEEFF



The past year has been one of the most significant periods of change in King David Schools’ history. The closure of King David Victory Park could easily have been a moment defined by loss and uncertainty. Instead, it has become a powerful example of resilience, unity, and the enduring strength of our community.

Jewish tradition teaches us that we must live in three places at once: connected to our past, grounded in the present, and optimistic about the future. The Torah enshrines *teshuvah* (literally repentance), the ability for one to change, to grow and not be bound, as a pillar of our faith. We possess a tremendous capacity for growth and renewal. Change is possible and improvement is attainable. We can emerge stronger from challenging experiences. This perspective has guided King David throughout this transition.

The results speak for themselves. Through a carefully managed integration process, King David retained approximately 90% of Victory Park’s pupils and 85% of its teaching and support staff. These figures are far more than statistics. They represent relationships preserved, educational continuity maintained, and a community that chose to move forward together.

While these outcomes are encouraging, we also recognise that not every family experienced the transition in the same way. Significant change inevitably brings challenges, and some parents, pupils, and staff felt aspects of the integration more acutely than others.

We are particularly grateful to families and staff who shared constructive feedback along the way. Their willingness to raise concerns, ask difficult questions, and hold us accountable has helped us improve our processes, communication, and support structures. Strong communities grow not only through celebration, but also through honest reflection.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of this journey has been the discovery of how much we have in common.



As pupils, families, teachers, and staff from different campuses came together, it became increasingly clear that we are united by the same aspirations, values, and commitment to excellence. What initially appeared to be a challenging transition became an opportunity to strengthen bonds and deepen our sense of collective purpose.

At the heart of this communal achievement lies the unique character of King David. Excellence in education has always been one of our defining characteristics, but equally important is our commitment to community and to strong Jewish values. These principles guided every decision made during the integration and ensured that people remained at the centre of the process.

Throughout, our community demonstrated extraordinary resilience. Change is rarely easy,

particularly when it involves institutions that people hold dear. Yet King David’s principals, educators, support staff, pupils, and parents embraced the challenge with remarkable positivity and determination. Their willingness to adapt and support one another transformed a complex organisational change into a success story.

Today, King David stands united and strong, while recognising that the work of building community is never truly complete.

We are making steps in honouring the heritage, traditions, and achievements of Victory Park while simultaneously building an exciting future for our pupils and families. We are preserving what matters most, pushing for excellence, while embracing the future with confidence. Being in three places at once.

As we enter the new year, we do so with pride in what has been achieved, but also with humility.

Rosh Hashanah reminds us that growth is an ongoing process. Just as individuals strive each year to reflect, improve, and renew themselves, so too must institutions. We remain committed to listening, learning, and continuously strengthening our special schools.

The story of this past year isn’t ultimately about closure. It’s about continuity, renewal, and growth. It’s the story of a community that chose unity over division, opportunity over uncertainty, and hope over fear. It’s the story of King David moving forward with strength, confidence, and an unwavering belief that our very best days lie ahead and that change is possible.

• *Rabbi Ricky Seeff is general director of the South African Jewish Board of Education and former principal of King David Primary School Victory Park.*

Passing the baton of *yomtov* meal traditions

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

From the apples, honey, and herring to the vibrant tables and the people in the seats around them, there’s something special about continuing family traditions when hosting *yomtov* meals. Three women discuss how they’re bringing their Rosh Hashanah memories into the hearts of a new generation.

Romy Waters has been hosting Rosh Hashanah dinners ever since she got married 13 years ago. “This was almost a given, passed down from my mom’s mom, who used to host Rosh Hashanah previously,” she says.

“My gran used to make absolutely everything by hand, from mincing the herring and the liver to making her own kichel,” Waters says. While she herself doesn’t make everything by hand, she does make the kichel her grandmother taught her to prepare.

Waters says that her mother always began preparations long before Rosh Hashanah, a habit that endures today. “My gran used to have her table set immaculately, my mother followed on that tradition and still sets her table about two weeks in advance. That’s one thing I didn’t take on from her,” she laughs, “with me, everything is last minute.”

Waters has also incorporated her own traditions when taking on hosting duties, involving her children in different aspects of the night and the preparations beforehand. “I try and make it fun for the kids, so I’ll always have some kind of activity on the table, like a craft, associated with the *chag*. I also try and involve my two young sons, getting them to help me set the table, which they love. My older son loves to make personalised name tags and everyone gets a personalised design.”

Aside from eating good food, what Waters loves most about hosting *yomtov* meals is gathering the whole family around the table. “*Yomtov* does something that no photo album or family tree can do, it makes memories tangible,” she says. “Even recipes are memories with instructions that are being passed down. For example, if a grandchild learns to knead *challah* the way their grandmother did, their hands are literally learning the shape of generations. It’s one of those times when we still need each other, passing down traditions and spending joyful time together.”

For Isarae Seeff, hosting lunch on the second day of Rosh Hashanah is about continuing a tradition started by her grandmother. “She used to invite her sister and all her family for lunch too,” she says. “It was always wonderful to be there with my family. When my grandmother moved out of her house, my mom began hosting these lunches. Then later, when my mom moved out of her house, I automatically took over as I was the oldest and I had a house that could facilitate the crowd. I’m still doing it.”

While not everything is the same these days, as

her cousins now have their own extended families and therefore don’t all attend anymore, the spirit of the second-day family lunch lives on. The food may not be the same – with Seeff preparing a milk meal in contrast to the meat one her mother always cooked – but it’s still about tradition. It’s a big second-day lunch with siblings, cousins, extended family, and close friends, she says. “It’s lovely. For me, it’s important as it brings back memories. While I can, I’ll keep doing it.”

While she’s unsure if her children will continue the tradition, she knows they’ve gained so much from these get-togethers. “My kids know that *yomtov* time is family time. It’s time to be together, to have people over.”

Not only has Nadine Green carried family *yomtov* meal traditions into her home, through her food business, Made by Nade, she brings these to the tables of other community members too. “The aromas that fill my home while I’m cooking bring back so many beautiful memories of *yomtavim* gone by and anticipation of those to come,” she says.

“Growing up, most of my *yomtavim* were spent with my family in the south. It was very special as there was a small Jewish community there and it was a privilege to feel part of it over the holidays. I got to spend time with my cousins and have fond memories of playing in the lounge while the adults sat around the table. The food was always delicious and the atmosphere warm, embracing, and traditional.” She recalls her Uncle Joe’s particular way of cutting the *challah*, something she still thinks about on Shabbat and *yomtov*.

“Today we try to create a warm, fun, and embracing experience for all who join us for the holidays,” she says. “We try to keep everything traditional and ensure that the children are involved and have fun. Exposing children to our traditions is imperative for continuity.”

When it comes to cooking, Green keeps her food traditional, but with a modern twist. “Food has a remarkable way of bringing people together,” she says. That’s why being able to extend that powerful feeling of unity through cooking *yomtov* food for multiple families is so special to her.

“I feel that in some small way I am part of each of their holiday celebrations,” she says. “It’s a wonderful feeling to know that through a meal, I am helping to keep our traditions alive, connecting friends and families to our roots, and passing that on to our children. The knowledge that Jews here and around the world are sharing the same experience and eating the same traditional meals with loved ones brings a wonderful sense of belonging.”



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What’s with Jews and food?

OPINION TEMMI HADAR



The sweet aroma of challah, round and full. The sticky honey dripping off the apple. The carrots. Black-eyed peas. Leek patties. Tzimmes. The red juice of the pomegranate. The wide eyes of the fish head, or the chocolate-covered marshmallow one.

Few holidays on the Jewish calendar are as full of powerful food imagery as Rosh Hashanah. On the first night of the Jewish new year, we gather with friends and family and wish each other blessings, giving our deepest hopes through something we can see, touch, and taste.

An apple dipped in honey, with a prayer for a sweet new year. A fish head, expressing our wish to be like the head and not the tail. Different communities bring their own customs to the table. Some have an entire spread of special foods, each accompanied by a prayer for the year ahead.

But why the focus on food? Surely our prayers to G-d should be anchored in good deeds, Torah study, and a renewed commitment to *mitzvos*?

And the question reaches beyond Rosh Hashanah. Why does Judaism mark so many spiritual moments with food and drink? In our quest to connect to the Divine, shouldn’t we be loosening our hold on the physical and mundane? Striving higher, towards the lofty and spiritual?

Judaism’s focus on food isn’t accidental or driven purely by culinary pursuits. It teaches us something profound about our role in this world. And there is no better time to remember that lesson than on Rosh Hashanah, when we renew our commitment to G-d and our purpose in His creation.

What are we doing here? Are we physical creatures striving for spiritual growth? Are we spiritual beings finding our way through a physical world?

The truth is, we are both. We have a *guf*, a body, and a *neshama*, a soul. The body needs nourishment. The soul longs for connection. Both are part of who we are. Our job is neither to escape the physical nor to become consumed by it.

Our job is to bring heaven down to earth. To elevate the ordinary to the extraordinary. To bridge the gap between spirituality and physicality.

There are heavenly worlds filled with angels and seraphim. Souls unencumbered by the demands of a physical body.

And there is this earth. Soil and rain. Bread and honey. A world we can touch and taste, filled with needs and desires, demands and possibilities.

And then there is us. The human being. A body and a soul. Feet planted firmly on the earth. A Divine soul within. Our job is to bring heaven down to earth. We are the bridge between these two worlds. And our tools to connect them are Torah and *mitzvos*.

That sounds lofty, but it happens in surprisingly ordinary ways. A coin earned through our labour becomes *tzedakah* (charity). Wax and a wick become a Shabbos candle, bringing light and holiness into a home. A meal becomes an opportunity to welcome someone who would otherwise eat alone.

The money, the food, the words become part of our service of G-d. Through Torah and *mitzvos*, we bring holiness into the things we already spend our days doing.

It’s easier to feel spiritual during a spiritual experience. When the shul falls silent before the shofar. When a familiar melody stirs something deep inside us.

But G-d asks us to bring the spiritual into our ordinary moments too.

An ordinary Wednesday. There are lunches to pack. Emails to answer. Someone needs a lift. Someone has left their shoes in the middle of the kitchen. Can we invite G-d into those moments too? Can we find an opportunity for patience, generosity, or a *mitzvah* right there, in the middle of the day we are already having?

Perhaps that is a question to bring to the Rosh Hashanah table.

So enjoy the sweet challah, the apple and honey, the pomegranates. Breathe in the familiar aromas. Look at the faces gathered around you.

These foods are a delight for the palate. And through the blessings we make and the prayers we say, they become nourishment for something deeper too.

We acknowledge the One who made them. We ask for His blessings. We share His abundance with one another. We allow the sweetness we taste to awaken a prayer for the year ahead, and a commitment to bring sweetness into the lives around us.

These ordinary foods.

These fruits of the earth. Grown in soil, ripened in sunshine, brought to our tables. Woven into our service of G-d, they become conduits for Divine blessings.

And here we are, body and soul, beginning another year of the work we were created to do.

Bringing heaven down to earth. One blessing. One *mitzvah*. One ordinary moment made holy.

• Temmi Hadar is the *rebbe*tzin at Pine Street Shul.

In stillness is our soul

OPINION RABBI ARI KIEVMAN



I remember it as though it were yesterday. It was Monday 10 September 2001. My cousin, visiting from Israel, and I had spent the day doing some pre-Rosh Hashanah shopping in Manhattan. Before heading back to Brooklyn, we decided to enjoy dinner at Le Marais restaurant, which then had a location on Wall Street near the World Trade Center. Our final adventure for the day was a visit to Windows on the World, the famous restaurant on the 106th floor of the North Tower.

It was quite a view to behold. Manhattan glowing beneath us, thousands of lights stretching into the distance. We lingered, taking in the view and the extraordinary energy of a city that never sleeps.

The next morning, while davening in shul, there was a commotion of people discussing the news that a plane had hit the Twin Towers. My reaction was denial, having just been there a few hours earlier.

Then came the second plane. My friends and I stood on the shul’s rooftop, watching the

smoke rise over Manhattan as the reality sank in. The towers I had spent plenty of times in and stood inside only hours before were now burning. The streets I had walked through the previous day were filled with chaos.

As a born-and-bred New Yorker, 9/11 is a day that will forever be etched in my memory. And now, 25 years later, September 11 falls on erev Rosh Hashanah. At sunset, we will enter the new year, beginning on Shabbos. Remarkably, next year it will also be on Shabbos. Our year is bookended by Shabbos.

When Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos, we don’t blow the shofar on the first day. The sound that normally pierces the air and calls us to wake up, reflect, and return to Hashem and our true selves, is absent.

Unlike the other major festivals, Rosh Hashanah is observed for two days even in Israel. So when the first day falls on Shabbos and the shofar isn’t sounded, there is still a second day on which to hear its call.

But perhaps we shouldn’t be so quick to fill the silence.

Chassidus teaches that when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos, we don’t need the shofar to awaken the connection it normally arouses within us. Shabbos itself gives us access to that connection. We don’t have to create the moment; we simply need to become quiet enough to enter it.

Perhaps that is a message we desperately need.

Our lives are filled with noise: notifications, headlines, demands, opinions, and endless things competing for our attention. Some people are already queueing for the iPhone 18, hoping that the newest technology will keep

them more connected, but one wonders if they are truly present.

Beneath all that noise is the deepest part of our identity. Beneath the id is the yid, the *neshamah* (soul), searching for connection, truth, and purpose; searching for Hashem and for genuine connection with those we love.

When standing near Ground Zero in the days after 9/11, I recall the rescuers searching for survivors would periodically stop the heavy machinery. Everything became completely still. Only when the noise stopped could they listen for the faintest sign of life beneath the rubble.

Our generation’s 9/11 was 7 October. It was a wake-up call that forced us to confront questions we cannot afford to ignore. Who are we? What does being Jewish mean to us? What kind of Jewish life are we creating? What are we passing on to our children? And what kind of relationship do we want with Hashem and

with one another?

Perhaps the silent shofar gives us a different way to respond.

We need to disconnect from some of the noise so that we can reconnect with our families, with our souls, with the moment we are actually living, and with the One who has been waiting all week for us to come home.

The shofar may be silent on the outside, but its message is still ringing within us.

Shabbos speaks a language that needs no amplification. It asks us to stop performing and start being present. To discover that Hashem isn’t somewhere far away. He is already here.

May this new year bring us less noise and more listening, less rushing and more seeing, less performing and more connecting.

May we be present with our parents while we still have the privilege of calling them, with our children while they still want to tell us every detail, and with our spouses, friends, community, and neighbours.

And most importantly, may we hear the sound of our own *neshamah*.

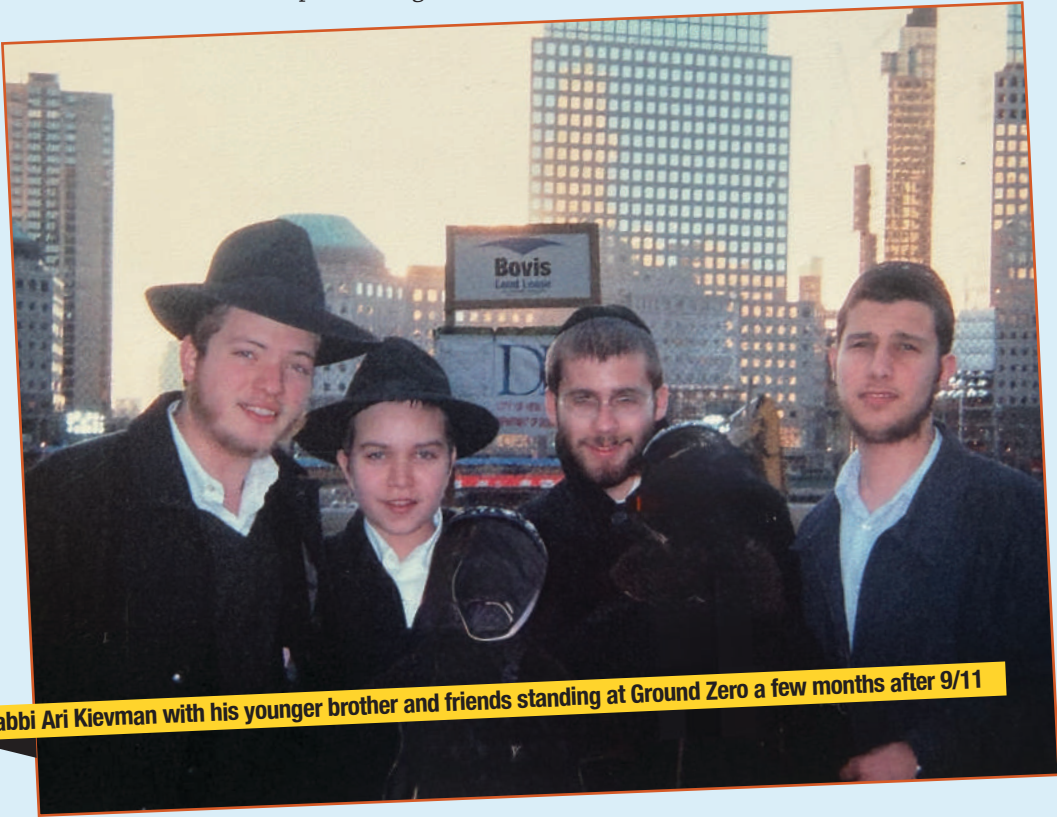
Perhaps that is the sound the shofar has been trying to help us hear all along: the sound of our soul calling us home.

On this holy Shabbos, may Hashem look at His children gathered together and take pleasure in seeing that we have come home.

G-d, look. We are here. We have come home to You.

Shana tova.

• Rabbi Ari Kievman is the rabbi at Chabad Sandton Central.



Rabbi Ari Kievman with his younger brother and friends standing at Ground Zero a few months after 9/11

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver





The Jewish Food Fund

REFRESH OUR FEED – KEEP 750 FAMILIES GOING

This Rosh Hashanah, help us ensure that the most vulnerable in our community can welcome Yom Tov with food on their tables and dignity in their homes.

HELP US KEEP THE PATTERN UNBROKEN

A message from Lauren Silberman,
CEO Yad Aharon & Michael.

Early next week, **Yad Aharon & Michael** will distribute 750 Rosh Hashanah food boxes to families in our community who rely on us for food security.

Before a single box has even been opened, its mere presence will convey a powerful message:
*Someone thought of me.
Someone knew I needed this food.
Someone prepared this especially for me.*

Behind each box is an unbroken pattern of care.
Food is ordered.
Deliveries arrive.
Fresh produce is packed.
Lists are checked.
Boxes are filled.
Vehicles are loaded.
Food is distributed.
And then, the following week, it begins again.
Seven hundred and fifty families.
Approximately 1 800 people.
Waiting.
Depending upon that pattern.
**Hunger does not take a holiday.
And neither can we.**

One of the families we currently support never imagined that they would need to ask for food. The father became seriously ill and could no longer work. The mother did everything she could to keep the family going, but their children are all still of school-going age and the numerous bills did not stop simply because an income did. This is a family whose parents have always worked, managed, and paid their own way. Then illness changed the equation. When so much in their lives became uncertain, they needed to know that one thing would remain certain:

There would be food for their children.

This is the family behind the box. And they are not an exception. They are part of the changing face of food insecurity in our community.

Yad’s annual food spend is R23 million.

We cannot carry this responsibility alone.

This Rosh Hashanah I am asking you to help us keep the pattern unbroken. Your donation will become fresh produce, nourishing food, delicious meals, and full Yom Tov tables. But it will also become something less visible and equally important:



Relief.
Security.
Dignity.
The knowledge that someone cares.
Week after week.
Year after year.
Yom Tov after Yom Tov.

Please do not put off your donation for another day. The families who rely on Yad need to know that the pattern will continue to hold.

I thank the entire community for believing in our vital food fund, and I take this opportunity of wishing you and your loved ones a Shana Tova U’metukah – a year filled with health, happiness, abundance, peace and sweetness.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Lauren



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BEHIND EVERY BOX NUMBER IS A FAMILY

Every week, **Yad Aharon & Michael** provides fresh, nutritious kosher food to hundreds of vulnerable families across Johannesburg.

But food is only the beginning.

Every Yad initiative is built around a single belief:
No person should have to sacrifice their dignity in order to ask for help.



YAD'S IMPACT AT A GLANCE

750 FAMILIES

receive vital food support from Yad Aharon & Michael.

1 800 INDIVIDUALS

rely on Yad in order to put food on their tables.

R230 000 EACH WEEK

is spent on fresh food for the families we support.

400 HOT MEALS

are served each week through Yad's Soup for the Soul.

220 CHILDREN

receive school lunchboxes every month through the Ohr Natanel Lunchbox Project.

ESSENTIAL DRY GOODS

are distributed to recipient families every second month, and before each Chag.

YAMIM TOVIM

bring increased distributions to ensure families celebrate the Chagim with dignity, plentifulness and joy.

OUR ANNUAL CLOTHING POP-UP SHOP

allows recipients to choose beautiful clothing and shoes for themselves and their families – at no cost.

Food parcels. Hot meals. School lunches. Yom Tov tables. Clothing. Connection. Dignity.

MEET THE YAD TEAM



MORE THAN A MEAL



Every Tuesday and Wednesday, recipients enter a beautiful, welcoming space. They sit at tables. They are greeted warmly. They enjoy freshly prepared soup, wholesome home-cooked meals and delicious cakes.
They talk.
They laugh.
They linger.
They are not simply receiving a meal.
They are being welcomed into a place in which they feel seen, valued and cared for.

Beautifully designed with the warmth and character of a welcoming neighbourhood café, Yad's new soup kitchen proudly opened its doors in June this year.

The initial project began more than a decade ago, in 2015, when Yad recognised that a weekly food parcel, while essential, could not meet every need.

People needed a ready-made nourishing meal.

They needed connection.

They needed somewhere to sit, talk and feel part of a community.

This year that original vision was reimagined and transformed into something extraordinary: a space where nourishment and dignity come together around one table.

Yad's Soup for the Soul has a full-time chef, operates under the supervision of the Johannesburg Beth Din, and serves approximately 400 meals every week.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Brian and Ros Jossel, whose extraordinary generosity made this legacy project possible, and to every member of our community who contributed funding, products, expertise, time, and care.

Together we did more than build a soup kitchen; we opened the door to belonging.



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein lights our gas



Brian and Ros Jossel cutting the ribbon at our opening event

MAKE A MEAL MEAN MORE

Sponsor a week at Yad's Soup for the Soul.

In honour of a birthday, anniversary, or simcha

In memory of a loved one

In gratitude for a personal milestone

Or simply because everyone deserves a place at the table

To find out more:

011 485 2076 / info@yadaharon.co.za

WHAT WILL YOUR FAMILY PLACE ON ANOTHER FAMILY'S TABLE THIS ROSH HASHANAH?

R1 200 can provide a single person's food for one week.

R45 000 can provide honey for all 750 families this Rosh Hashanah.

R4 800 can provide a family of two with food over the Chagim.

R92 000 can fund our Yom Tov chickens for 750 families.

R7 200 can provide a large family with food over the Chagim.

R160 500 can fund the meat included in our Yom Tov distributions.

Section 18A tax-deductible receipts are available for donations

Every donation matters.
Every donation becomes food.
Every donation tells a family:
You have not been forgotten.

**REFRESH OUR FEED
HELP KEEP
750 FAMILIES GOING.**

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**THE WEEK
DOES NOT SKIP.
WITH YOUR HELP,
NEITHER WILL WE.**

REBOOT YOUR YEAR REFRESH OUR FEED



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SnapScan

As Hashem renews creation, we renew our promise to 750 families, filling their tables with plentiful, dignified meals and their year with warmth, joy and sweetness. Your donation keeps the feed flowing.

Please donate generously @ yadaharon.co.za



The Jewish Food Fund

Rosh Hashanah 2026 means different things to people in our community. At the *SA Jewish Report*, we try to show what this means. So, we asked King David High School art pupils to give us a sense of what it means to them. We gave them a week to create their images. The one on our cover, by matric pupil Elisha Meyer, really resonated with our team, but we were hugely impressed by what all the pupils created. So, we made space to show you the rest of the work portraying the new year. – Editor



A still life image of a meal. In the foreground, a large roasted chicken is served in a white ceramic dish, garnished with fresh herbs. To its right is a bowl of colorful salad with chickpeas, tomatoes, and herbs. Further right is a bowl of roasted vegetables, possibly cauliflower and carrots, also garnished with herbs. In the background, a wooden bowl contains several red apples and a pomegranate. A small jar of honey with a wooden dipper sits on a wooden coaster. A loaf of braided bread with sesame seeds is visible in the bottom right corner. A vase with white flowers is in the top left. The scene is set on a wooden table with a striped cloth.

“People are stuck in the mindset that we need to have *yomtov* like we had in the 70s,

Similarly, Lenny Meyerowitz, owner of The PieWorks, says the Rosh Hashanah meal can feel special even on a budget. Of course the cheapest way to celebrate is “to be invited out, it’ll cost you a box of chocolates”, he jokes.

Continued on page 28>>


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A feast for the holidays

Keeping meals healthy around Rosh Hashanah is not that simple. **Lauren Boolkin** gives us her delectable offerings.

TABBOULEH ALLA SIMANIM

My quest for a different salad led me back to the never-fail tabbouleh. It can be made ahead, keeps well, and is infinitely moreish! I used couscous but you could use the traditional bulghur wheat or even quinoa instead. Feel free to add slices of chicken or meat. Cubed, seeded tomatoes and chopped, seeded cucumber are also great.

Ingredients

- 1½ cups couscous
- 1½ cups boiling water
- 4½ Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 250g cubed butternut or pumpkin
- 1 cup Italian parsley
- 1 cup coriander
- ¼ cup mint
- ½ cup pomegranate seeds

- ½ cup chopped dates
- ½ cup toasted flaked almonds
- 2 spring onions sliced
- 2 baby leeks washed and brushed with olive oil for garnish

Dressing

- 2 Tbsp date syrup (agave or maple syrup)
- 4 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp sumac
- 1 tsp salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Method

- Preheat oven to 200°C.
- Toss cubed butternut with 1½ Tbsp of the olive oil.



- Roast in oven until the edges are charred and the butternut is soft. Set aside to cool.
- Place the couscous on a serving platter.

- Pour over the boiling water and the remaining 1 Tbsp olive oil.
- Cover with plastic wrap to allow the couscous to absorb the water.
- Chop the herbs (using a food processor is fine) and sprinkle them over the salad with butternut and dates.
- Combine the dressing ingredients. Pour over the salad and top with the spring onions, pomegranate seeds, and flaked almonds.

FRUIT SALAD WITH A TOUCH OF SNAP, CRACKLE, AND POP

In my opinion the fruit platter has died, so when I saw a variation of this dessert in an old copy of *Fleishigs* magazine, I was tempted to think up something similar. There is no sugar in this dessert and it’s amazing the next morning with Greek yoghurt. Be sure to add the passionfruit dressing to the salad at least 30 minutes before serving.

Ingredients

Topping

- 1 cup Jungle Oats (not steel cut)
- 1 cup Rice Crispies
- ½ cup desiccated coconut
- 3 Tbsp coconut oil
- 3 Tbsp honey (or agave)

Salad

- 2 cups pineapple, cubed
- 2 cups green melon, cubed
- 1 cup pawpaw, cubed
- 1 cup strawberries, quartered
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup grapes, halved

Drizzle

- ⅔ Tbsp honey depending on sweetness of the passion fruit
- Juice of 1 lime
- ½ cup passion fruit, strained
- 1 Tbsp mint, chopped, plus more for garnish



Method

- Preheat oven to 170°C and line a baking sheet with baking paper.
- Melt coconut oil with honey.
- Mix the other topping ingredients together and then toss with the melted coconut oil mixture.
- Bake for 20 minutes until crispy, tossing midway. Keep an eye

- on it, you need to aim for a golden topping.
- Make the drizzle by mixing all the ingredients together and whisking until the honey dissolves. Set aside.
- Toss the fruit in a pretty bowl.
- Pour on the drizzle at least 30 minutes before serving and toss.
- Serve the topping alongside the fruit salad.

Looking for something to serve vegetarian guests, or as a light lunch over the chaggim? Here’s an idea from Cape Town food supplier **The Sephardi Chef**.



SPINACH QUAJADO

The spinach quajado is great for either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur as it can be served hot or cold. It accompanies any dish, and is simple and easy to make, with fantastic flavour.

Ingredients

- 2 packets spinach
- 4 large potatoes
- 6 eggs
- 450g grated cheddar cheese
- 1 cup milk
- Salt, pepper
- 2 Tbsp oil

Method

- Peel and boil potatoes.
- Once cooked mash them with the milk, salt, and pepper.
- Wash the spinach and tear by hand into smaller pieces.
- Beat eggs in a bowl.
- Add cheese and eggs to spinach and mix well by hand.
- Add mashed potatoes to the spinach mix and mix all by hand.
- In an oven-proof container add oil. Then pour in the spinach mixture.
- Bake at 220° C for 30 minutes until golden brown.

Serve hot or cold.

SIMANIM, THE MEXICAN VERSION

For this delicious treat, you could add shredded roast chicken or meat, which works beautifully. I tried the parev version and added grated cheese for authenticity; you could use parev cheese if you wish. These would be incredible for a Mexican night in the sukkah.

Ingredients (serves 4)

- 6 store-bought tortillas
- Olive oil for brushing and 2 Tbsp for the filling
- 1 avocado, peeled and chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- ½ cup grated zucchini
- ½ cup grated pumpkin
- ½ cup grated carrot
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp paprika
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- ¾ cup tomato puree
- 1 tin red kidney beans or black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tsp salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Limes and coriander for garnish

Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C and line a baking sheet with baking paper.
- Brush one side of tortilla with olive oil and drape over an oven-proof cup or ramekin. Continue until you have done

all the tortillas.

- Bake until lightly browned, about 8 to 10 minutes.
- Remove from oven and allow them to crisp up.
- In a small saucepan cook the onion on

- low heat until it begins to soften.
- Add carrots, pumpkin, and marrows, stirring until they are soft.
- Add the spices and stir for a minute or two.
- Pour in tomatoes, tomato puree, and beans.
- Cook for another five minutes and taste for seasoning.
- Ladle into tortilla bowls. Garnish with avocado, fresh coriander, and lime slices.





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Knowing who we aren't

OPINION

A friend once told me a story about his father. My friend is observant; his father is a committed, self-proclaimed atheist. One day, after he'd proudly announced his non-belief to a stranger, the man looked at him and asked, "Really? What kind of atheist are you – Orthodox or Reform?"

His father recoiled at the suggestion. "Orthodox! Obviously," he replied indignantly.

It might be the most South African Jewish answer imaginable.

South African Jews are complicated. We might not believe in G-d, but we are deeply offended by the suggestion that we don't believe in Him in the correct way.

We might drive to shul on Shabbat, passing three Reform congregations on the way to an Orthodox one. We might eat prawns, but not in the house. We might not keep kosher, but we know immediately when someone has used the wrong knife. We might not attend shul for 11 months of the year, but come Rosh Hashanah, we expect our seat to be exactly where it's always been.

There's something wonderfully contradictory about us.

Another friend once told me that during Pesach he would still go to a non-kosher McDonald's, but would never eat the burger bun. Someone else's family happily ate a non-kosher steak at Spur, but would never order a milkshake afterwards.

There are rules. South African Jewry has typically been more traditional than strictly observant. Even those who do very



little often remain emotionally attached to an Orthodox framework. They might not follow the rules, but they know that the rules exist – and they would prefer that nobody tampers with them.

It's why a South African Jew can spend Saturday morning on the golf course and still feel strongly that the rabbi should keep *Chalav Yisrael*.

Our Jewish identity has never been confined to religion. It's built around family, food, schools, shuls, youth movements, charities, Israel, and an extraordinary communal infrastructure. In Jewish Johannesburg, you can be delivered by a doctor who knows your grandparents, attend a Jewish school, play in a Shabbat-observant soccer league, eat in kosher restaurants, call

a Jewish security organisation when you're in trouble, and eventually be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

And throughout that journey, someone will almost certainly ask why you haven't called your mother.

We're a small community, which means that everybody is connected. If you meet another South African Jew anywhere in the world, it takes less than three minutes to discover a mutual relative, school friend, former business partner, or person with whom one of you is no longer speaking.

Our size gives us an intimacy that can be comforting and suffocating,

minyan, bring food, and sit with the mourners.

We complain endlessly about communal organisations, but we support them. We criticise our schools, but fight to keep them strong. We argue with our rabbis, but phone them when it matters. We threaten to emigrate, often while attending the farewell party of someone who's actually doing so.

Perhaps that is what makes South African Jews so distinctive. We aren't always observant, but we are deeply affiliated. We aren't always united, but we are profoundly connected. We're fiercely South African and

passionately attached to Israel.

We carry the habits of Lithuania, the rhythms of Africa, and the anxieties of Jewish history, all while insisting that nobody has better weather than we do.

And then Rosh Hashanah comes around.

The observant and the less observant, the believers and the sceptics, the regulars and those demanding to know who's taken the seat they last occupied 12 months ago, all return to the same place.

Perhaps that is the real meaning of our contradictions. Tradition isn't only about what we do. It is also about where we return, who we return to, and the chain to which we still know we belong.

As we enter a new year, may we hold onto the warmth, generosity, and instinctive sense of responsibility that make this community what it is. May we argue a little less, listen a little more, and continue to show up for one another, when it matters.

Shana tova to the observant, the traditional, the secular, the sceptical, and, of course, to all the Orthodox atheists.

May we all be written and sealed for a year of health, safety, meaning, and peace.

• *Howard Feldman writes a regular column for the SA Jewish Report and hosts The Morning Mayhem show on ChaiFM.*



HOWARD FELDMAN

Celebrating doesn't have to cost the earth

>>Continued from page 25

"Kosher meat is expensive [but] it literally depends on which cut of meat you want. You can choose a side fillet instead of a flap. You can substitute an expensive cut for a more affordable one." Rather than a more expensive roast or brisket, you can use minced meat and make a lasagne, meatballs, or spaghetti bolognaise.

Bogatie says while there are expensive items on the Rosh Hashanah table that are unavoidable, like honey, there are ways to make other things more affordable.

For example, some Pick n Pay stores sell challah dough or you can make it yourself. You also don't have to buy a fortune of apples.

She recommends keeping a budget-friendly Rosh Hashanah menu simple, symbolic, and based on inexpensive ingredients. Honey-glazed carrots are an affordable way to represent hopes for prosperity, while butternut or gem squash can fulfil the tradition of eating gourds. Gem squash can be filled with savoury rice, dried fruit, raisins, or nuts, making an attractive dish while naturally controlling portion sizes.

For starches, rice is one of the cheapest options, while couscous and baby potatoes can be used if the budget allows. For the main course, Bogatie suggests honey-glazed or honey-and-soy chicken, which ties into the wish for a sweet new year,

or a roast served with a simple homemade gravy.

She also suggests asking guests to contribute items such as cold drinks, grape juice, or wine, rather than taking on the entire cost yourself.

Desserts don't need to be elaborate either. Jelly and ice cream or a simple dessert made with jelly, fruit juice, and a whipped non-dairy topping can keep costs down while still making the meal feel festive.

"You don't need to have a million options," says Bogatie.

Fouché recommends building the meal around one substantial "anchor" dish, such as a large fish or meat dish, and complementing it with salads and smaller, more affordable dishes.

"How about a huge dish of slow-cooked pulled beef on a bed of hummus, top with toasted chickpeas, a drizzle of olive oil and za'atar, a pile of pita, and there is your anchor," she says.

"I love doing grilled hake portions with fresh herbs, and combining on one big board with baby potatoes, braised leeks, griddled zucchini, and fresh herbs. It looks impressive, is an easy way to present, and gives a feeling of largesse and generosity. Most importantly, be welcoming to your guests, as there is nothing more miserable than a host who complains about how hard he or she has worked for the meal."

A community never dies

OPINION

RABBI AZRIEL UZVOLK



The Mishna teaches that "If I am not for myself then who is?" and "If I am for myself then what am I?" Is that not a contradiction?

Each of us is an individual with our own story and our own *pekkal*. Regarding this part of our lives we must remember that "If I am not for myself then who is?"

At the same time, the individual is part of the Jewish nation. *Klal Yisrael* is something far greater than the sum, or partnership of individuals. Regarding this dimension, the Mishna says, "If I am for myself, then what am I?"

The halacha is that a *mitzvah* of the community overrides the *mitzvah* of the individual.

This is not only an issue of majority versus minority. Rather, it is because the community is eternal whereas the individual is not.

This is why the laws of Aveilut are suspended or removed when a *yomtov* arrives. The same person who has a *mitzvah* to sit shiva, has a communal *mitzvah* to celebrate the *yomtov*. And, more importantly, by celebrating the *yomtov*, the mourner celebrates the dimension of the deceased that never died. This is also the reason we recite Yizkor on *yomtov*. By saying Yizkor we are acknowledging that that soul is as much a part of the *yomtov* as ever.

This is perhaps the meaning of what our sages teach, "*Tzibur lo meit* (a community does not die)." A *tzibur*, a true Jewish community, lives on.

At first glance, this seems difficult to understand.

We see communities disappear throughout history. We visit abandoned shuls in Europe that now serve as museums, libraries, or concert halls. Surely communities can die?

The answer is that Chazal were teaching us something much deeper. A community is not defined by bricks and mortar. It is not even defined by a name or an address. A *tzibur* is the *klal*. It is defined by the people who accept responsibility for one another and who gather to serve Hashem together. As long as that spirit remains alive, the community itself lives.

Every Shabbos morning, the Shechinah rests where Jews gather to *daven*.

Every act of kindness between members strengthens the community. Every person who answers "Amen", every child who joins the children services, every volunteer who prepares a Kiddush, or stands on *shmirah*, every person who simply walks through the door to make a *minyan* – these are the true bricks from which a Jewish community is built.

Buildings may change. Addresses may change. The Mishkan itself was portable! The life of a community never depends upon its walls. It depends on the participation of its members. The future of a community belongs not to the spectators but to the participants.

This Rosh Hashanah ask yourself, "In what way can I connect myself to the eternal *klal*?"

Wishing you *ketivah v'chatima tova L'shana tova umetuka*.

• *Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk is the rabbi of the Victory Park and districts Hebrew congregation.*





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First and second nights – a delicate juggling act

GILANA LAB

For many married couples, planning Rosh Hashanah comes with a question trickier than deciding who’s hosting or what to serve: whose family gets us for *yomtov*? Two nights may sound like plenty of time, until they have to be divided between parents, in-laws, and, sometimes, different cities. Add religious observance, family expectations, and the inevitable question of whose “turn” it is, and Rosh Hashanah dinners can involve a lot of diplomacy.

Not wanting to start or cause more family *faribels*, we have changed the names of the people we spoke to. For Rachel and her husband, Josh, the problem is simple. “There are two nights and four families. Somebody is going to be unhappy. “We both have different family households that want us, so between the two of us there are four places we could be for dinner. And obviously everyone wants a night. The problem is that there are only two. “You start with, ‘Okay, who did we go to last year?’ Then someone



choosing whether we’re buying plane tickets.” For Leah, even having both families in Johannesburg doesn’t mean the two nights can simply be divided between them. “My husband’s family lives close enough for us to walk there. Mine doesn’t. We don’t drive on *yomtov*, so that changes everything. If we’re going to my family, we’re not just going for supper. We need to get there before *yomtov*, we’re sleeping there, we’re packing

Experiencing the high holy days for the first time

CLAUDIA GROSS

For some Jews, the sound of the shofar at Rosh Hashanah is woven into childhood memories. For others, this year will be the first time they hear it as members of the Jewish people. Across different backgrounds, communities, and stages of conversion, several South Africans are approaching their first high holy days with a mixture of excitement, nervousness, commitment, and profound reflection. Solomon Musi, who is currently completing Temple Israel Cape Town’s Jews By Choice programme, is excited about his first Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

“What I’m most excited about is the whole aura of the experience,” he says. “I imagine what other people went through before us, that excitement and commitment to G-d.” He says learning about the Jewish month of Elul, which precedes Rosh Hashanah, have encouraged him to examine both the good and bad within himself. The aim, he says, isn’t simply to recognise what is good, but to confront those aspects of himself that need to change. “Some of these things are what we were born into,” he says. “We have certain cultures, communities that we grew around. Some of the things I didn’t even realise were bad. I thought it was fine.” This process of self-examination has become an important part of his understanding of Judaism. Yom Kippur will be Musi’s first experience of fasting for a spiritual purpose. “You sometimes, as an individual, do fast,” he says. “But not with the purpose.”

He’s looking forward to experiencing the prayers and blessings associated with the day. “I’m ready,” he says. “I’m looking forward, especially to the prayers, the blessings. I want to experience that.” For another new Jew, the approaching high holy days represent the beginning of a different relationship with the Jewish calendar. Daniel*, a 34-year-old software architect from Sea Point, completed a Progressive conversion earlier this year. He grew up in a secular Afrikaans home in Pretoria and moved to Cape Town eight years ago. “Coming from a background where religious holidays felt mostly commercial or passive, my first Rosh Hashanah feels like a complete reset,” he says. It will also be his first as a full member of the community, after 18 months completing his conversion. “Standing in the synagogue hearing the shofar for the first time as a full member of the community, I know I’m going to feel that vibration right in my chest,” he says. His experience of community has also shaped his journey. “The Sea Point community didn’t just welcome me,” he says. “They fed me, argued with me over Torah, and guided me through every step.” Studying the liturgy changed his understanding of the prayers. A rabbi’s explanation of their purpose particularly stayed with him.

“We don’t read these prayers to remember who we were,” he says. “We chant them to decide who we are becoming.” Daniel’s parents were initially confused by his decision to convert. Their response changed when he explained the concept of *teshuvah* (returning to one’s truest self). His father ultimately told him that if a religion demanded personal responsibility for flaws, he couldn’t argue with that. This year, Daniel will celebrate his first Rosh Hashanah dinner with his family, with a round challah and honey. For a 29-year-old teacher from Benoni, the high holy days are unfolding while her Orthodox conversion is still in progress. She expects to complete it in 2027. Her connection to Judaism began through her husband, but she wanted the decision to become Jewish to be her own spiritual choice. She’s had to balance her Indian family traditions with kosher observance and Shabbat. Yom Kippur is the holy day she has been thinking about most.

“Fasting isn’t foreign to me coming from an Indian cultural background,” she says. “But the focus on absolute spiritual raw accountability, standing before G-d with nothing to hide behind, is deeply moving.” She is nervous about the length of the service, but has been practising the prayers and learning the *nusach* (traditional prayer melodies and wording) for months. Her Jewish learning has also extended beyond books and classes. Her mother-in-law has been teaching her to make teiglach and honey cake. These moments have helped translate her studies into family life. “You can read 20 books on Jewish philosophy,” she says. “But braiding a challah while talking about family history teaches you something no textbook ever could.” Matthew*, a 58-year-old retired general practitioner from Durban, completed his Orthodox conversion in Israel earlier this year before returning to South Africa. After retiring to the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, he’d started formalising what he describes as a longstanding intellectual and spiritual connection to Judaism.

“When you are older, converting isn’t about changing your identity,” he says. “It’s about clarifying who you’ve always been.” His medical career has also influenced how he experiences the high holy days. “As a doctor, I’ve seen how fragile life is,” he says. “The *Unetaneh Tokef* [prayer] hits exceptionally hard when you understand the gravity of who shall live and who shall die.” Opening the *Machzor* (high holy days prayer book) carries a different meaning this year. “For years I searched through books,” he says. “But this year, when I open the *Machzor*, I’m finally home.” For each of these people, the high holy days offer something different. Yet all four approach the season with the sense that these days are about more than learning unfamiliar prayers or observing new customs. They are preparing to enter a period of Jewish life that asks people to look backwards, examine themselves, and consider who they want to become. For people experiencing this for the first time, that invitation carries its own significance. *Interviewees have requested anonymity for privacy reasons.

remembers Pesach. Then you start discussing lunches because maybe we can fit somebody in there. Does lunch count the same as dinner? Does first night somehow count more than second night? I swear, you need an Excel spreadsheet!” The seemingly simple solution of bringing everybody together doesn’t work for everyone either. “People always say, ‘Why don’t you just have everyone together?’ Well, because they aren’t all friends,” Rachel says. “They don’t hate each other or anything dramatic, but that doesn’t mean everybody wants to spend *yomtov* together. You can’t force four separate families to suddenly become one happy family because you got married. “You know when someone is disappointed. They don’t even have to say it. You get the, ‘Oh, okay, enjoy’ and you know exactly what that means. And then you feel terrible because the last thing you want is for somebody to think you don’t want to be with them,” she says.

“WE BOTH HAVE DIFFERENT FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS THAT WANT US, SO BETWEEN THE TWO OF US THERE ARE FOUR PLACES WE COULD BE FOR DINNER.”

For Ben, the problem isn’t the number of families, it’s the distance between them. “My family is in Cape Town, where we live, and my wife’s family is in Joburg. So we don’t have the option that some couples have of saying, ‘We’ll do your parents first night and mine second night.’ If we fly to Joburg, that’s where we are. If we stay in Cape Town, her parents don’t have us for Rosh Hashanah. “We thought we could do one year Joburg, one year Cape Town. Very fair. Except family life doesn’t work out that way. Maybe we were with one family for Pesach, maybe there’s a reason we can’t travel that year, maybe siblings are coming in from somewhere else. Suddenly everybody remembers exactly where you were for every *yomtov*.” The guilt, he says, is real. “I think the thing we both worry about is our parents feeling like we’re choosing the other family. That’s never what we’re doing. Sometimes we’re literally

clothes, we’re thinking about where we’re going to shul the next morning. You can’t suddenly decide at 22:00, ‘Actually, let’s go sleep at my parents tonight.’ “I sometimes worry that from the outside it looks like we’re always choosing his family. We’re not. They’re just within walking distance. My parents understand that, but obviously they still want us there. Understanding why your children can’t come doesn’t mean you don’t miss them.” Eventually, Leah has had to stop trying to make everything perfectly equal. “If you start counting, you’ll make yourself crazy. Maybe his family gets more of Rosh Hashanah and mine gets more of another *yomtov*. You have to look at family life as a whole because sometimes you physically can’t make every festival 50-50.” And then there is Maya, who listens to friends discussing these negotiations with some amusement. “I honestly didn’t realise how lucky we were until I got married and started hearing other couples talk about whose turn it was. We don’t really have ‘your family, my family’ for *yomtov*. Someone hosts and everyone comes. Maybe my parents host one meal and his parents do another, but we’re all still sitting together. “Sometimes my mother phones and asks what my mother-in-law is doing before she asks what we’re doing,” Maya laughs. “I’m like, ‘Hello, remember me? I’m the reason you two know each other.’ Nobody is keeping score. There isn’t a first night that belongs to one family and a second night that belongs to the other. I know that’s unusual, and we’re incredibly lucky.” So couples approach the same two nights with completely different calculations. For some, the complication is distance; for others, religious observance or family structures. And for a lucky few, there is no calculation at all. But perhaps Rachel, with her four-family juggling act, has found the best way of looking at it. “We eventually realised that we’re never going to make four families equally happy with two nights. That’s impossible. But then you think about why they’re upset. It’s because they want you there. There are worse problems to have than too many people wanting you around their Rosh Hashanah table.”

Choosing to hear the shofar

OPINION

Having just moved to Johannesburg, I have found here many of the aspects that made me deeply love Brazil, my home country, and its people: the same creativity and warmth, and a resilient force moving both countries forward despite the challenges.

I have also found some of the same problems Brazilian cities face, including *favelas* there, townships here, and homeless people living on the streets under the worst possible conditions. Here and there, taking a walk or driving for a few minutes and facing this reality is enough to undo us.

So we develop defences. We build thick skin around the heart, a sort of armour to prevent us breaking down at every corner. What allows us to keep living also makes us insensitive to the suffering of others. The Torah offers an image for this problem. In Devarim 10:16, Moshe speaks of the *orlat levavchem*, the “thickening about your hearts”, which must be cut away. The image suggests that something can grow over the heart and dull its capacity to respond.

The Torah says very little about Rosh Hashanah. It doesn’t call it a new year, speak explicitly of judgement, or mention *teshuvah* (repentance). It gives us *t’ruah*, the sounding of the shofar, and very little explanation of what that sound is meant to do. During Elul, I tend to hear the shofar as an alarm clock, calling us towards *cheshbon hanefesh*, the process of taking account of our lives. On Rosh Hashanah, I am interested in another quality of the sound. It can reach places that words and resolutions don’t easily reach.

The Talmud asks what kind of sound a

t’ruah is and connects it with *yevava*, a cry, through the biblical description of Sisera’s mother waiting at the window for a son who will never return. A later tradition associates the hundred blasts of Rosh Hashanah with her hundred cries, the sound of a human being at a moment of deep vulnerability.

A Chassidic tale tells of a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov who, having trained for years, forgot the *kavanot* with which to sound the *shofar* and, weeping, sounded it as best he could. Satisfied, the Baal Shem Tov told him that the Divine palace has many chambers, each with its own *kavanah* to open its gate, but a broken heart is like an axe that can break through every gate.

Tehillim 34:19 teaches that “G-d is



close to the broken-hearted”, but most of us cannot live with our hearts constantly broken open. We need protection. Yet the protection can become so thick that almost nothing reaches us. Perhaps the cries of the shofar act like that axe, cracking the armour we have built and helping us register another person’s pain, and our own.

When we reach Yom Kippur, we strike our chests as we recite Vidui. If the shofar has made the heart more exposed, that gesture may meet something still capable of feeling what we have learned not to see around us, and of recognising what we need to confess. Something in our preparation for Yom Kippur would be missing without that.

That matters particularly this year,

because the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat. Jewish communities have generally refrained from sounding the shofar when the festival falls on Shabbat. The *mitzvah* itself is biblical, and the Talmud acknowledges that according to Torah law the shofar may be sounded on Shabbat. The prohibition is rabbinic, based on the concern that someone who did not know how to sound it might carry a shofar through a public domain while taking it to an expert. Even within rabbinic tradition, the restriction was not absolute, though. The shofar continued to be sounded in the Temple, and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai later preserved its sounding in places with a *beit din*.

At Bet David, as at some other Progressive congregations, we will sound the shofar this Rosh Hashanah. We take seriously the rabbinic concern that led generations of Jews not to sound it on Shabbat. Yet we are also weighing that concern against what we believe the shofar itself accomplishes. Its cries can penetrate the thickening around our hearts, restoring some of our capacity to feel our own failures and the suffering of those with whom we share this world. Giving up those cries would therefore mean giving up something we believe is essential to the spiritual work of Rosh Hashanah and to the journey that carries us from there to Yom Kippur.

This year, we have chosen to hear them.

• Rabbi Rogério Cukierman is the rabbi at Bet David in Sandton.



RABBI ROGÉRIO CUKIERMAN

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WhatsApp greetings: welcome connection or irritating interruption?

CLAUDIA GROSS

Every Friday, they arrive. A colourful bouquet. A sunset over Jerusalem. A Shabbat table glowing with candles.

During Elul, the Hebrew month preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there’s a daily stream of images encouraging reflection, repentance, prayer, and spiritual preparation, along with videos of shofar blowing.

For some, these messages are a small but meaningful reminder of Jewish connection. For others, they are digital clutter that gets deleted, muted, or ignored. The difference isn’t so much about whether people value Jewish connection. It’s about what connection looks like in an age of WhatsApp.

Miriam*, a retired primary school teacher living in Sea Point, Cape Town, welcomes the messages. “Every Friday morning, my WhatsApp lights up with bright floral images wishing me Shabbat Shalom, and during Elul, it’s beautiful reminders to reflect,” she says. “Why wouldn’t someone want that blessing in their day?”

For Miriam, the messages represent a modern form of something that existed long before smartphones. “People complain about clutter on their phones, but to me, it replaces the old printed newsletters and paper holiday cards we used to post,” she says. “It’s just modern *chesed* [kindness].”

She believes these small digital gestures can be particularly significant for people who may otherwise feel disconnected. “For older people who live alone or whose children have emigrated, getting a colourful picture with a prayer or an Elul message makes us feel remembered and connected to the community.”

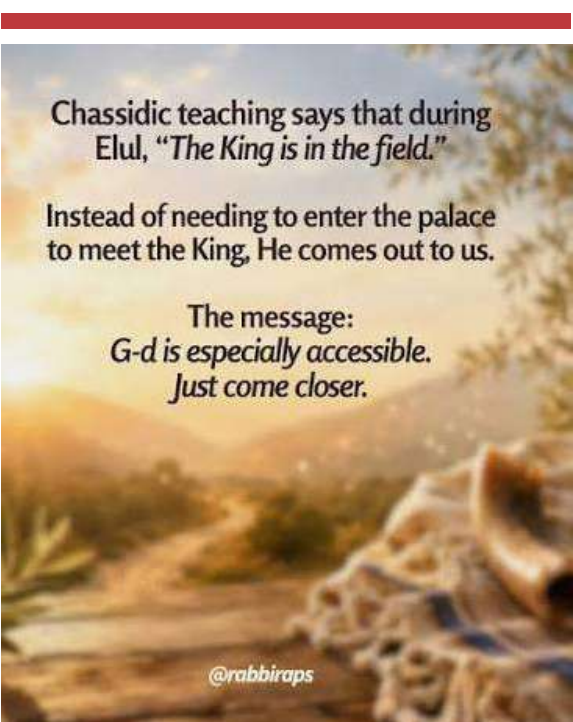
Elul has a particular significance in this context. It is a time for spiritual preparation before the high holy days. The month is associated with *teshuvah*, commonly understood as repentance or returning to the right path. People are encouraged to examine themselves and their relationships.

For Miriam, a daily message can provide a practical prompt to do this. “When Elul begins, life moves so fast that having a daily image pop up forces me to take a breath, pause, and put my mind into a state of *teshuvah*,” she says.

But the messages that bring Miriam comfort are a source of frustration for Dean*, a 28-year-old tech entrepreneur and graphic designer in Rosebank, Johannesburg. “It’s digital junk food,” he says. “Impersonal graphics, increasingly AI-generated, forwarded to 50 broadcast lists at once without a single thoughtful word tailored to the person receiving it.”

Dean says the problem becomes particularly noticeable at this time of year. “During Elul, my phone literally vibrates non-stop with low-resolution JPEG images of shofars and sunrise quotes, to the point where actual urgent personal messages get completely buried,” he says.

For him, the issue isn’t the sentiment behind a Shabbat Shalom or Elul greeting. It’s the method used to communicate it. “If you want to wish me a meaningful Shabbat Shalom or check in on me during the



month of Elul, send me a voice note or call me,” he says. “Don’t just tap ‘forward’ on a recycled chain image.”

He sees a contradiction between the purpose of Elul and the way some of its messages are delivered. “There’s a real irony in using automated digital spam to remind people about deep, introspective spiritual preparation for the high holy days.”

Dean has responded by muting family groups and changing his WhatsApp settings to reduce the amount of content reaching his phone. He’s noticed that since the proliferation of ChatGPT and similar AI platforms, his family members have taken to creating their own Elul messages, which, he says, “I can’t stand to look at.”

A Cape Town rabbi sees merit in both perspectives. “We have to distinguish between the delivery mechanism and the heart behind it,” he says. “The desire to wish a fellow Jew Shabbat Shalom or encourage spiritual awareness in Elul is fundamentally noble.”

At the same time, he says, there is a danger. “The challenge is that sacred concepts require mindfulness, and when holy ideas are turned into daily digital mass production, they risk losing their gravitas.

“I see both sides daily in the congregation,” the rabbi says. “Elderly members who feel embraced by these graphics, and young professionals who feel suffocated by notification fatigue.”

The tension is particularly relevant during Elul. “During Elul, introspection requires quiet and focus, but our smartphones create constant noise,” he says. “Sometimes a daily visual notification helps spark reflection, and other times it just adds to the noise.”

Batya*, a mother of three and communal volunteer in Cape Town, experiences the divide from the middle. She finds herself navigating the expectations of older relatives while dealing with children who have little patience for WhatsApp overload.

“I’m in the middle generation, where my mother forwards me six Elul graphics a morning and my teenage kids are constantly begging me to leave the extended family chat because of the spam,” she says.

Yet she struggles to reject the messages outright. “I don’t have the heart to tell my aunt that her daily Shabbat Shalom glitter image goes straight to my archived chats because I know she sends it out of genuine love,” she says.

For Batya, the difference reflects changing ideas

about what it means to maintain relationships.

“There is definitely a generational divide in how we define connection,” she says. “Older relatives see sending an image as an active touchpoint, while younger people view it as thoughtless broadcast spam.”

That divide can have consequences for the very messages intended to encourage spiritual awareness. “By the third week of Elul, the volume becomes so intense that people start ignoring the messages altogether,” Batya says. “Which defeats the entire purpose of the spiritual wake-up call.”

Her solution is diplomatic rather than confrontational. “I’ve learned to just send a quick heart emoji reply to keep the peace,” she says. “But internally, I’m constantly clearing storage space off my phone.”

The rabbi believes neither response should be dismissed. “Ultimately, technology is a tool,” he says. “While chain-forwarding graphics isn’t deep Torah study, if it brings a moment of Jewish connection to someone who is isolated, we shouldn’t dismiss it entirely.”

That may be the heart of the Shabbat Shalom debate. The same image can be experienced as kindness by one person and clutter by another. A daily reminder can prompt reflection for one recipient while becoming another notification to swipe away.

As Jewish communities increasingly communicate through screens, even an ancient greeting is taking on a new meaning. For some, a Shabbat Shalom image is a simple blessing. For others, it is a reminder that the most meaningful connection may sometimes be the one that arrives without a picture attached.

*Interviewees have requested anonymity for privacy reasons.

Big yomtavim aren’t for everyone

CLAUDIA GROSS

For many Jewish families, the high holy days mean crowded dining tables, packed synagogue services, familiar rituals, and generations coming together. But for others, those traditions can make the *yomtavim* difficult.

Some find large gatherings overwhelming. Others have painful family relationships or financial pressures. A crowded synagogue can make praying itself difficult.

Their responses vary. Some stay home, others attend smaller gatherings, and some leave town altogether.

“As an introvert, I find big family gatherings overwhelming and draining,” said one Cape Town parent. “My kids are also introverts so when we go to these gatherings, I’m trying to manage their feelings of being overwhelmed along with mine. This makes it stressful.”

Their approach to the high holy days has changed from year to year.

In recent years, the family has attended small gatherings, stayed home, or gone away. “We often find that enjoying South Africa’s beautiful scenery is a meaningful and special way of pausing and marking these moments,” the parent said.

This year, the family plans to celebrate *yomtov* at home. “I see it as a positive step in starting our own traditions in a way that works for us,” the parent said.

However, choosing a quieter celebration hasn’t always been easy. The parent said there had been feelings of guilt, and judgement from family members who didn’t fully accept why large gatherings were difficult.

“There is definitely this expectation. But just because we find these gatherings overwhelming, doesn’t mean we love our family less or our Judaism less.”

The parent believes communities need to recognise that not everyone experiences communal celebrations in the same way. “Judaism is a very extroverted religion, but not every Jew is extroverted and we need to make space for introverted Jews, who can’t always be part of big gatherings,” they said. “There should be less judgement and more understanding that some people find being alone or being in nature a more meaningful and spiritual experience.”

Others avoid high holy day gatherings because of difficult family relationships. Cape Town resident David*, 42, stopped



attending synagogue services five years ago after an acrimonious fallout with his immediate family.

“When Rosh Hashanah rolls around, the silence in my apartment is deafening,” he said.

“Every WhatsApp group in the community is buzzing with family recipes and table layouts, but for me, showing up at shul means running into the very people who cut me out.”

He said this doesn’t mean he’s abandoned Judaism. “It’s not that I’ve abandoned my faith or my heritage. I miss the shofar terribly,” he said.

However, being surrounded by families at another synagogue can intensify his sense of isolation. “Walking into a sanctuary full of families sitting together in matching suits, holding hands, and pretending

everything is perfect just reopens wounds I’ve spent years trying to heal.”

David said the expectation that people should put family disagreements aside during the holidays can overlook the reality of fractured relationships. “They don’t realise that sitting two rows away from someone who refuses to speak to you turns a sacred space into an emotional minefield.”

He now marks Rosh Hashanah alone at home. “Now, I dip my apple in honey alone on my balcony,” he said. “It’s quiet, and it’s lonely, but it’s real.”

For Johannesburg resident Leah*, 38, the barrier is financial. She is a single mother of two who’s faced financial hardship since the COVID-19 pandemic. The cost of synagogue seats, holiday meals, outfits, and gifts are prohibitive. “The high holy days have become ridiculously expensive and nobody in our community wants to talk about it openly,” she said.

She knows that some synagogues provide financial assistance or subsidised seats, but “having to submit your bank statements to prove you are ‘poor enough’ to pray with your community strips away every last bit of your dignity”.

Leah said financial pressure affects social participation around the holidays. “When you can’t afford to contribute to the festival meals or host people, you start quietly withdrawing,” she said.

Her children have noticed the difference. “My kids asked me why we aren’t going to the big family services this year,” she said. “How do you explain to a nine-year-old that holiness has been priced out of our budget?”

Leah has therefore created a spiritual

space for her family at home.

For Pretoria resident Talia*, 29, large services present a different challenge. She has sensory processing disorder and social anxiety.

“For someone with severe sensory overload, a high holy day service is a nightmare disguised as a *mitzvah*,” Talia said. She described packed pews, noise, children moving through the aisles, strong perfume, and bright lights as triggers. “My nervous system goes into full fight-or-flight within 20 minutes. Yom Kippur is supposed to be about reflection and atonement, but I spend the entire day fighting off panic attacks.”

She feels judged when she leaves a service to recover. “There is so much unspoken judgement if you step out every 15 minutes to catch your breath,” she said.

Talia has found an alternative way to mark the day. “I’ve traded the packed main sanctuary for an individual walk in nature with an audio recording of the shofar.”

She said it had taken time to accept that observing the holidays could look different. “It took years to forgive myself for not fitting the mould of how a ‘good Jewish person’ observes the holidays. But peace of mind has to come first.”

The experiences of these four people point to different ways Jews can mark Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They include smaller family gatherings, time in nature, private prayer, or creating traditions at home.

For the Cape Town parent, the key is allowing people to make those choices without assuming they reflect a lack of love for family or Judaism. “If someone can’t attend a big *yomtov*, don’t take it personally,” they said. “Rather understand that it’s not for everyone, and that is perfectly okay.”

*Interviewees have requested anonymity for privacy reasons.



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Why SA entrepreneurs stand to gain from closer ties with Israel

OPINION

LUYANDA HENNA



When my recruitment business failed after three years, I returned to the corporate world carrying more than disappointment. I felt ashamed. I had invested my hopes and identity in that business, yet had nobody with whom I could unpack what had happened. It took years to heal. I thought about that experience deeply during my recent visit to Israel through MASHAV, the agency for international development cooperation.

I had certainly expected to learn about innovation on the trip, but what I experienced was a new way of thinking about entrepreneurship that completely changed how I understood my own setback. MASHAV was established in 1957 to share Israel's knowledge and technologies with developing nations. Its emphasis on building human capabilities and supporting sustainable development became evident, almost immediately, through the people I met on the programme. Their lessons made a compelling case for closer relationships between South Africans and Israelis, relationships that connect knowledge with opportunity and allow both societies to build a greater prosperity together.

As a South African woman and social impact practitioner working with women and young people in the Eastern Cape, I see enormous creativity and determination. Many participants, however, have had little exposure to entrepreneurs, investors, or business networks. Some have never encountered a successful entrepreneur whose background resembles their own. My experience in Johannesburg had been different.

Industry experience, networking opportunities, and entrepreneurial energy surrounded me. The contrast taught me how much geography can shape access to opportunity. Israel helped me understand how deliberately we need to build the relationships that make that opportunity usable.

One MASHAV facilitator, entrepreneur Jamie Amsel, offered an instruction that stayed with me, "Make learning your strategy."

Listening to him, I began to reconsider my business experience. A failed enterprise didn't make me a failed person. For the women and young people I work with, that distinction matters. We must develop the confidence and resilience of the entrepreneur alongside the practical capabilities of the enterprise. I encountered entrepreneurs in Israel who had built companies, experienced setbacks, and started again. Their willingness to experiment seemed connected to the support around them. Mentors, academics, investors, and fellow

entrepreneurs appeared to form a network that could respond as their needs changed. Shared workspaces illustrated this. Their value went beyond affordable desks. Working beside other entrepreneurs created opportunities for introductions, informal mentoring, and solving problems together. Sometimes the person who can help you take the next step just needs to be within your reach. Yes, capital remains essential. But money achieves more when entrepreneurs also have access to skills, customers, guidance, and people who can help them recover when something goes wrong.



Luyanda Henna at the MASHAV Training Center

One encounter has already prompted me to act. Through Noa Rifkin, I learned about Check Point's SecureAcademy, which provides free cybersecurity learning resources through partnerships with educational institutions and non-profit organisations. The model connects specialist expertise with organisations that understand the communities they serve. Since returning, I have spoken to Rifkin about exploring a partnership to bring these skills to South African women and young people. That conversation is still exploratory, but it demonstrates how an international exchange can become the starting point for practical cooperation that truly benefits those who didn't have access to these resources before.

I believe that such partnerships work best when knowledge travels in both directions. Israeli expertise can help expand access to technical skills, while South African organisations contribute local understanding, community relationships, and insight into the challenges those skills must address. Together, we can develop approaches that are more relevant and useful than either partner could create alone.

Another facilitator, Sharon Gesthalter, emphasised shared humanity and authentic relationships. Her reflections reinforced something essential to my work: people experience an organisation through the way it treats them. Trust grows when we recognise one another's aspirations and remain present through difficulty and setbacks.

I learned that our entrepreneurship programmes in

South Africa need to offer sustained mentorship, visible role models, and spaces where participants can test ideas. Support should continue beyond graduation, connecting people to markets, expertise, and networks as their businesses develop. Young people should be able to choose entrepreneurship as a credible career, with a pathway that makes that ambition truly realistic.

South Africans already understand the power of rallying around one another. We sometimes call it "country duty". What I saw in Israel challenged me to imagine that generosity as an everyday part of economic life: people and institutions taking continuing responsibility for helping others build.

I returned home wanting to adapt these lessons to our own communities. Closer relationships between South Africans and Israelis can give that work momentum, opening doors to shared learning, stronger enterprises, and new opportunities. Prosperity grows when people can contribute their strengths and gain from one another's experience.

The women and young people I work with deserve those connections. My experience of MASHAV convinced me that we have much to gain by building them.

• *Luyanda Henna is a South African social impact practitioner and entrepreneur focused on expanding economic opportunities for women and young people, particularly in underserved communities in the Eastern Cape.*

Judgement day for Jewish achievers

GILANA LAB

For the judges of the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, judging day was about far more than names, CVs, and lists of accomplishments. It was an opportunity to meet the nominees, hear their stories first-hand, and understand not only what they have achieved, but how they got there.

Across the different award categories, judges sat down with nominee after nominee, turning what had until then existed largely on paper into conversations about businesses built, careers forged, communities strengthened, and obstacles overcome.

For Anthony Meltzer, one of the Investec judges for the Professional Excellence and Business Leadership categories, that meant a 13-hour day, beginning at 07:30 and ending at 20:30. He and his fellow judges interviewed 25 nominees across the two categories.

"It was a long and demanding day," Meltzer said. "It required sustained focus because it was important that every nominee received the same level of attention, engagement, and respect, regardless of how late in the day they were interviewed."

Yet the intensity of the day was matched by what the judges heard. "The outstanding candidates were truly deserving, and hearing about their journeys, achievements, and contributions was incredibly inspiring," Meltzer said.

Being asked to assess people who had achieved so much was also daunting. "The hardest part was being a judge of people who are very accomplished and, in many respects, people I look up to. It was challenging and very humbling."

Greg Solomon, a judge for the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award, experienced

much the same feeling while meeting 31 nominees, describing the experience as "fascinating and deeply humbling".

"We had the privilege of meeting extraordinary individuals who have dedicated themselves to building businesses, achieving remarkable milestones, creating opportunities, and making a tangible difference in the lives of others and in their communities," he said.

"What stood out most wasn't simply what these individuals have achieved, but the courage, conviction, resilience, and purpose that have driven them to achieve it. There are exceptional people doing exceptional things within South African Jewry."

Their stories, he said, were "a powerful reminder of the

depth of talent, ambition, generosity, and leadership that exists within our community".

Dawn Nathan-Jones, one of the judges for the Europcar Women in Leadership Award, encountered that talent among the 19 nominees in the category. "The women were incredibly well prepared, professional, and accomplished. Many genuinely blew me away with what they have achieved and the impact they are making."

Some of the younger women, in particular, stayed with her. "I was particularly inspired by the young women doing incredible work in the community. Seeing our youth so actively involved in helping others was impressive and incredibly encouraging."

The conversations also allowed judges to look beyond the obvious measures of achievement. Liran Assness, a judge for the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award, found meeting people at different stages of their careers particularly interesting.

"For me, it was really inspirational," he said. "It's great to see all different businesses and people, young and old, at different stages of their lives and careers, presenting their businesses."

When it comes to entrepreneurship, Assness said the process cannot simply be about comparing balance sheets. "It's not only about the numbers. You can't just say, because this business made this amount of profit this year, you're getting that award. It's not a prize for the biggest business; it's a prize for entrepreneurs."



Judging Day at Investec

For him, entrepreneurial flair needs to sit alongside a successful, sustainable business, showing the judging panel what to consider as the selection process unfolds.

After 13 hours of listening, questioning, and getting to know the people behind the nominations, Meltzer admitted that the day was considerably longer and more intense than he'd anticipated. "The food kept rolling in throughout, and I'm fairly certain I left about 3kg heavier than when I arrived," he joked.

Judging day begins the selection process, but its most important purpose is also its simplest: allowing nominees to move beyond the CV, nomination form, and list of achievements, sit across from the judges, and tell their own stories.

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Olim look forward to first Rosh Hashanah in Israel

LEE TANKLE

Rosh Hashanah signals the beginning of a new year. For those who’ve recently made aliya, it marks their first Jewish New Year in a new country, a new home, and a new chapter of their lives.

From navigating Hebrew to finding one’s place in Israeli society, the first months of aliya are filled with change. As Rosh Hashanah approaches, new *olim* reflect on what it means to celebrate the *chag* in the Jewish State for the first time, and their hopes for the year ahead.

For Moshe Grauman it’s the first time he’s spending the *chaggim* without blood relatives. “My *yomtovim* were very much family-only events in South Africa. However, since coming home to Israel, I’ve made many connections and for the first time, I’m going to someone who isn’t family by blood but family by bond,” he said.

This change is something he never thought possible as his life in South Africa was mainly spent indoors with family, or at school. Now, he spends his days outdoors with friends, and the *chaggim* will be no different.

“Overall my time in Israel has helped me grow as a person and expand my knowledge, experience, and skills. I can’t see myself anywhere else in the world but here in our homeland,” he said.

Vernon Levenberg, who made aliya just this week, said that while making the leap and leaving his family in his 60s was daunting, he’s excited for his first Rosh Hashanah in his new home.

“As a new *oleh*, going to a country that opens its arms and welcomes you home is an incredible feeling. Whether you choose to come through a programme or make aliya independently, knowing that you are welcomed with open arms is something truly special,” he said, “This will be my first Rosh Hashanah in Israel, and as a Jewish man, I am

extremely excited and proud to experience the Jewish New Year in the land of Israel.”

While he didn’t have any concrete plans yet, he was keeping an open mind and seeing where the wind takes him.

“I want to see what opportunities lie ahead and where this new chapter will take me. I know this journey won’t be easy. Starting again at my age, in a new country and a new environment, will bring its

children and grandchildren, who are also *olim*. “We are celebrating Rosh Hashanah with our family and going to shul together and looking forward to this important time,” said Geff. The family already spends Shabbat together. “We walk to and from our granddaughter’s apartment and feel

safe and appreciate walking with many other people,” he said. “Shabbat is special. We make sure it is different to the week because, being retired, we have spare time. So we dress smartly, go to shul and attend Shabbat dinners.”

Melanie Harris never thought she would be starting over in Netanya at the age of 76. While it’s been overwhelming, she’s looking forward to spending *yomtov* with her family.

“After a lifetime in South Africa, there is something incredibly special about being able to start this new chapter surrounded by family,” she said. “It has been an emotional journey, leaving behind a lifetime of memories, friendships, and a home that’s been such an important part of our lives. “At 76, I have learned that life can still surprise you. We may be starting a new chapter, but we are starting it together, with gratitude for everything behind us, excitement for everything ahead, and the wonderful feeling that, after all these years, we are finally home,” she said.



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ChaiFM ensures no one’s eating alone on Rosh Hashanah

GILANA LAB

The image of Rosh Hashanah is often of a packed table, with family squeezed together, familiar foods being passed around, and the noise that comes with celebrating a *chag*. Yet for some, the approaching festival has brought a much quieter question: where am I going to go?

It’s a question ChaiFM chief executive Howard Feldman realised more people may be asking than the community knows.

Working in community radio gives Feldman an unusual window into what people are experiencing. Listeners communicate with the station constantly and, through those conversations, he began noticing a need that wasn’t being spoken about openly.

“We sometimes get a sense of people’s immediate emotional needs,” he says. “Although many of us are surrounded by

family, there are people in our community who’ve moved here from another town, are recently divorced, or whose children have emigrated. People are lonely and don’t necessarily have the support structures that many of us are blessed to have.”

That prompted Feldman to launch a ChaiFM initiative matching people who don’t have somewhere to spend Rosh Hashanah with community members willing to open their homes. “We thought we would put it out there and get a sense of how big the need is. The response has been tremendous, both from people offering to host and from those needing somewhere to go.”

The people reaching out aren’t necessarily those one might expect to be alone. Feldman received a message from someone who’d recently moved from Cape Town and didn’t yet know many people in Johannesburg. Others are older, with children or family no longer nearby.



“For me, it’s about creating a sense of warmth within the community and letting people know that they are valued,” he says. “It’s also about recognising that this isn’t going to be a once-off. Hopefully, it’s something that will grow.”

At the time Feldman spoke to the *SA Jewish Report*, about 10 people were looking for

somewhere to spend Rosh Hashanah, while 13 or 14 had offered to host.

For Feldman, that imbalance is a reassuring reflection of the community rather than a surprise. “We are a fantastic community. South African Jews are so keen to reach out and assist each other. We just need to be shown the need and given a way to help, and we’ll do it.

A national *cheshbon nefesh*

OPINION

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, there’s the impetus to do our personal *cheshbon nefesh*, an audit of our shortcomings, achievements, and areas we want to improve going into a new year.

The timing couldn’t be more apt for Israelis. After three years of war and amid a tumultuous political climate and shifting sands in the international arena, Israelis are doing a national *cheshbon nefesh*. A long, hard look at where we currently stand as a nation, what is happening to our national soul, and where we go from here.

I know I am emotionally exhausted from the past year. Many people comment about how resilient we are in Israel, how we have seemingly moved forward in the last year. But the truth is, we carry a lot of mixed emotions – grief, joy, trauma, exhaustion, and happiness, in a complicated emotional cocktail. We are still carrying immense trauma from 7 October and I think we will for many years to come. I’m not ashamed to speak about my own post-traumatic stress disorder. I don’t like crowds or loud noises and, having endured wars within a war that bring with them sirens, missiles, and destruction, it’s still taking a while for my nervous system to reset.

This past year, we have run the gamut of emotions. The sheer thrill of the return of all of our hostages. The immense pain that many returned home in coffins. The brave sons and daughters we have lost in defence of the country. Time does not heal all wounds. War with Iran and Hezbollah. An alarming rise in antisemitism wearing its latest iteration, antizionism. Violence in Judea and Samaria. All of this weighs heavy on our souls and as we welcome a new year, it all informs the type of country we want to live in.

It’s no coincidence we are called Israel. *Israel* means “to wrestle with G-d” and right now, Israelis are wrestling with their conscience.

We are on the precipice of one of the most consequential elections in Israeli history. The big question we are asking is: will the Netanyahu era come to an end? Israelis are frustrated and angry at many of the decisions of the coalition government, which is viewed by many as veering into the extreme. Political figures such as ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, who are extremely polarising, the influence of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) factions and their dogmatic refusal for many to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are all contributing to this frustration. Israelis are asking ourselves the most important question – will the next government align with our values?

One thing that’s evident is that the global assault on our collective Zionist identity as a country has only strengthened our resolve and, as we approach the 27 October elections, it is a mainstay on party platforms.

Prior to 7 October, Israel was extremely divided. Who can forget the mass protests across the country both in favour of and opposed to proposed judicial reforms? The events of 7 October, like many disasters throughout our history, united everyone – but the cracks have reappeared.

The war demonstrated the importance of having an independent judiciary as Israel faces South Africa’s “genocide” accusations at the International Court of Justice.

Israel’s ability to investigate allegations through a robust judiciary is evidence of its robust democracy, which protects both the rule of law and our armed forces. While there is no doubt



that there need to be some reforms, perhaps it’s time for Israel to have a constitution.

Another area of contention that could influence the way Israelis vote, and our ability to begin to heal as a nation, is the issue of a possible national inquiry into the circumstances that led to the 7 October attacks. Many have taken responsibility, including former prime ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, former IDF chiefs and senior command, the former head of Sin Bet, and other ministers and officials. But glaringly missing from the list of mea culpas are the current prime minister and members of his coalition, who have, to date, refused a national inquiry. President Isaac Herzog has been an outspoken advocate for the need for a national inquiry.

We are also approaching a new year when the sands of international support have shifted considerably. The countries we once called close allies have taken a more hostile stance against the Jewish State, largely influenced by sectarian politics in their own bases. Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, and others who were once staunch allies are now among the strongest critics.

The political climate in the US is also shifting and Israel must brace for a post-Trump America and focus as planned on a military partnership, as opposed to a relationship where the perception of aid is seen as negative by young Americans. In fairness, perhaps they don’t fully understand the benefits from a national security perspective, but aid is now the stick that’s wielded to pull away from this strong alliance of shared values. Some blame Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for neglecting the Democratic Party to focus on Republicans, and it will take a concerted effort on multiple fronts to rebuild those ties.

The news is not all negative. In fact in most of Africa, South America, the South Pacific Islands, India, and in countries like Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Cyprus, and in our own region, ties are strengthening, making the perception that Israel is isolated untrue. The sands have just shifted to other areas.

Growing violence in Judea and Samaria is lighting a fuse that could explode the proverbial tinderbox that is this territory. A small group of extremists (I won’t use pejoratives by calling them “settlers” because there are many different kinds of settlers, they are not a homogenous group) is committing violent acts against Palestinian civilians and inhibiting security forces from maintaining calm by attacking them as well. While they have been roundly condemned by the president, the prime minister, and the IDF, this must be stopped and perpetrators must face consequences. They threaten to blow open another front and are a stain on our country.

Despite everything our remarkable country faces on a daily basis, Israelis feel more optimistic.

The Jewish People Policy Institute’s Israeli Society Index found that 43% of Jewish Israelis believe Israel is improving and will continue to improve, up from 36% last year. Among right-wing respondents, optimism rose to 76%, compared with 68% a year ago.

Overall, 35% of Israelis said the country is improving and will get better, while 30% said Israel is declining and the decline will continue. The latter figure fell from 38% last year.

Overall, the report says, “the right has become more optimistic about the present, while the centre-left has become more optimistic about the future.”

Over the past few years, Israelis have grappled with war and loss and while those battles, both kinetic and emotional, are still ongoing, now is the time for another reckoning on a personal level and as a nation. Who will we be in this coming year? What will our *cheshbon nefesh* look like this time next year?

Shana tova. May this year bring what we so fervently hope, pray, and fight for. Peace.

• Rolene Marks is a journalist and commentator on Middle East affairs, co-founder of Lay of the Land, and the national spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation.



ROLENE MARKS

“That’s why it didn’t surprise me that we had more people offering to host than people requesting a place. I think that’s who we are as a community.”

However, having more than enough hosts doesn’t remove one of the biggest barriers to the initiative, asking. “I think it’s harder to ask for a place than it is to offer to host,” Feldman says.

Recognising that vulnerability has shaped the way ChaiFM is running the programme. One person is dedicated to managing the process, with Feldman overseeing it, and the identities of those seeking somewhere to go kept private. There is no list circulated among potential hosts, and when someone asked for one, Feldman refused.

“We have to be respectful of the people asking us for a place,” he says. Instead, ChaiFM has approached potential hosts privately and asked whether they would be comfortable welcoming a particular person. “It’s a two-way street, and hopefully we can remove that element of discomfort.”

Nor is it simply a matter of finding an empty chair. ChaiFM asks three questions of hosts and guests: where they live, their general age group, and their level of religious observance. “We ask about religious observance on both sides and match people accordingly,” Feldman says.

There is, admittedly, no sophisticated matchmaking formula behind the scenes. Feldman is largely relying on instinct and plans to check in after the *chag* to find out how the experience went for both sides. “I’ll be phoning people after *yomtov* to make sure it went well on both sides. I feel a bit like a matchmaker, which isn’t a natural calling for me at all. At this stage, I’m just going with my gut.”

The success of the initiative won’t necessarily be measured only by the number of matches ChaiFM makes. Feldman has approached rabbis and shuls in different communities to help spread the message, hoping it will also encourage people to notice those around them.

“Hopefully, it creates awareness, even if people don’t go through us. It may make someone stop and think, ‘Maybe there’s somebody in our community we should invite.’ That’s really the whole idea.”

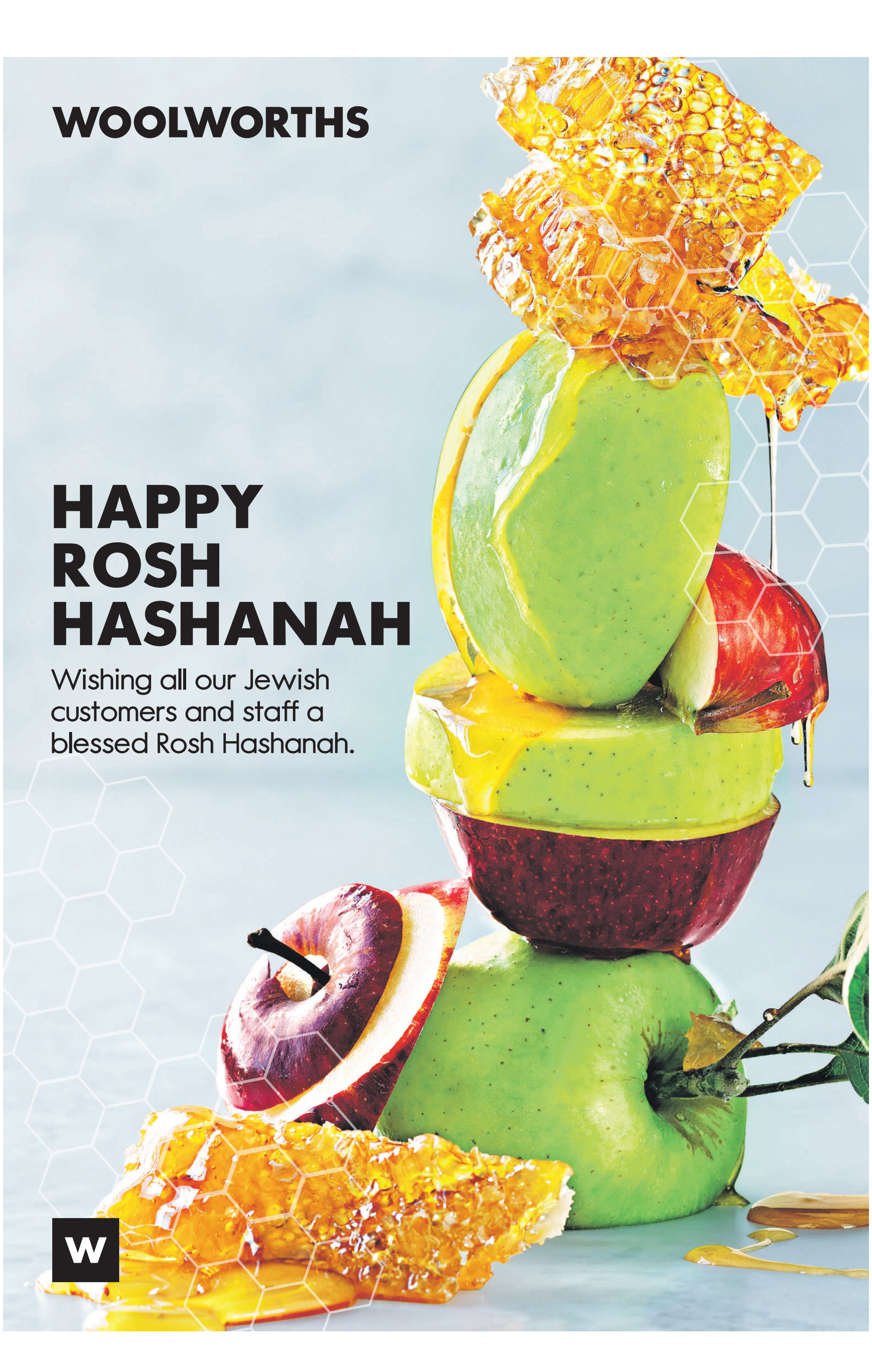
The idea is already stretching beyond Rosh Hashanah. Feldman intends to repeat it for Sukkot and believes that, once the station has an effective system in place, there’s no reason it couldn’t eventually work for an ordinary Shabbat. “This is about creating community spirit, warmth, and sensitivity,” he says.

For now, Feldman is the first to admit that he’s figuring it out as he goes. “I’m absolutely winging it. Sometimes an idea is enough if it comes from a good place and with good intentions. Please G-d, it’ll go well.”

WOOLWORTHS

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The African and Jewish sacrifice to remember

OPINION

KAMOHELO CHAUKE



South Africans rightly remember the SS Mendi. During World War I, the troop ship carrying members of the South African Native Labour Corps sank in the English Channel after colliding with another vessel. More than 600 South Africans died. The Mendi has become one of our most powerful symbols of black military sacrifice, and deserves its place in our national memory. But a generation later, another ship carried Southern African servicemen to their deaths. Its name is far less familiar.

On 1 May 1943, during World War II, the British troop ship SS Erinpura was sailing in an Allied convoy in the Mediterranean when a Nazi Luftwaffe aircraft attacked north of Benghazi, Libya. The ship was struck and sank rapidly. Among the casualties were 140 Jewish soldiers of 462 Transport Company and 644 Sotho, Tswana, and Swazi members of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps. The Jewish soldiers came from British Mandate Palestine, territory where the State of Israel would be established five years later in 1948. The African pioneers came largely from Southern Africa. The meeting of these men aboard Erinpura represents a remarkable intersection between African, Jewish, and Middle Eastern history that deserves a place in our Heritage Month conversations.

Their contribution began long before that final voyage. Recruitment from Basutoland, today's Lesotho, began in 1941. These Basotho servicemen built roads and defensive positions, unloaded ships, transported supplies, and helped construct railways that kept the Allied military machine moving. Some served in British Mandate Palestine and Lebanon. They helped construct sections of the coastal railway running northwards from the Haifa region towards Lebanon, including work around Rosh Hanikra. Many had skills acquired in Southern African mines, including working with explosives, and those skills became valuable to the Allied war effort. The Jewish soldiers of 462 General Transport Company also had an important record of service. Jewish volunteers from British Mandate Palestine served in British forces across the Middle East and North Africa. Members of 462 Company transported the supplies without which armies simply could not fight. They served through the Western Desert campaign and the battles that eventually forced Axis forces backwards across North Africa. Erinpura therefore carried not spectators of history, but men who had been doing the hard, dangerous, and often forgotten work that made Allied victories possible. Their journeys finally converged in April 1943. Erinpura sailed from Alexandria on 29 April as part of Convoy MW 27. On 1 May, the Nazi German aircraft attacked. The ship went down off the Libyan coast, taking hundreds of African and Jewish servicemen with it. This is a moment when different people, carrying different languages, memories, and histories, nevertheless stood beside one another without surrendering who they were. That, to me, is the real Heritage Month lesson of Erinpura: solidarity does not require cultural surrender. Perhaps this history affects me so deeply because my own South African identity cannot fit neatly into one cultural box. My Sotho lineage reaches me through my grandmother, Puleng Paulinah Mokoena-Nekhavhambe. My family stretches across this country, while my heritage carries Sotho, Venda, and Tsonga influences. I grew up in Orange Farm among Sesotho and isiZulu-speaking communities, and later in Alexandra, surrounded by South Africans from across the country and Africans whose

family journeys began elsewhere on this continent. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) that lesson became even more powerful. I have, among my leadership roles, served two terms on the Student Representative Council and participated in youth activism. I have organised, protested, argued, celebrated, and dreamed alongside people who do not speak my language, share my religion, come from my culture, or agree with my politics. Wits sometimes feels like South Africa compressed into one room. Christians, Jews, Muslims, traditional African believers, atheists, and others share lecture halls and libraries. We may disagree, but we also study together, struggle together, and imagine the future of the country together. That experience has convinced me that human beings are never one-faceted. Like millions of South Africans, I am the product of histories that have travelled, encountered one another, and mixed. The Basotho pioneer aboard Erinpura did not have to stop being Basotho to stand beside the Jewish soldier. The Jewish soldier did not have to surrender his Jewishness to serve beside an African. They carried their identities with them while serving a common cause. This intertwined history did not disappear beneath the Mediterranean in 1943. It reappeared in another defining chapter of our history: the struggle against apartheid. Ruth First, born to Jewish immigrant parents, became a journalist, intellectual, and anti-apartheid activist, and was eventually assassinated by the apartheid state with a parcel bomb in Mozambique in 1982. Joe Slovo became a central figure in the South African Communist Party and Umkhonto we Sizwe before serving in Nelson Mandela's government. Denis



Goldberg stood alongside Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, and others in the Rivonia Trial and spent more than two decades imprisoned by the apartheid state. Helen Suzman and the women of the Black Sash fought apartheid in and outside Parliament, challenging discriminatory laws, and visited political prisoners, including Mandela. There is a powerful historical thread here. Southern African and Jewish soldiers fought Nazi Germany. Decades later, Jewish South Africans stood alongside black South Africans fighting apartheid. Today, another generation inherits a democratic country that still requires us to work together against poverty, unemployment, inequality, racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and the many other forces capable of dividing us. That is why this history matters now. We live at a moment when the world constantly seems to demand that we choose camps. Politics can make disagreement feel like permission for hatred. Social media reduces complicated human beings to labels. Yet our

history tells a richer story. We don't need identical politics to respect one another's heritage, nor identical histories to recognise one another's suffering. Respecting Jewish history does not diminish African history. Celebrating Sotho heritage does not threaten Zulu, Venda, or Tsonga heritage. Remembering one community should never require forgetting another. Heritage Month should therefore be more than a festival of difference. It should teach us how to live with difference. Unity in diversity doesn't mean becoming culturally identical. It means being secure enough in who we are to respect what made somebody else who they are. The South Africa we should be building isn't one in which our cultures disappear into one another, but one in which they can stand proudly beside one another. That is why the SS Mendi and SS Erinpura belong in the same national conversation. Mendi reminds us of black South Africans whose World War I sacrifice must never be forgotten. Erinpura expands that memory by showing us Southern Africans and Jews from British Mandatory Palestine, now Israel, serving together against Nazi Germany. One is already embedded in South African remembrance. The other deserves to be. More than eight decades after Erinpura disappeared, the message beneath those Mediterranean waters remains remarkably relevant. We are different people carrying different histories, but we are beneath the same sea. This Heritage Month, South Africa should remember that.

• Kamohelo Chauke is a community and student activist at the University of the Witwatersrand.

A first-time visitor's view of Israel

PERSONAL STORY

STEPHEN CRANSTON



I had put a visit to the holy land at the top of my bucket list when I'd left full-time employment to start writing books three years ago. I had every intention of going for Christmas 2023 until, let's say, events got in the way. When I visited just after Easter this year, it was hardly in ideal conditions. The tour operator told us it was touch and go, as Iran was bombing Israel, and one of its missiles had come close to landing on the Al-Aqsa Mosque itself. The possibility of a repeat attack was worrying as the tour of the Jerusalem Old City was the highlight of the trip. I was reminded of my father's stories when he worked in firefighting during the London Blitz and the 1944 Second Blitz, when London was hit by Doodle Bugs, a kind of primitive drone, and missiles. There was something of that stiff upper lip spirit in the Israelis – their generally noisy nature notwithstanding.

It was reassuring, as we travelled through Israel, to see the sophisticated civil defence. There were air-raid shelters at the hotel and, we were told, in every apartment block in Jerusalem and Greater Tel Aviv, where the majority of Israelis live. Gaza, by contrast, has thousands of miles of tunnels, but apparently no room for women and children to shelter in during air raids. A few things struck me immediately on landing at Ben-Gurion Airport. We were told to stick together as a group. I was concerned that the Israeli authorities might dig out some of my criticisms of the current government. I'd been quite vocal when the demonstrations around Bibi's Supreme Court reforms were taking place. But the man at passport control wasn't intimidating at all. He was quite sloppy; his shirt wasn't even tucked in. I soon found out that this is quite normal in Israel. I felt very overdressed when I put on a blazer for Shabbat dinner. When we went to collect our bags there was a snack

but there were no signs in English or Latin script. It was all in Hebrew. I assume the black stuff in the bottle was some kind of cola, and our South African-Australian tour guide ordered it for me in fluent Hebrew. It is just as well I am a fan of the crime drama series *Fauda*, as it had already cleared up some of my misperceptions. I'd thought that the Hebrew language, like Irish Gaelic, might be a gimmick for tourists and that the lingua franca was some kind of Brooklynesse English. This wasn't the case at all. As a South African tour group, all the conversations with the tour guides were in English – though, as it happened, I was the only native English speaker – and only white male – in the party. But the guides would speak Hebrew or Arabic among themselves.

I knew from *Fauda* that Jewish and Arab Israelis are often indistinguishable. I met a prominent Arab Israeli podcaster, who certainly contradicts the trite view that Israel is some kind of Jewish ethnostate. We were grateful for Israeli Arab shawarma shops in the Old City of Jerusalem and in Jaffa (Yafa), the most historic part of Tel Aviv. The hummus and baba ganoush in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem was very welcome at Shabbat lunchtime when, of course, Jewish-owned restaurants were closed. But even in the hotels – and we stayed in strictly kosher establishments – there was no sign of New York deli food. Israel is in the Eastern Mediterranean, not in the Baltic or the Lower East Side of New York, and the diet reflects that. Israelis eat more fruit and vegetables per head than practically any other people in the world. There is very little obesity, certainly compared with North America and Western Europe. Israel is very much not part of the West in terms of demography. Even among secular Israelis working in the tech sector, it is quite common to have four children.

The birth rate is even higher among the Haredi ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arabs. This presents its own set of problems; there are people much better equipped to discuss this than I am. But since the 7 October war, it was inevitable that Haredis could no longer dodge the draft into the Israel Defense Forces, unless they were bona fide religious scholars. We had the chance to go into the West Bank without our Israeli guide. It's clearly marked that Israeli citizens aren't welcome in the main population centres of the West Bank. It's recommended, though an unwritten rule, that "visibly Jewish" people don't attempt it either, especially not to visit the capital, Ramallah. Jews who took the wrong turning and accidentally ended up in Ramallah were lynched not so long ago. Conditions in the West Bank are nothing remarkable for anyone who has visited South African townships; they are substantially better than they were in Bantustans such as the Transkei and Bophuthatswana, both of which I visited often as a young journalist. A Palestinian guide took us into a "camp" that wasn't under canvas and was substantially more comfortable than Alexandra township in Joburg. The Palestinian Authority is deeply unpopular and apparently incompetent, comparable perhaps to the Transkei under the Matanzimas. There could be a breakthrough if it had leadership half as strong as the better homeland leaders such as Major General Bantu Holomisa, after he took over from the Matanzimas through a South African-organised coup, and the shrewd Lucas Mangope in Bophuthatswana. But as it stands, all the polls show that Hamas would win by a landslide in a free and fair election in the West Bank. The election runoff in Israel is in full swing now, but not a big topic when I was there. People were more worried about the next Iranian missile that might fall on their heads. If one had landed on our minibus that would have been tickets.

But I could that see Israel is a vibrant democracy – two Israelis, three different opinions, as they say. The current prime minister is deeply unpopular, especially in Tel Aviv. Even more so possibly now that there's been a stalemate in the US-Iran War. • Stephen Cranston is a former associate editor of the Financial Mail and is writing a book on the history of the Investec Group.



Duvenage says active citizens can force change

CLAUDIA GROSS

For Wayne Duvenage, the fight against corruption isn't separate from business. Rather, it is a condition for business to function.

The chief executive of the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) spoke at a United Jewish Campaign business breakfast in Cape Town on Wednesday, 9 September, tracing his journey from corporate executive to civil activist.

He used the e-toll campaign to demonstrate how organised citizens can use the law to force change.

OUTA began in 2012 as the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance, challenging Gauteng's electronic tolling system. The e-tolls were eventually switched off in 2024.

Before entering civil activism, Duvenage spent decades in the travel and tourism industry. He was chief executive of Avis South Africa for five years. His move into civil activism wasn't planned. "I certainly didn't have civil activism on my CV when I left Avis," he said. "It happened, and it happened for a reason."

He said the e-toll campaign changed his understanding of how citizens could influence public policy. The campaign began with research and engagement with government, rather than an immediate decision to go to court. Duvenage said the group spent more than a year trying to persuade government that the tolling model would fail.

He said the campaign wasn't opposed to user-pays principles; its objection was to what he regarded as a flawed model. "It was about the principle in the scheme. It was about doing what is in the best interest of society."

The campaign had to overcome public fears about the consequences of refusing to pay. Duvenage said motorists were warned that they could lose licences or face criminal consequences. OUTA responded by researching the law and explaining citizens' rights. Social media became an important part of that effort.

Duvenage said challenging government required both legal action and public communication. "Business

doesn't want to challenge government," he said. "They don't, still to this day."

He argued that this reluctance can weaken democratic accountability. But the courts, media, and constitutional protections give citizens important tools for challenging government decisions.

The e-toll campaign eventually forced OUTA to develop a broader model for civil action. Duvenage said the organisation didn't want to simply expose problems and move on. It wanted to maintain pressure until institutions responded.

OUTA also changed how it funded its work. Instead of relying mainly on once-off donations, it sought regular monthly contributions. Duvenage said this allowed the organisation to build a litigation fund and employ specialist staff. He said OUTA now works across corruption, maladministration, public procurement, energy, transport, higher education, and government oversight.

One of the examples discussed at the breakfast was the proposed Karpowership deal. OUTA challenged plans to procure electricity from floating gas-powered ships.

Duvenage said the proposed contracts would have committed South Africa to long-term costs.

OUTA used the courts and environmental requirements to delay the project. The organisation ultimately succeeded in challenging the electricity generation licences for the three Karpowership projects.

The energy debate remains relevant to OUTA's work. Eskom reported a R30.35 billion profit for the 2026 financial year, despite a decline in electricity sales. Duvenage has argued that Eskom cannot rely indefinitely on higher prices while demand falls. The power utility needs to find new ways to increase sales and reduce electricity prices.

He has also continued to challenge governance failures in public institutions. In June, OUTA called for a forensic investigation into the Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority after its chief executive was suspended.

At the breakfast, Duvenage linked these cases to a broader argument about accountability. He said institutions need effective oversight, consequences for wrongdoing, and protection for people who expose misconduct.

Whistleblowers, he said, are an important source of information for OUTA, which receives information anonymously and helps people understand how to

provide evidence without unnecessarily exposing themselves.

The discussion turned to South Africa's political future. With local government elections approaching, Duvenage urged citizens to vote and remain engaged between elections. "Active citizenry works every single day," he said.

He argued that businesses cannot isolate themselves from the country's political and institutional health. Companies might be focused on survival, but corruption ultimately affects the environment in which they operate. "If we don't defend the democracy against this corruption, then there is no country to do business in."

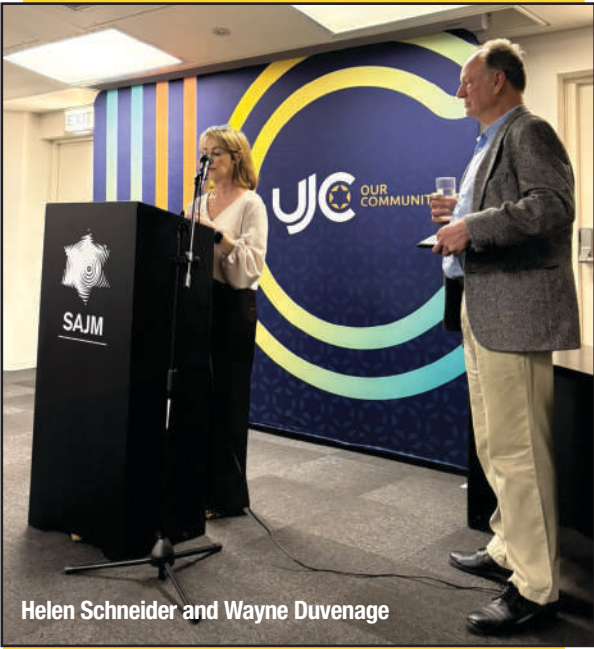
Duvenage was critical of the African National Congress's record in government and predicted major political change by 2029. He also questioned whether the Democratic Alliance could secure a national majority without broadening its appeal.

His comments on party politics formed part of a wider point about participation. He said citizens should focus on identifying people and organisations capable of improving governance, rather than simply expressing frustration.

He also rejected the idea that South Africa's problems are beyond repair. He pointed to the country's natural resources, tourism potential, and existing institutions as reasons for optimism. "I'm excited about South Africa," he said. "We have ama zing potential."

For Duvenage, the lesson from more than a decade of civil activism is that change requires persistence. He said citizens don't need to join a political party or become full-time activists to play a role. They can ask questions, support credible organisations, vote, provide information, or challenge decisions through lawful channels.

The United Jewish Campaign's message at the breakfast was similar. Its executive director, Helen Schneider, said the Jewish community also depends on people who participate, give, volunteer, and choose to be involved.



"We wanted to stay the course, be resilient. Once the issue has been exposed, you need to keep the spotlight on." He described this approach as "narrative economics", which he defined as the power of owning the story. Public understanding could create pressure that continues after a news cycle has ended and headlines have been forgotten.



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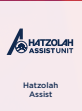
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New rabbi to take Great Park up the escalator

LEE TANKLE

What was meant to be a few months in South Africa turned into three years, a marriage, and a connection to the country that Rabbi Yisroel Binstock never quite left behind.

Almost two decades later, he has returned to Johannesburg with his wife, Leanne, and their family to begin a new chapter at Great Park Shul. He hopes to honour its rich history while building a vibrant community for the next generation.

Born in Israel and raised in London, Binstock first came to South Africa in 2007, never expecting it to become such an important part of his life. Though he later returned to the United Kingdom (UK), where his rabbinic career took him from youth leadership to congregations in London and Manchester, regular visits to Johannesburg kept his connection to the South African Jewish community alive.

Binstock and Johannesburg-born Leanne separately spent several years living in each other’s home countries before meeting in Johannesburg in 2010 after the Icelandic volcanic eruption disrupted flights. They married later that year and moved to Israel, where Binstock completed his *semicha* (rabbinic ordination). They later went to the UK. Throughout, the family maintained close ties to South Africa through Leanne’s family and Binstock’s relationships with the local rabbinic community.

So, when the call came that Great Park Shul was looking for a new rabbi and would love for the Binstocks to become the leaders of the congregation, it was a no-brainer for the family.

“We knew the people and we knew the place. Leanne and I had often considered moving back. We were very settled in the UK, and it was a lovely community, but we always felt that if the right opportunity came up in South Africa, we would consider it. We have family here and we’ve always been impressed by the Jewish infrastructure and the sense that there isn’t only an active, but a growing Jewish community,” he said.

“It may not necessarily be growing in terms of numbers, but that’s what it has felt like coming back year after year for the past decade. It doesn’t feel like a community that’s standing still. There’s always some kind of new life within the Jewish community, whether it’s a new shul, kosher restaurant, shop, programme, activity, or school. It has always felt like a growing place to us, so when this opportunity came up, it was something we were really excited about.”

However, this new chapter is also daunting because of the history of the community. The Great Park Shul is a continuation of one of the oldest shuls and most prominent in Johannesburg, the Wolmarans Street Synagogue.

“I know it’s not in the same place, but to be part of a community that has such history and heritage, but is also looking to make sure that it’s progressing into the future – into something that can be a symbol not only of what was but very much the present – is a challenge. It is also very exciting [and] speaks to Leanne and I because it very much is what the Jewish journey is all about. We take what is old, we know what we’ve inherited as our tradition, and we always try and find ways of making sure that it’s alive, meaningful, and relevant to today’s



Rabbi Yisroel and Leanne Binstock and their family

generation,” he said.

Binstock explained that since his arrival two weeks ago, he has felt nothing but warmth from the Great Park congregation and wants to get to know its members more.

“There are so many warm and friendly people. South Africans are lovely people. Everyone has gone out of their way to make us feel so welcome. There are a lot of practical things when you’re moving countries. These are always going to be challenging, but people have offered to help in every way imaginable. For Leanne, Johannesburg was home. For me, I lived here for three years. It really helps when people go out of their way to make this place feel like home again,” he said.

The goal is to grow with the community and foster a love of Judaism.

“I would love a congregation who are excited about being



There are so many warm and friendly people. South Africans are lovely people. Everyone has gone out of their way to make us feel so welcome.

together, excited about growing together as a community, who care for each other, who care for the Torah, and who are proud Jews. I’m not excited by the idea of radical change, but slow, steady growth,” Binstock said.

“My vision of an ideal Jewish community is an escalator. But the idea of an escalator is that it’s moving slowly and you have lots of people on different steps, but they’re all going upwards together. Where anyone on any level can feel like you’re part of something bigger, which enables you to grow together, and that we might deal with you,” he said.

What dogs do for the holidays

LEE TANKLE

Booking the flights, packing the bags, and planning the itinerary may be the easy part of going on holiday. For pet owners, there’s another important question to answer before they can leave: who’s going to look after the furry members of the family?

From calling on family and friends to hiring pet sitters or booking kennels and catteries, owners have plenty of options. Choosing one usually depends on more than convenience or cost; it’s about making sure their pets are safe, comfortable, and well cared for while they’re away.

Dog sitter Michelle Levy says people opt for a house sitter when they prefer to have their pet remain in their own environment and keep their routine.

“When you send a dog away, some places put them in a cage or around other animals, which can be very stressful,” she says. “At home, they’re in their own environment, they know their surroundings, and they’re more comfortable, which is especially important when their owners are already going away.

“That’s why I do a meet-and-greet beforehand and spend about an hour playing with the animal so they can get to know me while their owner is there. I also try to keep their routine the same. If they sleep on the bed, they sleep on the bed with me; if they sleep under the blankets, they can sleep under the blankets. They get the same love, care, and attention they’re used to from their owners,” she says.



Similarly, Johannesburg grandmother Denise Hotz sends her dogs to Tanya Kalvari Rubin at her home in Lyndhurst, where Rubin takes care of two small to medium dogs at a time.

“My two dogs are always happy when I fetch them. I prefer my dogs to stay in a home environment rather than a kennel where they cannot get the affection they’re used to in a home environment. It’s better to leave your dogs in a loving home and lock up and leave your house,” says Hotz.

Kirsty Baker-Pinkus says she, too, has never considered sending her four dogs to a kennel.

“With a house sitter, they get to stay at home, sleep in their usual spots, follow their normal routine, and have all the things around them that they’re used to. They’re still in their own space, which I think makes a huge difference and keeps the whole experience much less stressful for them. There are also the added benefits of having someone at the house, like being there to let the helper in, keep an eye on things, and the house having presence,” she says.

Cape Town animal lover Janet Gelgor has been using the same house sitter for her eight pets for 13 years and says she will never send her cat and three rescue dogs to a cattery or a kennel.



“For me, choosing a pet sitter over a kennel is about peace of mind, knowing they’re in their familiar environment. So they get one-on-one attention at home and get taken for regular walks which they’re used to,” she says.

Talia Levy started hosting a few dogs at her house a couple of years ago when people she knew went away.

She has continued to do so. “The dogs live in my home and stay on my bed, as their owners believe that they would feel isolated in a kennel environment. Some of the dogs are timid, so socialising in a kennel setting isn’t always ideal for them,” she says.

Levy loves looking after dogs and even sends her husband and daughter away so that she can accommodate more of them.

“They make me feel like a superstar and follow me everywhere. I chased my husband and my daughter away between Christmas and New Year, which is my busy time. This means that they could go away, and I could have more space on my bed for more dogs.”

However, some people prefer to send their pets to a kennel. When Michelle Alpert goes on holiday, she sends her golden retriever to one in Kempton Park.

“I like it because they let the dogs run outside most of the day. Sending him somewhere allows him to socialise with other dogs, run around outside, and have company. If someone stays at my house but goes out during the day, he’s still going to be left alone for periods of time,” she says.

Similarly, teacher Shira Symons sends her dogs to the Woodrock Pet Hotel, north of Johannesburg, saying it’s like sending them to camp.

“I chose the Woodrock Pet Hotel because there’s very good care there; they’re very knowledgeable about dogs and what they require and their needs. The other reason is because they socialise the dogs. They keep small dogs together and big dogs together, so the dogs actually play with each other all day. And so we call it Habonim Machaneh. He goes to camp, you know what I mean? When we go on holiday, he goes on holiday,” she says.



Knowing what support exists before a crisis hits

CLAUDIA GROSS

When a family is confronted with a serious illness or an end-of-life diagnosis, there is often a scramble to work out what help is available. A recent webinar organised by wellness network JEWELL aimed to change that by bringing together professionals working across palliative medicine, hospice care, aged care, bereavement counselling, and spiritual support. The message was that families shouldn't wait for a crisis to start asking questions about care.



JEWELL is the Jewish wellness space in Cape Town. Its work focuses not only on responding to people in crisis, but also on identifying community needs, connecting people with existing resources, and strengthening collaboration.

"Serious illness, ageing, dying, grief, and loss are things that will touch every one of us in some way," JEWELL founder Natalie Barnett said. "And yet very often, we begin thinking about the care and support available only when we suddenly need it."

The webinar sought to give the community a clearer picture of what support exists and how different forms of care can work together. A key starting point was dispelling the idea that palliative care means someone is about to die.

Shelly Korn of Sunset Care said there was significant confusion about palliative care, even among clinicians. Palliative care can be provided alongside treatment for serious illnesses. It can help with symptoms such as pain, poor sleep, low energy, appetite loss, and anxiety. It also addresses emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Support extends to family members and others caring for the patient. "It can be seen as a team sport," Korn said.

This distinction matters because palliative care isn't limited to the final stages of an illness. Dr Andrea Mendelsohn, a palliative care doctor at Groote Schuur Hospital, said most patients seen by her team return home.

"Twenty percent of what we do is probably people who have end-of-life care in hospital," she said. "But the 80%, so the majority of the patients we see, are going to go home and live with this condition, and our goal is to help them keep living."

For families, knowing this could change when they seek support. Palliative care doesn't necessarily mean that curative treatment has ended.

The webinar also highlighted the importance of knowing what services are available within the Jewish community.

Highlands House social worker Samantha Klynsmith said the facility is increasingly caring for frailer members of the Jewish community, including people with dementia and multiple health conditions. Its multidisciplinary team considers residents' medical, social, and spiritual needs. It also works with families to establish what matters to each person.

This can become particularly important when relatives live elsewhere. Klynsmith said staff sometimes need to become closely acquainted with residents to understand their wishes and what provides them with comfort.

That is why she urged people to discuss their wishes before they are unable to communicate them. "Death is still quite a taboo subject, even with the aged," she said. "We don't always want to speak to it, but we really owe it to ourselves to have those tough conversations."

An advance directive can help record a person's wishes for future medical care. Having these

discussions in advance can also reduce uncertainty for family members. The need for support extends beyond physical care.

Sarit Swisa, a clinical psychologist who coordinates Nechama's bereavement counselling services, said emotional loss can begin before someone dies.

Someone with a serious illness may already be experiencing a sense of loss as their circumstances change.

Nechama provides counselling within the Jewish community, although the service isn't religious. Its counsellors make space for clients' feelings, beliefs, and experiences. "It's actually the hard work of just being present for people in some really challenging periods of life," Swisa said.

The panel also highlighted that serious illness affects not only older people. Rod Bloom became involved in paediatric palliative care after his 14-year-old son, Rowan, died from Ewing sarcoma. Bloom said he hadn't understood what palliative care meant when his son had reached that stage of treatment.

His family was eventually able to arrange a nurse and hospital bed so Rowan could spend his final days at home. His experience led him to establish the Rowan Bloom Foundation, which is working towards creating a centre for children requiring palliative care.

Bloom said paediatric care presents particular challenges because the entire family is affected. "The whole family needs to be held," he said. "Parents are involved, as are siblings. There's a whole lot of dynamics involved when it comes to a dying child."

Rafaela Joffe Peerutin, chair of the Soul Carers Network, added another layer to the picture. Soul Carers provides support around the spiritual and existential aspects of dying. This can include questions about meaning, suffering, faith, fear, and what a person wants at the end of life.

The aim isn't to replace medical care, but to ensure that the person's emotional and spiritual needs are recognised. "When we talk about total pain, we don't just talk about the physical pain," Joffe Peerutin said. "We also talk about spiritual pain."

The webinar's central message was therefore less about defining palliative care than about encouraging people to become familiar with their options before they urgently need them.

For the Cape Town Jewish community, a range of services already exists across medical, emotional, practical, and spiritual care. The challenge is knowing where to turn and having the conversations early enough. As Barnett said, the aim was to begin that conversation "before the crisis".

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Safe for Jews app helps travellers navigate antisemitism

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

French Jewish tourists leaving a Barcelona synagogue chased by an angry mob, an Australian Jewish couple threatened with death at a French supermarket, countless Israelis targeted around the world. In the face of heightened risks to Israeli and Jewish tourists, an Israeli entrepreneur is taking action.

The founder of the web platform Safe for Jews, Shay Yaish, a keen traveller with a background in cybersecurity, always wanted his own startup. But he was unsure what its focus would be. It was when planning a trip with his wife that inspiration struck.

“Using Google, we started looking for places to visit and included antisemitism in our search,” he says. “I realised that this was the idea I should be working on, and that became Safe for Jews. So, it came from this real pain I felt in possibly facing antisemitism when travelling.”

Now a year old, Safe for Jews uses several factors to determine how safe a destination is for Israelis and other Jews. Using AI tools and Yaish’s personal oversight, the platform assesses the severity of warnings and incidents and applies different levels of importance to each one.

Carrying the most weight are the Israeli government trip advisories, which give country-specific warnings to Israeli travellers. The second consideration is Israeli and global news reports, which are tagged according to whether they’re related to Jews specifically, or Israel in general. The last one is community feedback, gained when Israelis and other Jews report back on any negative experiences abroad around their religion or nationality. “I even get emails from Christians saying that they love and welcome Jews to their

countries as well, so it’s been enlightening for me,” Yaish says.

While he acknowledges the limitations of his platform, Yaish says he’s constantly working to enhance the information it provides. “I’m trying to give as clear a picture for people as possible, but it’s a complex project,” he says, “and there are a lot of changes happening constantly around the world.”

On the platform, destinations are classified under four categories, “Safe”, “Caution”, “Warning”, or “Dangerous”. Even when a place is considered safe, travellers are advised to be aware and check news reports before they travel, Yaish says. If there have been antisemitic incidents in a particular country, caution is advised. “When we start to see increased trends, multiple antisemitic incidents against Jews or Israelis in a short period of time, we tag it as ‘Warning,’” Yaish explains. “Dangerous” destinations are those to which the Israeli government does not allow travel.

While Jews around the world use the platform, it is more targeted to Israelis, Yaish admits. One of his plans is to offer separate classifications for diaspora-based Jews and Israelis, as they face different threat levels.

The distinction plays a role in attitudes to travel to South Africa, where a degree of trepidation is especially evident among Israelis. Yaish says Safe for Jews’ “Warning” classification for South Africa is largely due to the Israeli government advising against non-essential travel to the country. This is obviously specific to Israeli travellers, he clarifies, saying, “When you’re flying with an Israeli passport, it’s more dangerous for you.”

Safe for Jews reports that the greater risk is due to legal and diplomatic concerns. “Israel recalled its ambassador in 2023 and its chargé d’affaires was expelled in January 2026, leaving limited consular support,” it notes on its South African listing. It also mentions that Pretoria has said

South African citizens who have served in the Israel Defense Forces face arrest on return and that the Jewish Agency’s chairperson cancelled a 2025 visit.

The platform does, however, acknowledge that recorded antisemitism in South Africa is low. It cites May 2026 statistics from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) that reflect the same numbers as 2025 and a lower number of incidents than those observed in 2023 and 2024. It does, however, reference an uptick in incidents in Gauteng in the second quarter of this year.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD, says the Board receives regular inquiries from Jewish people around the world considering visiting the country. “Frequently they express their concerns about the perception of antisemitism in our country,” she says.

“We explain the reality of the situation on the ground in South Africa: that the hostility displayed by the African National Congress government in the past few years doesn’t translate to the situation on the ground. Israelis visiting often tell me of strangers approaching them in shops with a warm ‘Shalom’. We do hear anecdotes from time to time of someone saying ‘Free Palestine’ or something of that nature, but this is the exception.”

Liron Sanders, chief executive of CSO, says the organisation also regularly receives safety queries from international travellers to South Africa. “Depending on the current environment, the advice we give is predominantly focused on awareness, being conscious of your surroundings, and knowing how to contact us in an emergency. If there is a specific trend, though, we will give advice that caters specifically to that.

“Our advice to travellers is generally also focused on alertness and awareness of the environment you’re in. However, ahead of specific holiday periods we give more tangible advice about more specific risks. For example, during last year’s holiday period there was a risk of protests and baiting of community members, so we gave advice about disengagement and deescalation.”

South Africa remains relatively safe, say the experts. “Thankfully we aren’t seeing the same violent aggression that tourists abroad encounter,” says Kahn. “It is horrifying to see some of the appalling targeting of Jews and Israelis globally. It gives us great pride that Jewish people feel comfortable to wear *kippot* and Magen David necklaces in our country.”

Ultimately, the larger vision of Safe for Jews is helping Jewish people to travel safely, says Yaish. “It’s about helping them to find communities, welcoming hotels and businesses, and kosher restaurants so that they can feel safe to visit and not live in fear.”



Holocaust education criticised for downplaying antisemitism

LEE TANKLE

“Never Again” has become one of the most recognisable phrases associated with Holocaust education. But what does it mean when antisemitism continues to evolve?

This is what Dr Shay Pilnik, founding director of the Emil A and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at New York’s Yeshiva University, explored at Limmud Johannesburg recently. He challenged some of the fundamental assumptions behind how the Holocaust is taught and whether current approaches are doing enough to protect Jewish communities today, particularly in the United States.

Pilnik, the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, explained that Holocaust education is an American invention from the 1960s.

“It started in America, although there were grassroots efforts by individual Holocaust survivors in many countries who began going into schools and sharing their experiences. In America, this started as early as the 1960s,” he said.

“The first two decades after the Holocaust have often been described as decades of silence.

Most Holocaust survivors were busy recovering from the war and rebuilding their lives. The stereotypical experience of my grandparents in Israel was that nobody wanted to talk to them about it, nobody wanted to listen, and nobody really bothered.”

The first two decades after the Holocaust have often been described as decades of silence.

Pilnik said the word “Holocaust” itself is an Anglo-American term that first gained currency in the English-speaking world. In Russia, for instance, there was no real reference to the Holocaust as a distinct phenomenon, he said. The term “Holocaust” wasn’t widely used in the Soviet Union until *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the 1980s, with the Nazi genocide largely viewed as part of the broader Soviet experience of World War II.

In Hebrew, *Shoah* is used instead, meaning a natural

disaster, while “Holocaust” comes from the Greek *holokaustos*, referring to a sacrifice consumed by fire. Pilnik noted that this terminology carries theological implications that don’t accurately describe the Holocaust, which was a crime committed by human beings. In America, however, the term “Holocaust” gained traction as early as 1942, when a group of rabbis used it in a pamphlet.

However, as Holocaust education started to grow, there were many critics. The main critiques focus on the fact that Holocaust education is generalised and doesn’t necessarily address the main reason that the Holocaust happened, antisemitism.

“One critic, [academic] Ruth Wisse, explained that Holocaust education in America has taken the very specific experience of the Jewish people and turned it into an experience of humanity. And she, in a way, foreshadowed that in the future, this experience of Nazi versus Jew, villain versus victim, this paradigm in Holocaust education will turn around like a boomerang on the Jewish people,” he said.

“In another critique, [scholars] Casey Babb and Naya Lekht explain that in Holocaust

education there is no link whatsoever between, for example, violence against Chassidim on the streets of Brooklyn today with what happened in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, Pilnik quoted

committing mass murder.” Then, any action short of murdering six million Jews doesn’t acknowledge the danger of antisemitism, she says.

Pilnik said, “If we teach that the Holocaust happened because people weren’t nice enough, that they failed to appreciate that humans are all the same, for instance, or to build a just society, we create this self-congratulatory space where antisemitism grows. So, first of all, the same idea: fighting on behalf of the dead Jews and leaving aside the living ones,” he said. “Very little of Holocaust deprecation concerns living ones because, let’s say, when you go to the Illinois Holocaust Museum, they do have some general exhibits about genocide. But to be fair, when you go to the exhibit, it’s a very

serious exhibit. And yes, it tells the story of the Jewish people in Europe in a way not much different from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.”



author Dara Horn as saying that “using the Holocaust as a morality play is exactly its appeal. It flatters everyone. We can all congratulate ourselves for not

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Koffler conquers the Deadly Dozen

CLAUDIA GROSS

At 55, Paul Koffler never expected to represent South Africa on a world sporting stage. Yet this month, he was in London wearing the green and gold, competing at the inaugural Deadly Dozen World Championships.

Koffler finished fifth at the championships, in which more than 60 countries were represented, with about 190 South African athletes travelling to Crystal Palace.

The Deadly Dozen is a hybrid fitness race that combines running with functional strength exercises. In the standard track race, athletes complete 12 400m runs and 12 exercise stations, known as Labours. The Labours use bodyweight movements, kettlebells, dumbbells, and weight plates.

For Koffler, his achievement was the culmination of a transformation that began with a simple decision to give his gym routine purpose.

He had been going to the gym for years but was looking for a clearer goal when a friend sent him a social media post about Deadly Dozen last year.

“We basically go to gym, and we have for a number of years,” he said. “But going to gym, you’re like almost a seahorse in the ocean, going where the current takes you. These hybrid sports came about to actually give the gym-goer some kind of direction and some kind of goal.”

He began training and entered his first Deadly Dozen event as part of a relay team. “I went there and I nearly died. But I loved it.”

Koffler soon decided to attempt the event as a pair. He spoke to his neighbour Lance Keir about finding a partner. “I said, ‘Lance, I think the next event that they have, I’ll find somebody in my gym,’” Koffler recalled. “He phoned me half an hour later and said, ‘Paul, you’ve got a partner.’” Keir, a 39-year-old athlete who practises jiu jitsu and CrossFit and competes in Hyrox, offered to join him.

That partnership became an important part of Koffler’s journey. The pair entered competitions, improved their times, and eventually qualified for the World Championships. In London, they cut four minutes and 40 seconds from their previous time, an improvement of more than 10%.

The competition also carried a personal significance for Koffler. He had never imagined that he would represent South Africa as an athlete.

“Even if I was younger and a reasonable athlete, there’s no chance I would have represented South Africa in anything,” he said. “To do it at this age is just mind-blowing. I’m humbled by it and highly appreciative.”

The South African team experience added another layer to the achievement. Athletes arrived the day before the event and were given South African shirts, socks, and other

team items.

“It was just a dream,” he said. “I’ve always believed in South Africa. I love South Africa, I love South African sports, and I love South African people.”



Paul Koffler and Lance Keir at the Deadly Dozen World Championships

The support extended well beyond the competition venue. Koffler said his family, employees, friends, and members of the Jewish community supported him throughout his preparation.

“The way my employees galvanised around me and supported me was spectacular,” he said. “We all went on this journey together.” His training became a theme within the business.

Staff meetings included discussions about personal transformation and improving different aspects of their lives.

He also saw changes at home. His eating patterns changed, as did the family’s approach to nutrition and exercise.

His two sons are sportsmen, and Koffler said his training gave him a different kind of credibility with them. He has run two 10km night races with his 13-year-old son, with the pair winning medals.

“You can tell your kids what to do, but if you don’t have credibility behind it, it doesn’t really mean much,” he said.

Koffler credits his wife, Caroline, with helping him through the uncertainty and pressure of training and competing. “She had to put up with me being nervous for an event, or just unsure of myself. Having her there to calm me down and speak about the bigger picture and the benefits of going down this road was incredibly important.”

His experience also connected him with other athletes and members of the community. He mentioned several South Africans who inspired him by continuing to train and compete later in life.

For Koffler, that has become one of the central lessons of the experience. “I think for me, mostly it was all the wasted years,” he said. “The years of having ability as a youngster, then throwing it all away by getting lazy and into bad habits.”

He now sees physical training as a way to pursue broader personal growth. “One of the main things is actually using the body as a portal for human growth as a whole. And also, to live the latter part of one’s life with dignity and energy.”

His competitive journey is not over. Koffler is currently ranked third in his age group and wants to reach number one. He has entered three upcoming races in South Africa, giving himself three opportunities to pursue the South African record in his age group. He is also considering competing next year in Hyrox, the sport that first introduced him to hybrid fitness racing.

For now, Koffler is reflecting on what it meant to stand on an international stage wearing South African colours.

He said the achievement wasn’t really about being on the world stage. It was about discovering what’s possible with effort and commitment. “Life’s not about being stagnant,” he said. “It’s not about what one thinks the convention is. We’ve got to be dynamic. We’ve got to move. We’ve got to keep on creating, no matter what age.”



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