

NAZA's real collateral damage is the truth

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



In the past few weeks, two Israeli-made shows have dominated the headlines. One is *Fauda*, which in its latest season is laying bare the atrocities and trauma of 7 October in as much excruciating pain as art imitating life allows.

Fauda has managed to succeed where Israel's public diplomacy has failed – and the results are evident as it

soars to the top of the Netflix rankings, especially in the Arab world.

The other production is the documentary movie *NAZA*. The title is an Israeli military acronym derived from *nezek agavi*, Hebrew for “collateral damage”, but most people will reach for another analogy. You know the one.

The movie, which is backed by the notoriously anti-Israel British publication *The Guardian*, relies on anonymous testimony from 24 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who claim to have served in the elite intelligence unit 8200. It claims that a planned strike that would result in 500 civilian deaths was approved.

Israel's war with Hamas is the most scrutinised conflict in the world, and if there ever was an incident where 500 civilians were killed, it would have dominated the front pages of most media outlets. The only strike in which the number 500 was mentioned was on 17 October 2023 when Hamas alleged that an Israeli airstrike had struck the Al-Ahli hospital, killing that many civilians. Faster than Hamas was miraculously able to count alleged civilian deaths, was the speed with which this made headlines around the world. When the facts were investigated, it was discovered that a Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket had fallen short and hit the parking lot, causing a small crater and sadly killing a handful of civilians. But the lie had gotten out, put its trousers on, and was gallivanting around the world – and the result was mass protests and attacks on several synagogues.

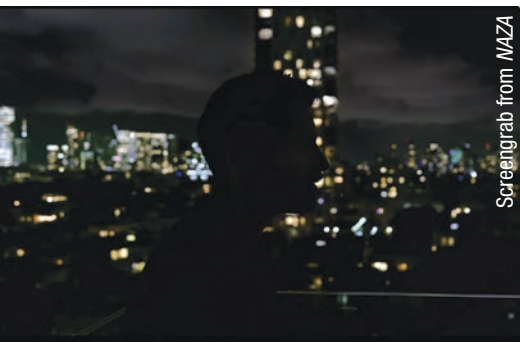
A similar thing is happening with *NAZA*. The headlines about its content have dominated media around the world, despite it not being interrogated for factual accuracy and everything else one hopes a subject matter of this importance should be subjected to.

The IDF has reacted strongly to what's been shared. It has refuted the claims that the army uses artificial intelligence to determine targets and that a strike killed 500 people.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called *NAZA* “pure propaganda, created by radicals who serve the narrative of murderous terrorists. It is yet another element of the anti-Israel campaign that began after 7 October, driven by the Red-Green coalition of the radical left and Islamist movements.”

The ministry took aim at the lack of verification, saying, “the ‘film’ claims that the IDF approved a planned strike despite anticipating 500 civilian deaths. This is false. It

never happened. Never. The IDF would never approve such an operational plan. But there is a reason – and a method – behind the dissemination of such an outrageous allegation. The method employed throughout this campaign, including in this ‘film’, is familiar: introduce a shocking falsehood, amplify it around the world, and allow it to shape headlines and public opinion. By the time the facts emerge and corrections follow, the damage to Israel's image has already been done. Again and again, false accusations against Israel receive immediate global attention, while their subsequent



Screengrab from NAZA

collapse receives only a fraction of the exposure and impact. This film follows precisely the same pattern.

“The same applies to another false accusation, that the IDF allows AI systems to make operational decisions independently of human judgement. This is simply false and fundamentally misrepresents how the IDF operates. Operational decisions are made within a defined human chain of command and are subject to human judgement and oversight. The IDF has developed extensive procedures intended to prevent and mitigate harm to non-combatants.”

Methods of warning to mitigate civilian casualties are conspicuously ignored in *NAZA*. Methods include roof knocking, dropping pamphlets announcing impending strikes, SMSs, phone calls in Arabic, and other methods that have been lauded by other army officials.

A soldier who claimed to have participated in the movie spoke to *Walla*, one of Israel's biggest news publications, and made serious allegations about how his testimony and casualty figures were obtained.

“I participated in this film, unfortunately, and they manipulated me so much,” he said. “Numbers of 400 and 500 collateral damage don't exist.” He claims that interviewees were financially incentivised to give

increasingly higher figures. “They offer you 10 shekels for every additional person you say: say 400, get 4 000; say 500, get 5 000. People start exaggerating. They see the money and cash in front of their eyes.”

The big question is why? Why did these two Israelis who claim to call Israel home, produce such a damaging movie? Plaudits from peers? In this instance, a 25-minute ovation at the Venice Film Festival, the same festival that gave similar accolades to Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favoured celluloid propagandist.

The filmmakers claim it is concern for Palestinian casualty recognition.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a different opinion. “The truth is the opposite of what the ‘film’ seeks to portray. And yes, in Israel's democracy, where freedom of expression is cherished, there are also radical Israelis who lie [and] distort facts, seeking political goals and personal gains. The film's co-director, Yuval Abraham, is no neutral investigative journalist – he is a long-time radical anti-Israeli activist committed to demonising and delegitimising Israel.

“As part of this method, the film's creators deliberately omit Hamas from their narrative, erasing the terrorist organisation whose actions are at the heart of this war. Hamas deliberately targets Israeli civilians, as it did on 7 October, while embedding itself within Gaza's civilian population and using civilians as human shields. Israel is fighting this bloodthirsty terrorist organisation while the IDF operates in accordance with international law and takes extensive measures to minimise civilian harm.”

The filmmakers lack the ability of a truly perspicacious reporter to examine their own motives. When questioned on Israel's Channel 12, Abraham simply could not verify any of the accusations, and when pushed about omitting the atrocities of 7 October and Hamas's role in the war, he testily responded with “go make your own movie”.

Israeli officials are debating what punitive measures they can take against the pair. The film has successfully united Israelis in anger. I would wager the hopes of the filmmakers to have their movie screened here would be met with a national temperature colder than the Arctic.

Perhaps they need to binge watch season 5 of *Fauda*

- Rolene Marks is a journalist and commentator on Middle East affairs, co-founder of Lay of the Land, and national spokesperson for the SAZE.

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Looking after it for the next generation

Torah Thought

“You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.”

Some might say that Patek Philippe's famous slogan is almost as impressive as the watches themselves. It is brilliant marketing because it sells much more than a timepiece. It sells the idea of legacy. Deep down, we know that so much of what we own in this world is temporary. Possessions come and go, fashions change, and even the things we treasure most will eventually belong to someone else. Yet we are drawn to the idea that something we value might outlive us.

On Simchat Torah, as we reach the final portion of the entire Torah, we read the famous words, “*Torah tziva lanu Moshe, morasha kehillat Yaakov*,” The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.”

The Torah is described as a *morasha*, a heritage.

There is something significant about that word. A gift becomes yours. You may use it, preserve it, change it, or even neglect it. But a heritage is different. A heritage connects generations. It comes to us from those who came before, is entrusted to us for a time, and carries with it a responsibility to pass it onwards.

That is perhaps why Simchat Torah is such a powerful celebration. We not only study Torah. We dance with it. We hold it close. We bring our children into the celebration. There is a beautiful custom for all the children to stand together under a for the Kol HaNe'arim aliya, allowing us to visualise the next generation gathered around the Torah.

The Torah has survived not simply because it has been carefully preserved in an Aron Kodesh, but because generation after generation has chosen to make it live.

Having recently begun a new chapter at Great Park Synagogue in Johannesburg, this idea feels particularly real to me. There is something very special about seeing a community with deep roots, filled with positive Jewish energy and with families of all ages who share a genuine desire to build for the future together.

That is the challenge and privilege facing every Jewish community. We do not merely inherit Judaism from our parents and grandparents. We are

Rabbi Yisroel Binstock
Great Park Synagogue



its custodians. We may not own the Torah in the way we own our possessions. We have something far more precious. We have the privilege of looking after it for the next generation.

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Mother brings fallen son’s story to SA

CLAUDIA GROSS

Before 7 October, Yakir Hexter had been about to begin his third year of architectural studies at Ariel University. Instead, he landed up putting on his army uniform and running to report for duty. He forgot his watch. He forgot his boots. He did not, however, forget the people he believed needed him.

He was killed in Gaza on 8 January 2024 and never got to complete his studies, begin his dream career as an architect, or follow any other dreams.

internationally with my exhibit and also in order to speak about my son, Yakir,” she said. “I remember thinking after he was killed that the world needs to hear. The world needs to learn about our soldiers and what kind of people they were.”

Yakir was killed shortly before his 27th birthday. He had served as a combat engineer in the 8219th Battalion of the Commando Special Forces Unit.

The eldest of three brothers, he was an athlete who won the Jerusalem Marathon in his age category at 18 and later ran a half-marathon barefoot. He was an artist,

simple, “There’s no way I’m leaving my brothers.” A week later, Yakir was killed alongside his close friend and study partner.

The wait for news was traumatic for Hexter. Israeli military policy is that families are informed of a soldier’s death in person. Yakir was killed during the day, but his family was informed only about 10 hours later.

“Every knock on the door, every car that went past my door was, ‘Is this it? Is this it?’” she said. More than two years later, grief remains a permanent reality. “People don’t understand that it doesn’t get better and it doesn’t go away,” she said. “This is something for life when you lose a child.”

Photography became a way for her to process what she was experiencing. “I couldn’t fathom the reality that was in front of me and I couldn’t register and make sense of it,” she said. “So, I took out my camera and took some pictures and it became a timeline and a storyline of that first year.”

Those photographs became part of *Yakir’s Light*. The exhibition also includes drawings and architectural projects from Yakir’s studies. His family discovered some of his sketches only after his death. Hexter’s photographs document the experience of losing a son, while Yakir’s work shows the life, creativity, and potential that were lost.

The exhibition wasn’t initially planned. Hexter began photographing her grief without intending to

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Chaya and Yakir Hexter

But now, three years later, his mother, Chaya Hexter, is bringing his story to South Africa through *Yakir’s Light*, an exhibition combining his architectural drawings and artwork with her photographs of grief.

The exhibition will form part of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) programme marking three years since the attacks of 7 October. It will run in Johannesburg from 5 to 9 October. Hexter will personally guide visitors through the work and speak at the SAZF’s communal commemoration on 7 October.

For Hexter, taking the exhibition outside Israel is about ensuring that Yakir is remembered as a person, not only as one of the soldiers killed during the war. “This is the first time I’ll be travelling abroad

a Talmud scholar who received rabbinical ordination, a bartender, and a gourmet chef.

Yakir raised money for disabled children through running and cycling. Much of his charitable work was done quietly, and Hexter continues to hear new stories about him from people who knew him. “He was very humble, but he was incredibly gifted and talented and accomplished,” she said. “He really managed to pack a lot into the short 26 years of his life.”

When the war began, Yakir was called up and served two tours in Gaza. When he had the opportunity to return to university instead of going back for another tour, he chose to return to his unit.

Hexter remembers telling him that he had done enough. His response was

Israel-bound flight diverted to Saudi Arabia after terror attack on board

TOMER ALMAGOR – JTA

A Flydubai flight from Dubai to Tel Aviv made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia after passengers reported that an altercation had broken out between two pilots.

Israeli officials are describing the incident as a terrorist attack and passengers say they intervened to restrain a man who had attacked one of the pilots.

The flight, carrying more than 100 Israeli passengers, was diverted while flying over Jordan and eventually landed at Tabuk Airport in northern Saudi Arabia, an Israeli official told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

An Israeli official briefed the media and was quoted by Israel’s Channel 12 as saying that one pilot stabbed the other and attempted to “do a 9/11” – either by hijacking the plane and flying it towards Israel or crashing it. The official said that a “dramatic disaster was prevented”.

According to passenger accounts on social media and reports by Israeli media, the co-pilot attacked the captain and attempted to take control of the aircraft. At least two people were injured in the incident, which lasted about an hour and a half.

“We are on the flight from Dubai. We took control of the flight. There was an attacker with a knife who stabbed one of the pilots,” passenger Itzhak Liber said in a Facebook video. “A few of us jumped in and pulled him out of the cockpit. Everything is okay now. The terrorist is neutralised. There is a pilot who is seriously injured.”

“It was tough. Everything is covered in blood,” Liber added.

Another passenger, appearing in a video posted to social media with blood visible on his face, said they were in the middle of a

hijacking and had restrained the attacker as the plane prepared to land. In another video, several passengers said they were protecting the pilot.

A third passenger told Israel’s Channel 12, “There were moments when we were sure this was the end.”

Saudi authorities said the two pilots were taken to a hospital after sustaining injuries, according to international media reports. Flydubai, which is owned by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has acknowledged that there was an “incident” that led to the diversion of the flight. It stressed that the plane had landed safely and that all passengers were safe. UAE officials had not commented on the incident as of publication.

Data from Flightradar24 showed the aircraft descending roughly 14 000 feet in less than 30 seconds during the incident. The plane subsequently diverted from its route and landed in Tabuk.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had held consultations and was monitoring developments. “Following concerns over an aviation incident, the prime minister held consultations on the matter and followed developments,” Netanyahu’s office said. “The incident is under control, and all measures are now being taken to return the Israeli passengers safely to Israel.”

Israel and Saudi Arabia do not have formal diplomatic relations, but the two countries maintain ties. This is not the first time a flight carrying Israeli passengers has landed in Saudi Arabia.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said in a post on X that there had been an attempt to “crash” the aircraft and “murder 180 Israelis”. He called for Israel to hold accountable the “state or terrorist organisation” responsible for the incident.

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Antizionist protesters’ appeal request gives ‘oxygen’ to hate

TALI FEINBERG

In May this year, Martin Jansen, the treasurer of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), claimed the Cape Union Mart case was “bankrupting” the antizionist organisation. He called on supporters to “mobilise and have a mass presence at that court and put pressure on the judges”.

But now, after the PSC lost the case, it has announced that it’s applying for leave to appeal.

The original case was heard in the Western Cape High Court in June, before a full bench. The court interdicted the PSC and its supporters from claiming that Cape Union Mart or its brands are associated with the State of Israel, fund “genocide” or the conflict in Gaza, or that Cape Union Mart’s executive chairperson, Philip Krawitz, funds the Israeli army or the conflict.

It also restrained claims that the retailer or Krawitz are “killing children” or “supporting genocide”, barred obstruction of customer access to stores, and required compliance with the Regulation of Gatherings Act. However, it allowed the PSC and its supporters to protest and boycott lawfully.

“There is no polite way to describe what the PSC is doing. It is asking a court to let it keep saying things that three High Court judges, unanimously, found to be false and defamatory,” says Joshua Schewitz, executive director of the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council.

The judgment, delivered unanimously on 4 September 2026, was “framed in unusually firm language”, says independent practising attorney David Polovin, who believes the court is unlikely to grant leave to appeal.

He says the PSC’s application lacks reasonable prospects of success because “the factual record of the posters, chants, and social media posts was largely common cause, and the court carefully limited the relief so that it does not prohibit peaceful protest or a consumer boycott”.

However, the interdicts ordered by the court are

suspended pending the leave application, which means the PSC could try to defame Krawitz and Cape Union Mart in the interim. The organisation says it will continue to protest lawfully.

The court will schedule a hearing to consider the leave to appeal.

The PSC stated that it is requesting leave to appeal because “aspects of the judgment and orders



raise important constitutional questions concerning freedom of expression, political speech, and peaceful protest”.

The PSC claims the court’s order is “too broad”, but Schewitz says “this is dishonest” because the order does not prohibit protest, boycotts, or criticism of Israel. “The court’s own judgment records that no such relief was sought. What the order prohibits is the repetition of specific claims found to be false, and the harassment of customers and staff. The PSC is not fighting for freedom of expression. It is fighting for the freedom to defame.”

Schewitz says the facts are not in dispute. “A full bench of the Western Cape High Court heard argument over three days, examined almost 900 pages of answering affidavits, and delivered a unanimous judgment. The court found that the admissible evidence establishes that Krawitz is not ‘funding a genocide’ or ‘murdering babies’. It found that Cape Union Mart is not doing so either.”

The court found the PSC’s words and symbols to be

“egregiously” defamatory.

“The PSC lost on every point,” says Schewitz. “It could not produce a single piece of admissible evidence to support the central allegations of its 19-month campaign.”

That campaign caused “real harm”, he emphasises. “Krawitz, his family, and approximately 3 000 Cape Union Mart employees across 270 stores were subjected to posters calling him a ‘genocide funder’, chants asking how many children he had killed, manipulated photographs depicting him with devil’s horns, swastika imagery superimposed on Israeli flags, and a poster accusing Jews of being ‘The synagogue of Satan’. Staff and customers were harassed and intimidated. The PSC’s own members admitted responsibility for this conduct. The court examined it and granted a final interdict.”

In a statement, Cape Union Mart said that the company and Krawitz had approached the court to address specific conduct that the court

found warranted relief, “and we stand by that judgment”.

Harassment and intimidation of customers and employees; breaching the Regulation of Gatherings Act; and false and defamatory claims, made without proof, linking Cape Union Mart and its chairperson to the conflict in Gaza and the military actions of Israel “are not lawful or peaceful protest”, said the statement.

Cape Union Mart’s legal adviser, Simone Sulcas, says it stands for the constitutional right to peaceful and lawful protest. However, “that does not include defamatory and harmful claims that are repeated during protests or posted online. Nor does it include harassment and intimidation. We welcome the High Court’s decision to confirm this principle – a principle we believe all law-abiding South Africans support – and we trust that the respondents will fully comply with the High Court judgment.”

Attorney Shimron Shapiro says that the PSC is entitled

to ask for leave to appeal, “but this was a unanimous decision of a three-judge full bench, and the court’s findings went beyond simply restricting political speech: it found specific allegations to be defamatory, and held that the PSC had failed to establish an adequate evidentiary basis for them”.

That presents “a significant, and I believe insurmountable, hurdle, as a court will only allow an appeal to be heard if there are reasonable prospects of success”, explains Shapiro.

“Publicity is the real prize” for the PSC, says Polovin. “An appeal will keep the media focused for months more. For an organisation that thrives on public attention, sustained exposure is oxygen.”

“The PSC is wasting the court’s time,” says Schewitz. “The original reason for its protests has been proven false in court. So why does it continue? Because Cape Union Mart is a Jewish business. What the PSC now wants is a green light from the courts to continue saying what was proven as false, and to intimidate people on the strength of those lies. We are confident that South Africa’s court system will not be duped by such thuggish conduct.”

The Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies executive director, Daniel Bloch, says, “South Africa is a constitutional democracy and the PSC is entitled to

The PSC lost on every point. It could not produce a single piece of admissible evidence to support the central allegations of its 19-month campaign.

apply for leave to appeal. We respect that process and do not believe the community should be unduly concerned.”

At the same time, “the appeal process cannot be used to disregard the existing court order or to

continue making statements that the court found to be defamatory”, says Bloch. “Our message to the community is to allow the legal process to take its course.”

South Africa’s courts have spoken clearly, says Schewitz. An application for leave to appeal “does not change the facts. It simply confirms that the PSC intends to waste further court time, rather than accept what three judges told it plainly: stop making claims you cannot prove.”

The pearl in Peninnah

PERSONAL STORY

Almost exactly a year ago, in these pages, I wrote about my marriage collapsing when I discovered how completely I had been deceived by my then husband. I don’t want to retell that story here but there’s something about it that I understand differently now.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read in the Haftarah the story of Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.

Hannah has no children. Peninnah does, and repeatedly provokes Hannah because she is childless. Hannah is devastated. She goes to the sanctuary at Shiloh and prays so intensely that Eli, the priest, at first thinks she is drunk. She asks G-d for a son and promises that if she is given one, she will dedicate him to G-d’s service. That child is Samuel, who later becomes one of Israel’s great prophets and anoints both Saul and David as kings.

Ever since I became aware of the story, I have not particularly liked Peninnah, which was slightly unfortunate as Peninnah is my Hebrew name.

Traditionally, Jewish girls are given their Hebrew names soon after they are born. For whatever reason, that did not happen with me. So I was given one when I had my Batmitzvah. I remember sitting in front of the rabbi who consulted a book with English names on one side and Hebrew names on the other. Paula became Peninnah.

Earlier this year, my sister was visiting from England and we arranged a Jewish naming ceremony for her two young daughters. I decided to take part too. I had always felt my Hebrew name had not been chosen with much meaning, and the story of Peninnah troubled me.

I started reading about other Hebrew names and came across a deeper Talmudic interpretation of Peninnah. The biblical story tells us she provoked Hannah because she was childless. But the Talmud

says she acted “for the sake of heaven”, trying to push Hannah towards prayer.

It does not make the cruelty disappear, but it did make me look at the story differently. It was when Hannah reached complete anguish that she cried out to G-d in the way she did.

There was another detail I could not get away from: my sister’s Hebrew name is Hannah.

Peninnah also means pearl.

A pearl starts with something small that gets inside an oyster and irritates it. The oyster slowly covers it, layer by layer, until a pearl forms.

I had started this process looking for a name to replace Peninnah. Instead, the more I read, the more I found myself returning to it.

Which brings me back to my personal journey. I had exposed myself completely to someone I loved. I trusted him. I believed the life we were building together was real. And then I discovered that so much of it was a lie.

For a long time, I stopped trusting my own judgement. If I could be so wrong about the person closest to me, what else was I wrong about? My entire sense of what was real seemed to disappear. And underneath all of it was deep shame.

I was ashamed that I had been taken in. Ashamed that I had not seen it. We all hear stories



about people being conned and wonder how they could be so naïve. And then I became one of those people.

Last year at Limmud, I told my story publicly for the first time. I didn’t know how people would look at me afterwards, but I just knew I could not carry the secret any longer. The weight of the shame was becoming unbearable.

Afterwards there was a long pause. Then people stood up and clapped. A queue formed. One woman hugged me, crying. We didn’t say a word.

The marriage had left me questioning my judgement, my memories, and sometimes even my understanding of what was real. Yet nobody at Limmud asked me to prove what had happened. Nobody suggested there must be another explanation I had somehow missed. They simply believed me. I had not realised until then how badly I needed that.

I think shame is like mould. It grows in dark, closed places. Mine had grown because I was terrified of letting anybody see it. When I finally let people in, it began to lose its hold on me. I thought telling people what happened would expose me. Instead, keeping it hidden was what had given the shame so much power.

Two years later, I am still making sense of everything that happened. I am not going to pretend every wound has disappeared, or that I

have neatly turned something terrible into something good.

I would never choose what happened to me.

At Pine Street Shul, I asked Rabbi Hadar to formally reaffirm the name Peninnah for me. When he did, it no longer felt like the name a rabbi had selected from a book years earlier. For the first time, the name felt like it belonged to me.

Perhaps that is why I want to share my story again. Not to say that suffering is good, or that every terrible thing happens in order to teach us something. I do not believe pain needs to be romanticised. But I have learnt that when we are at our lowest, we should not assume we have to survive it alone.

I am deeply grateful to be part of this community. People made room for me. They listened. They believed me. They helped me carry something I had been trying to carry alone.

If you too are carrying something that feels too shameful to say out loud, you do not have to tell an auditorium full of people. Tell one person you trust. Let somebody into the dark. The thing that gets inside an oyster and causes a pearl to form is still an irritant. It does not become good because of what eventually grows around it.

I cannot change what happened to me. But I can choose what I carry forward from it.

The name I once wanted to replace is now the name I have chosen to embrace.

Today, I proudly carry the name Peninnah.
• Paula Slier 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.

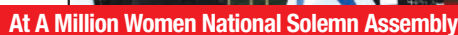


PAULA SLIER

CLAUDIA GROSS

Feder said the gathering included international

"I would love to see South Africa play more of a mediation role between the two people [Israelis and Palestinians]," Modise said. "It would be better for them to play a Mandela role, a reconciliation role. That's what we are known for. We are known to be a country that was



For SAFLI, the turnout was evidence that the government's position doesn't encompass the views of all South Africans. For Israel's diplomatic mission, it demonstrated that people-to-people ties remain possible despite the deep political differences between the two governments. The question now is whether those relationships can translate into broader engagement between South Africans and Israelis while diplomatic tensions remain.



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Jewish Report

The community we choose to be

The leafy garden suburb of Norwood in northeastern Johannesburg has never been predictable. It went from a working-class suburb to a bit more of an affluent area, but now it's a little frayed at the edges. And it's not even as big as a square kilometre.

For decades, Norwood has been home to people from many backgrounds – Jews, Muslims, Italians, West Africans, and others – who have shared its pavements, shops, schools, and restaurants. Today, its most visible communities are Jewish and Muslim and they live side by side without, for the most part, any problems.

Just a few weeks ago, we published an opinion piece celebrating exactly that. The writer described a place where a visibly Jewish person could buy kitke and chopped liver, walk past a Palestinian flag, and stop for a haircut at a Muslim-owned barber. Nothing dramatic happens. People greet one another, do business, and get on with their day. In the world we live in now, that ordinariness feels almost extraordinary.

Then came the video of Rodney Plett outside Chabad of Norwood in the final hours of Yom Kippur. What was clearly a road rage incident became a confrontation in which a Jewish man vomited out vile, racist, and wholly unacceptable language at the Muslim man who was in the other car. No provocation, headache, hunger, anger, or road rage dispute can make what he uttered acceptable.

It was painful to watch, not least of all because it was one of our own who was treating the other man with such contempt. It was even more horrific that it happened outside Chabad of Norwood on the holiest day of the Jewish year. At this time of year, we are meant to be confronting our failings, asking for forgiveness, and resolving to do better. It was hard to witness Plett on video saying these revolting things as he put on his *kippah* to go into shul.

The Jewish response was swift, broad, and unequivocal. Rabbi Mordechai Rodal of Chabad of Norwood was clear from the get-go: this behaviour was abhorrent and unacceptable. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies called Plett's actions offensive and unacceptable. Across the board, Jews refused to excuse, soften, or defend what we had heard. It makes clear that Plett spoke for himself, not for Judaism, not for Norwood, and not for us.

Yet, even that resounding rejection wasn't enough for those determined to hate us. For them, one Jew behaving disgracefully becomes evidence against all Jews – or, more pointedly, against all who support the Jewish State. It is the same blanket tarring that assumes every Jew who supports Israel supports Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. That couldn't be further from the truth. Supporting Israel's right to exist doesn't require support for every Israeli leader, policy, or utterance, any more than citizenship or communal belonging demands unthinking approval of everyone who claims to speak in your name.

We know how corrosive collective blame is because Jews encounter it constantly. One person's wrongdoing is made to stand for a people; one politician's extremism is attributed to every Zionist; every Jewish person is expected to answer for a government thousands of kilometres away. We should reject that lazy prejudice wherever it appears.

But rejecting collective guilt doesn't release us from collective responsibility for the values we choose to defend.

Rabbi Rodal understood that distinction. He didn't hide behind the fact that Plett was one congregant among many. He took responsibility as the rabbi of the shul outside which the incident occurred and responded quickly. He said there was no place for racism, prejudice, or demeaning language in the community, acknowledged the hurt caused, and made it clear that such behaviour couldn't be tolerated.

By the following morning, Rodal had spoken to Abdur Rahman Aziz, the man who recorded the encounter. He commended Aziz for the restraint with which he handled an intolerable situation and asked to meet him personally. That is what leadership looks like in an ugly moment: not taking blame for words you didn't utter, but taking responsibility for what happens in the community you lead. Instead of issuing a statement and retreating, he reached across the wound in an attempt to heal it.

While some poo-pooed it, Plett's later apology also matters. In it, he acknowledged that he had mentioned the Israel-Gaza war because he knew it would hurt Aziz most, that Aziz had done nothing to deserve it, and that none of the circumstances he described excused what followed. He apologised to Aziz, to the Muslim community, to his congregation, and to Norwood, and said he would welcome the opportunity to apologise to Aziz personally.

It is easy to apologise in print or online, especially when outrage is roaring and lawyers are involved. It is far harder to sit opposite the person you demeaned, look him in the eye, hear what your behaviour did to him, and apologise without qualification. I remain appalled that Plett behaved as he did. His willingness to seek that meeting cannot undo the harm, and it is the very least that accountability demands. Still, being prepared to face the person he hurt is a necessary and, in its own limited way, admirable step.

Norwood offers us a useful reminder. Coexistence isn't a grand declaration or a carefully staged photograph. It is built on ordinary encounters. It is about the shopkeeper who knows your order, the neighbour who watches your gate, the barber who asks after your family, and the people who make room for one another on a crowded pavement. It is also built into the difficult moments, when we decide whether one ugly incident will harden us against one another or push us to defend the decency we usually take for granted.

We can't allow this incident to become a weapon against the Jewish community. Nor should we ask the Muslim community to swallow its hurt for the sake of appearances. The way through isn't denial or defensiveness. It is honesty, accountability, and the rebuilding of trust between people who still have to share the same streets tomorrow morning.

This is a moment for Jewish and Muslim leaders in Norwood to speak to one another, but also for ordinary residents to keep doing what they have long done. That is to greet, listen, buy, sell, disagree, and refuse to dehumanise. A single video can travel around the world in minutes. The quieter work of being good neighbours rarely goes viral, but it is what holds a suburb – and a country – together.

The Norwood celebrated in our pages a few weeks ago hasn't disappeared. It was wounded by what happened, but it is still there in every ordinary exchange across difference. Let this incident be a lesson not in who we are destined to be, but in how we choose to be. We can choose not to be defined by suspicion, humiliation, and blanket hatred. We can choose instead to live side by side with respect, integrity, and brotherhood.

As Rabbi Rodal put it in a television interview, "We all have so much in common. We are all G-d's children." Let's focus on coming together and being one nation under one G-d. That is what Norwood deserves. It is what South Africa deserves. And, ultimately, it is what we all deserve.

Shabbat Shalom and *chag sameach*

Peta Krost

Editor



Green shoots sprouting

OPINION

PAUL BACHER

I have been thinking a lot lately about green shoots.

Not because I've suddenly become blind to what's wrong with South Africa. Quite the opposite. But I wonder whether we have become so practised at identifying everything that's going wrong that we sometimes fail to notice what's going right.

And lately, when I look around Johannesburg, I see green shoots everywhere.

Not one big miracle. Lots of smaller things, in different places, driven by different people.

Start close to home.

A year or so ago, it felt as though you could choose almost any house you wanted in Glenhazel. Today, family homes are increasingly difficult to find and rentals even harder. That's hardly a scientific demographic study, but something has shifted. People are choosing to live here.

Then look at what is happening more broadly within Jewish Johannesburg.

The Chassidic community has built a magnificent new campus. Pine Street Shul, which not long ago was discussing downsizing or amalgamating, has experienced a remarkable rebirth in Orchards. The Kollel and Chabad of Norwood have undergone major upgrades. Torah Academy has invested heavily in a beautiful new Girls High School campus. Ma'ayan Chai, a new Chabad seminary and the first in South Africa, has opened with its first group of young women.

Think about the psychology behind that. Communities that believe they have no future don't normally build campuses, to fix Johannesburg and are picking up a piece of it themselves.

CAP Green transformed Galliot Park in Glenhazel from a tired, dusty public space into a beautiful, safe, and popular family park. The point is not simply the landscaping. Families came back. Children came back. A piece of Johannesburg was reclaimed.

CAP Green isn't simply planting grass. It's restoring belief. The same is happening in education.

Businessman Rob Katzen helped rebuild Jeppe High School for Boys, after years of serious decline, into a five-star campus. Out of that experience came EduSafe, which is now working with other government schools.

Its philosophy is wonderfully practical: security must work, bathrooms must work, buildings must be maintained, finances must be controlled, and management must be accountable. A school is more than a place where children learn maths and English. It tells thousands of children, teachers, and parents what "normal" looks like.

Fix one park and you change a neighbourhood. Fix one school and you potentially alter the trajectory of thousands of children over decades.

Then go downtown.

Jozi My Jozi, co-founded by businessmen Robbie Brozin and Adam Craker, has brought business, civil society, communities, and the city together around a simple proposition: Johannesburg cannot be restored by government alone, nor by business standing on the sidelines complaining.

Main Street is beginning to change. Former mining headquarters are being repurposed around education, entrepreneurship, culture, and technology.

Co-founder of the Maharishi Invincibility Institute Dr Taddy Blecher is expanding its extraordinary work of moving young people from education into employment. Jozi My Jozi has helped install solar streetlights, reclaim public spaces, and bring ordinary Johannesburg residents back into parts of the city they had stopped experiencing as their own.

A city begins dying when its citizens stop using it, believing in it, and feeling that it belongs to them. That psychology can also be reversed.

Perhaps the most important green shoot of all is the increasingly serious partnership between business and government.

The Government-Business Partnership, led by Discovery founder Adrian Gore, began around electricity, logistics, and crime.

Ports and rail are beginning to reform too, with private operators entering parts of the freight network.

And now Johannesburg itself is increasingly becoming a focus of that partnership.

What excites me most is that the top-down and bottom-up movements are beginning to happen at the same time.

CAP Green is reclaiming parks. EduSafe is reclaiming schools. Jozi My Jozi is reclaiming streets, buildings, and public spaces. Maharishi is creating pathways into employment. And business and government are beginning to tackle the machinery of the city itself.

If those forces begin meeting in the middle, Johannesburg could become something we haven't spoken about for a very long time. Not merely a problem to be managed, but a model of how a badly broken city begins rebuilding itself.

I am not saying South Africa has turned the corner. Unemployment remains catastrophic. Municipalities are struggling. Crime is serious. Corruption has done enormous damage. Our Jewish community faces real demographic challenges.

But perhaps that is precisely why green shoots matter. A green shoot does not mean the forest is healthy. It means something living is pushing through.

And perhaps, as Jews, we should understand that better than most. We have never confused a difficult present with a hopeless future.

We build before certainty. We educate before certainty. We plant before certainty. We have children before certainty.

Look around Johannesburg. A shul builds. A seminary opens. A CBD building fills with young people learning skills. Loadshedding almost disappears. Students walk onto campus proudly and visibly Jewish.

None of these things individually proves very much. But together? I think they tell a story.

I am increasingly convinced that there are green shoots all around us.

And our job is not merely to notice them. Our job is to water them.

• *Paul Bacher is a social entrepreneur and community builder, with a passion for fostering meaningful connections and creating spaces for personal and collective growth.*



At the SAUJS stand during Israeli Apartheid Week

refurbish institutions, open seminaries, and invest heavily in education. They retreat. This doesn't feel like retreat.

Even painful consolidation can be a sign of strength.

I was a proud Victory Parker, and it was deeply sad to see King David Victory Park close after more than six decades. But strong communities cannot preserve every institution indefinitely because they are afraid to change. Sometimes sustainability requires difficult decisions, consolidation, and redeployment of scarce resources so that what remains becomes stronger.

At the same time, the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning in Houghton is creating a new generation of Jewish Studies teachers because the traditional university pipeline had effectively dried up. Again, somebody saw a problem and said, "Let's build a solution."

Our welfare infrastructure tells the same story.

The Chevrah Kadisha now serves close to 10 000 people across an extraordinary range of needs, which keep expanding its services – recently with Rimon Health, a structured primary healthcare programme for uninsured community members who cannot afford medical aid. Another example is Yad Aharon & Michael, which provides weekly food assistance to around 750 Jewish families, and has now rebuilt its Soup for the Soul facility, which feels like a warm café, not an institutional soup kitchen.

There is another green shoot that I find deeply encouraging. After 7 October, it would have been very easy for South African Jews to become smaller, quieter, and more fearful. Yet, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, together with the South African Union of Jewish Students, student leadership, and university administrations, made campuses a strategic priority. This year, Jewish students turned Israeli Apartheid Week on its head. They created a campaign called "Pride Without Apology". One of the invitations was wonderfully simple, "I'm a proud Zionist, come ask me what that means." Conversation replaced intimidation and Jewish identity became visible rather than apologetic.

This is not to say the problem is solved but compare the psychology. From fear to confidence, from hiding to engaging, from being acted upon to becoming actors in our own story. That is a green shoot.

Outside the Jewish community, I see the same instinct emerging: people are no longer waiting for somebody else



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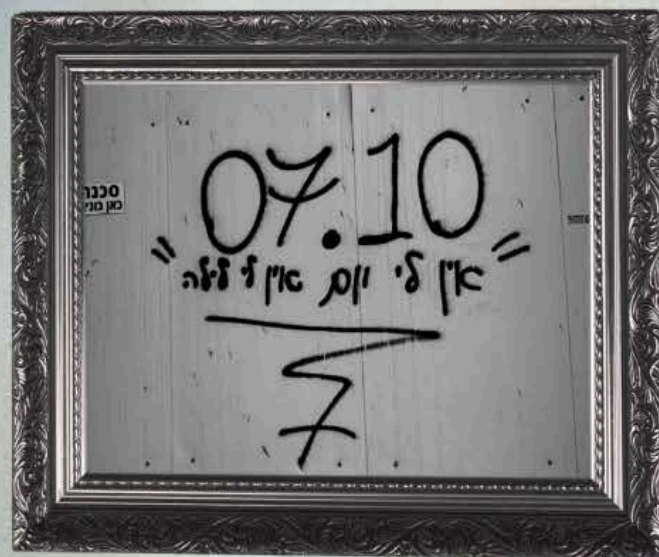
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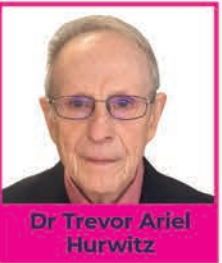
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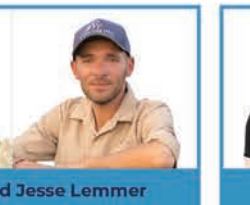
ICHIKOWITZ FAMILY FOUNDATION RISING STAR AWARD



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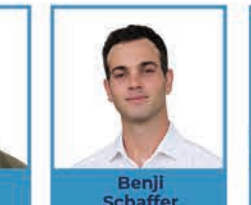
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Ari Yuter and Jesse Lemmer



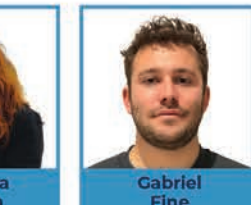
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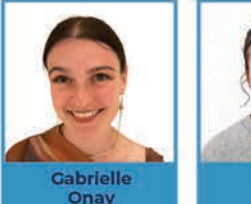
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Voting closes midnight SAST 29 October 2026

A gift of solidarity for the new year

LEE TANKLE

For members of the community, an unexpected Rosh Hashanah gift carried a message that went far beyond the turning of the Jewish year. Calendars created and distributed by the movement Christians Against Antisemitism were a simple gesture of solidarity and friendship at a time when many Jews have felt increasingly isolated. Noreen Goetz, a member of a Jewish women’s choir in Cape Town who received a calendar after practice, said, “What a lovely surprise to receive the calendar and handwritten card. It is so heart-warming to know that some people in this world care about us.”

The director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, Benji Shulman, spent much of Rosh Hashanah at Johannesburg’s Chabad of Illovo, one of the shuls that received the calendars. He said many congregants were deeply moved by the gesture and curious about the people who had gone to such lengths to show their support.

“I’m also very grateful to know that as a Jewish community, we don’t stand alone against this prejudice and discrimination that some people would like to subject us to. And the fact that ordinary South Africans are actually not prepared to put up with this stuff all the time. I think that gave great strength to the community during what has been a fairly difficult period,” said Shulman.

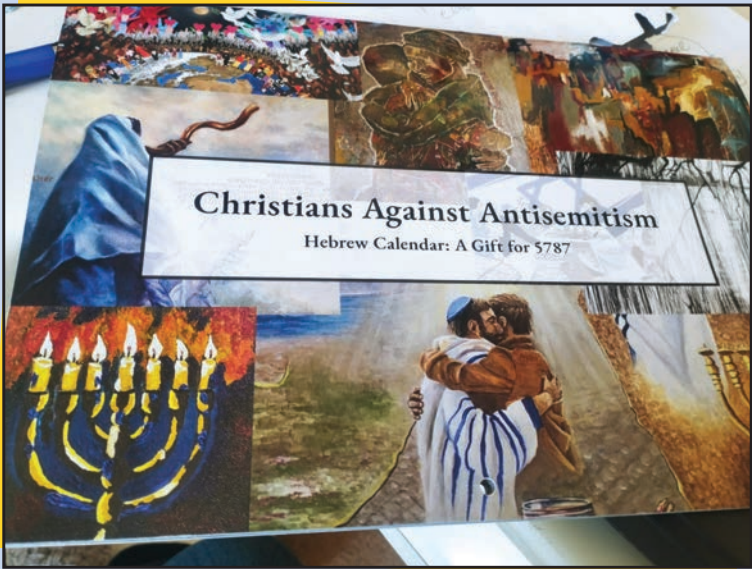
The calendars form part of a broader effort that began in the aftermath of 7 October bringing Christians and Jews together through prayer gatherings, commemorations, and other acts of support. Working through personal networks and organisations, including the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), those involved say they aim to stand alongside the Jewish community while strengthening ties between the two faith communities.

Christians Against Antisemitism is a movement, not an organisation. It is an inter-denominational group of Christians across South Africa, an informal collection of churches, ministries, and individuals who believe in the word of G-d as contained in scripture.

The response to the calendars was more profound than organisers anticipated. They said Jewish recipients’ surprise and gratitude reflected the importance of showing that there’s solidarity beyond the community itself.

“There has been a bit of

surprise from the Jewish community that there are people who are standing in support of them. And then obviously gratitude and thankfulness for what we are trying to do as



well,” said a creative leader of the calendar project, who preferred to remain anonymous. Loshni Bassadien, one of the coordinators of

this initiative, explained that since the horrific events of 7 October, a network of Christians across the country has come together to pray and show solidarity with Israel and the Jewish community.

In their first year, the focus was on praying for the hostages. In 2024, while hostages were still being held in Gaza, they launched their first Rosh Hashanah initiative, handing out envelopes bearing the words “Let My People Go”, along with bracelets and messages of hope from Christians to Jews.

“In 2025, we continued the initiative with traditional Rosh Hashanah items, including kosher honey, apples, and sweet treats, again accompanied by a message of support. This year, amid the rise in antisemitism worldwide, we decided to address it more directly through the calendars,” she said.

“Our work is ongoing. We support initiatives involving the Embassy of Israel and SAFI,

whether by helping to find venues, bringing Christian communities together, securing sponsorship, or raising awareness.”

Volunteers distributed the calendars to shuls and other Jewish communal spaces.

“It was all done through a network. I work closely with SAFI, which has connections with several shuls and Chabad communities. For the community close to where I live, I reached out directly because I wanted to create awareness and make it a more local initiative. We contacted the rabbis, received a very positive response, and personally delivered the calendars,” Bassadien said.

“For the other shuls and Chabad communities, distribution was coordinated through SAFI. We dropped the calendars at their head office, and they assisted in distributing them to the different communities.”

They also invited Christians who have Jewish friends or colleagues to give them calendars. Individuals and representatives from churches collected calendars and personally gave them to the Jewish people in their lives as a gesture of support.

Private security users urged to report crimes to police

CLAUDIA GROSS

More than half of the housebreakings in South Africa in 2025/26 weren’t reported to police because many victims believed nothing would be done.

This finding is contained in Statistics South Africa’s latest Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey, which provides a picture of crime that extends beyond cases recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The survey found that 1.08 million households experienced housebreaking during the 2025/26 period. This represented 5.3% of households nationally. However, only 48.2% of those affected reported some or all housebreaking incidents to police.

For the Jewish community, the findings highlight the importance of understanding what happens to crime reports after an incident. CSO chief executive Liron Sanders agreed community members don’t always want to open cases with SAPS.

“While we see a lot of people hesitant to open cases, we strongly encourage the community to open cases as it assists with resourcing at a station department level,” Sanders said.

The survey shows that when crimes remain unreported, they don’t enter SAPS statistics in the same way as reported cases. This can affect how the extent of crime is understood and how policing resources are allocated.

Sanders said the CSO was working closely with SAPS and has a strong relationship with relevant police stations.

Although Jewish households have a strong dependence on private security, he highlighted the effect that under-reporting to the police could have on community security. “We rely on police statistics to drive our operational response.”

CAP data provides a similar picture of under-reporting, particularly for less serious crimes. Sean Jammy, CAP deputy chief executive, said its 2026 data showed that a SAPS case was opened in 58% of contact crimes reported to CAP.

The figure was considerably higher for serious crimes.

Home invasions were reported to SAPS in 84% of cases, while hijackings were reported in 58%. Armed robberies in public spaces were reported in 46% of cases. Only 39% of attempted contact crimes were reported.

The reporting gap was considerably larger for what CAP calls soft crimes. Only 24% of these incidents were reported to SAPS, including 54% of burglaries, 21% of snatch-and-grab incidents, and just 17% of thefts.

“The Stats SA report reflects something we see every day: many victims feel that opening a case will not lead anywhere, and so they don’t,” said Jammy.

CAP nevertheless urged victims to report every crime, regardless of its seriousness. Jammy said a police case was important even when CAP had already responded to an incident.

“When we apprehend a suspect, we work with SAPS and the prosecuting authority to support the docket

through to conviction,” he said. “That process depends on a case having been opened by the victim.”

As many as 24.4% of the heads of the South African households impacted by crime maintained they didn’t think it was worthwhile reporting to the police, according to the survey. A further 21.8% said police could do nothing or that there was insufficient proof.

The Stats SA findings reinforce concerns about a lack

of public confidence in policing. However, the survey doesn’t suggest that everyone who doesn’t report a crime distrusts the police. Other reasons included solving the matter themselves, believing police involvement was unnecessary, and reporting the matter elsewhere.

The survey also found that reporting rates varied considerably according to the seriousness of the crime. An estimated 1.4 million incidents of theft of personal property were experienced by people aged 16 and older. Only 37.3% of victims reported some or all incidents to police.

Street robbery produced a similar pattern. An estimated 459 000 people experienced street robbery, involving about 515 000 incidents. Only 41.7% reported some or all incidents. Among people who didn’t report street robbery, 36.8% said police wouldn’t do anything about it. This increased from 32.6% in 2024/25.

The second most common reason was that police could do nothing or lacked proof. This was cited by 23.1% of victims, down from 26.3% the previous year. By contrast,

reporting was substantially higher for more serious crimes. Some or all incidents were reported in 77.3% of cases involving hijacking and 67% of sexual offences.

Murder had the highest reporting rate among the household crimes measured. Some or all incidents were reported in 94% of cases. The survey therefore shows a distinction between the experience of crime and the crime that enters official police statistics.

Stats SA says the Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey complements SAPS statistics rather than replacing them. SAPS figures record crimes reported to police, while the survey asks households and individuals about crimes they experienced.

The survey was conducted between April 2025 and March 2026. It covered private households across all nine provinces, as well as residents in workers’ hostels.

The latest findings also show that South Africans are increasingly taking measures to protect themselves against crime.

The proportion of people aged 16 and older who had done something to protect themselves increased from 43.3% in 2024/25 to 46.6% in 2025/26. The most common measure was changing when people walked outside. Some 31.5% said they only walked during safer hours.

A further 29.9% had installed physical security measures at home, such as security gates. About 7.3% had turned to private security, including paid armed response. Of those who took measures to protect themselves, 78.3% said they felt safer afterwards.

While 80.7% of people felt safe walking alone in their neighbourhood during the day, only 37.9% felt safe doing so when it was dark.

Women were particularly likely to feel unsafe. In 2025/26, 45.1% of women said they felt very unsafe walking alone after dark, compared with 38.8% of men. The Western Cape had the highest proportion of people who felt unsafe walking alone during the day, at 30.1%. Gauteng followed at 25.8%.

Despite the concerns about reporting, some rates improved during 2025/26. Housebreaking reporting increased from 43.4% in 2024/25 to 48.2%. Street robbery reporting rose from 36.4% to 41.7%.

The survey also found that household crime generally decreased. Seven of the eight household crime categories measured showed declines during the 12 months covered by the survey. However, individual assault increased from 363 000 victims in 2024/25 to 408 000 in 2025/26.

The figures also show that many South Africans continue to rely on the police. When witnessing a crime, 40.8% said they would call the police first, making it the most common response.

Together, the findings present a complex picture of public safety, with continued reliance on police alongside concerns about whether reporting crime to them will result in action.



Unapologetic champion of SA Jews and Israel

GILANA LAB

Community leader par excellence Marcia Parness cared deeply and wasn't afraid to make that care known, no matter the consequences. Whether the subject was Israel, the South African Jewish community, or people with less than those around them, she is remembered for speaking her mind, standing firmly for the causes she believed in, and devoting decades of her life to serving others.

Parness, who was in her mid-80s, died on 18 September following post-surgery complications. Honorary life president of both WIZO South Africa and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), she had devoted decades to the community.

"She had unbelievable integrity," says community stalwart Reeva Forman, who knew Parness as both a colleague and friend at the SAZF. "At any meeting when we were discussing things, she would insist on her point of view being heard, even if it wasn't popular. But she never said it aggressively. She always said it out of great concern. I don't believe Marcia ever acted for her own sake or to prove something. She acted 100% in terms of the people who would benefit from any cause she espoused."

As a teen, Parness joined a Bnei Akiva dance group and discovered a Jewish world

that hadn't been central to her upbringing. When she realised her friends couldn't eat at her family home because it wasn't kosher, her mother told her that if she wanted to make the house kosher, she could do it herself. At 15, she did.

That commitment grew into a lifetime of involvement in communal affairs. Parness became a pioneering woman in student Zionist leadership at the University of the Witwatersrand, and devoted much of her life to WIZO, eventually being honoured as a life president.

Her concern extended far beyond the Jewish community. "She particularly cared a great deal about those who were less fortunate," Forman says. "Be they in the Jewish community or in the wider South African community, she was always speaking about that." Caring for "the poor, the neglected, the stranger" was, she believed, "deeply embedded in her very soul". It was also what drew the two women together. "We both had a passion for the South African Jewish community, the wider South African community, and Israel," Forman says. "Marcia was an activist like me, and when you have those passions in common, you automatically become colleagues and friends."

Parness also cared deeply about preserving the history of the community she had spent so

much of her life serving. "She talked so much about the roots of the SAZF," she says, describing Parness as "very, instrumental" in ensuring that its library and its material were protected.

It was through that library that Eric Mathobo came to know a different, more personal side of Parness. She employed him as an assistant at the Beyachad library in 2003, and when he was later retrenched, she fought for his reinstatement. In 2006, she employed him again in the audiovisual department, and the two went on to work together on Yom Ha'atzmaut and Israel quiz events.

"Her passion was the survival of the library," Mathobo says, remembering how she helped raise funds when its future was uncertain. He notes her "incredible deep knowledge", but even more strongly, her kindness. "What she taught me is a legacy that will remain with me forever."

For Mathobo, Parness became "a mother away from home". Earlier this year, she called to tell him that he would be travelling to Israel, fulfilling what he described as his biggest dream. It would be his first journey outside South Africa and his first time on an aeroplane. "I was so thrilled going to Eretz Israel," he says. It was one of many times over more than two decades in which Mathobo felt Parness had looked out for him.

In their final conversation on 16 September, Parness had called to wish him happy birthday. She told him she would be going into hospital that Thursday. "The giant tree that has sheltered me for so many years has fallen," he says.

Forman was shocked by Parness's sudden death. Around Rosh Hashanah, members of the SAZF leadership received short notice of her funeral, but "everyone dropped everything and rushed", she says. "The entire SAZF leadership was present at her funeral." For Forman, the response reflected the respect Parness had earned over a lifetime of communal involvement. What she will miss is Parness sitting among them as they discuss the "past, present, and future of the South African Jewish community, global Jewish community and Israel", and her "total and utter devotion and integrity and just openness".

"With Marcia, you always knew you were getting what really concerned her from a place of deep concern for others."

For Forman, that is the measure of the woman she knew. "That's the highest accolade I can give anyone, to have integrity in terms of Judaic and humanitarian values."

For Mathobo, the legacy is equally clear. "I will always remember her as a strong, kind, and great woman," he says. "*Lala ngokuthula, mbokodo. May your soul rest in eternal peace.*"



Marcia Parness

King David teacher recognised globally

LEE TANKLE

Every teacher hopes to leave a lasting mark on their pupils. For Tal Kattan, deputy head of school and head of Hebrew at King David Primary School Linksfield, his impact has been recognised far beyond his own classroom.

Kattan stands out as the only South African to receive a Global Jewish Teachers Award this year. The Global Jewish Teachers Awards recognise outstanding educators working in Jewish schools around the world. They celebrate teachers who make a significant contribution to Jewish education, particularly by strengthening Jewish identity, inspiring pupils, and building meaningful connections to Israel and Jewish life.

Of the more than 200 teachers nominated, only eight were selected as recipients of the award.

"I see the recognition as a reflection of the importance of Jewish education and the role it plays in shaping a child's identity and sense of belonging," Kattan says. "It is about giving children a strong connection to Hebrew, Israel, and Jewish life, and helping them understand what it means to be part of the Jewish people in the world they live in today."

Kattan says he was overwhelmed when he found out that he was one of the recipients.

"Finding out that I had been selected as one of only eight educators from around the world, and the only one from South Africa, was an incredible surprise. I felt incredibly proud, but also very humbled," he says.

Being the only South African awarded makes it particularly special for him. "I feel very proud to represent King David and our community on an international stage," he says. "It is a real honour to see Jewish education in South Africa recognised on an international platform, particularly at a time when the role of Jewish educators in

strengthening identity, connection, and continuity is so critical. I hope the recognition also highlights the very many dedicated Jewish educators across South Africa who do this important work every single day.

"At the same time, the award is a reminder of the weight of the responsibility we carry as Jewish educators. It means so much to know that the hours and hours of dedication and investment that go into elevating Hebrew in the school, bringing Israel closer to our students and strengthening Jewish life are being seen not only within our school community, but now on a global stage. There is also something very special about that recognition coming from South Africa. Our Jewish community may be small, but it has a strong voice and continues to make a significant contribution to *Am Yisrael*. To have the work being done here recognised internationally is something I am incredibly proud of."

Kattan believes a great teacher needs to combine knowledge and high standards with genuine care, passion, and humility, creating a classroom where children feel comfortable asking questions and remaining curious.

He believes Jewish educators have a particular responsibility as links between generations, passing on thousands of years of Jewish history, tradition, language, values, and faith, while inspiring pupils to carry them forward in their own way. Teachers should also serve as role models, demonstrating respect, *derech eretz*, integrity, and pride in Jewish identity through their everyday actions.

At King David, Kattan impresses upon his pupils that Hebrew is a living language and doesn't exist only within the walls of the school campus.

"Hebrew should not begin and end when the lesson starts. It should be heard, spoken, seen, and enjoyed throughout school life," he says.

This is done not only in the classroom, but by bringing Israel and Jewish life into the everyday life of the school.

"The 'yoms' are particularly important in the identity formation of our students. Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron, Yom Ha'atzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim give children opportunities to understand our history, feel connected to *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*, and locate themselves within the story of the Jewish people."

The attacks of 7 October brought an added and very real dimension to this work, he says. On the first anniversary of 7 October, pupils produced a music video of Eden Golan's song *Hurricane*. This year, the school has produced a unity song and video, largely in Hebrew, bringing pupils together around a shared message of *achdut* (unity) and connection.

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Moderated by Mandy Wiener

SCAN TO REGISTER



Tal Kattan

Finding strength in starting over

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Whether it’s at the start of a new year or during life’s inevitable upheavals, starting over is seldom a simple prospect. For some though, creating a new life has been the making of the people they were always meant to be.

Change has been a constant for Dana Silver*, who moved to Arcadia Children’s Home at the age of five. “I was growing up in an unstable environment and shortly after that I lost my mother,” she says. “At that age, you don’t really understand the full weight of what’s happening, you just learn to adapt.”

She’s grateful to Arcadia for giving her stability, structure, and opportunity when she desperately needed it. “More than anything, it gave me a chance to break the cycle and see that my circumstances didn’t have to determine the rest of my life.”

Yet Silver faced multiple challenges along the way. By the time she reached matric, she was failing all her subjects and had little academic confidence. Then everything changed. “A family opened their home to my sister and me and gave us a completely different kind of stability and support.

“That was one of the biggest turning points in my life. Within about three months, I went from failing to passing matric with distinctions. My ability hadn’t suddenly changed, my circumstances had. That experience showed me how powerful it can be when someone believes in you and gives you the space to believe in yourself too.”

Now in her early 20s and building a corporate career, Silver cannot separate who she is today from those tough but formative experiences. “I don’t think I would ever have been in a position to even interview for the role I have now, let alone succeed in it, had it not been for everything I went through growing up,” she says. “More than anything, those experiences taught me that perspective is everything. I have learned how to see challenges as opportunities to adapt, work hard, and keep moving forward.”

Having had to adjust to new homes, environments, and realities multiple times, Silver says she’s learned that starting over isn’t always negative. “Sometimes it’s the beginning of the part of your life that changes everything.” Navigating frequent changes, even if you’re just simply trying to cope, is the foundation of resilience, she says.

“Now, I approach change with the understanding that even when you cannot control the circumstances around you, you can still build something new from them. For me, that’s probably the biggest lesson: your past will always be part of your story, but it doesn’t have to dictate your future.”

In some cases, people actively seek a fresh start. After a painful breakup and two unexpected deaths in his family, Zack Cohen*, then in his 20s, knew he needed to do something completely different. So, when he saw an advert for a marine construction job in the Gulf, he decided to apply.

needed to go somewhere to clear my head. It was a rollercoaster of emotions in a short space of time.”

He interviewed for the position with a local recruiter and received an employment letter the next day. Within weeks, he was flying out. While the sudden change was out of character, and concerned his

parents, it proved to be exactly what he needed.

Working with people from around the world in a foreign country, he embraced his new life and travelled the globe. “I learned that I was capable of things that I didn’t previously see myself doing, and my world opened up.”

After two years, however, due to global economic upheaval, the American company he worked for was forced to retrench staff. What began as a regular workday, ended with him on a plane back to South

Africa that night. “It was bittersweet and a shock to the system, but I was glad to be going home to my family and friends.

“I wouldn’t trade that time as

I gained so much confidence and independence as well as a broader perspective on the world. Sometimes in life you get into a rut and this experience helped me to dislodge myself from that state.”

While change often leads us to exactly where we’re meant to be, fear around it is common. “A predictable environment provides a sense of control,” explains counselling psychologist Lisa Hirschowitz. “Change shatters that illusion and forces individuals to confront a whole new reality.”

It is also a sometimes painful way of establishing one’s identity, she says. “When there is change, people often feel temporarily incompetent or struggle with a shifting sense of who they are.”

While resisting change isn’t unusual, adaptability is a key indicator of resilience, long-term well-being, and personal success, Hirschowitz says. It’s part of growth, a central part of life. “Change occurs regardless of whether one invites it or not. Being adaptable prevents one from being overwhelmed or left behind when circumstances do change. Change is vital in life as remaining in a comfortable routine eventually leads to stagnation. A clean slate exposes one to new

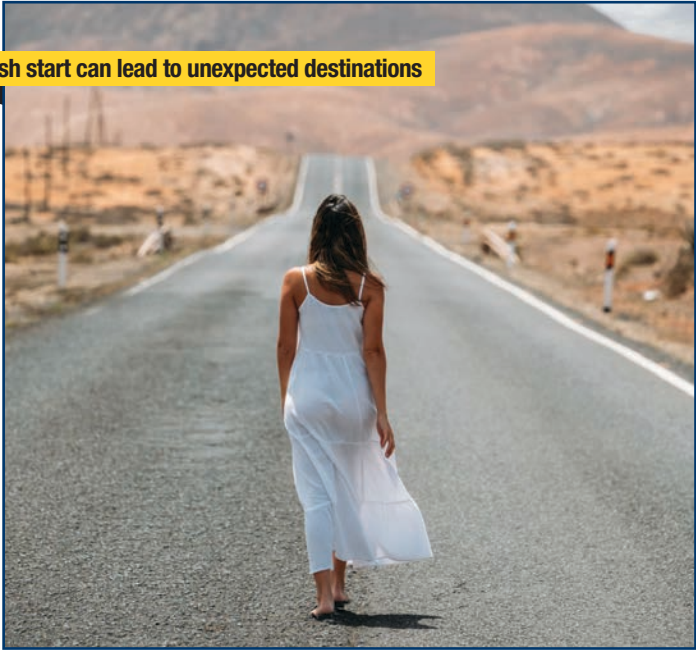
environments, mindsets, and networks, reigniting curiosity and intellectual growth.”

Going through a significant change – be it divorce, emigration, a new job, or any other life shift – requires grieving what was, while still being excited by what’s to come. “Understanding that mixed feelings can coexist about the same situation is vital. Transitions have three phases: the ending, the transition period, and the new beginning. The transition often feels chaotic, uncomfortable, and unanchored,” she says.

Yet, feeling lost doesn’t mean you’ve made a mistake. “Give yourself time to adapt and adjust,” Hirschowitz advises. “When one feels out of control, it’s useful to keep certain things predictable, for example, drinking coffee at the same time each day, or a brief morning stretch or walk. This gives one something concrete to anchor to in times of chaos.”

Getting support from others, whether it be from a friend, someone who’s been through something similar, or a psychologist, can also help you process the many feelings that come with change, she says. *Names have been changed due to family sensitivities.

A fresh start can lead to unexpected destinations



“I already had my heart set on going to live overseas with my ex, which fell through with the breakup, and then this opportunity came along. With the losses I’d faced, I also

Book discovery reignites musician’s extraordinary war story

HEATHER DJUNGA

The former headmaster of Jeppe High School for Boys in Johannesburg and former manager of the Ruth First Jeppe Memorial Trust, Kevin Tait, was astonished to discover the story of acclaimed Jewish musician and former Jeppe Old Girl, Olda Mehr, in a book a friend found for him at a second-hand store. Mehr, who landed up being trapped by Nazis in Warsaw, was one of Jeppe’s most accomplished musicians.

Tait told the *SA Jewish Report* how his friend had by chance picked up a copy of *The Piano War* by South African author Graeme Friedman, believing that the book’s central character, Mehr, was a Jeppe Old Girl. He was right.

Tait then posted a picture of the book and an announcement on his Facebook page how “a chance discovery at a bookstore of *The Piano War* has uncovered the astonishing story of Jeppe Old Girl Olda Mehr who was surely Jeppe’s most accomplished musician ever. She came to Jeppe High School for Girls from Kroonstad High School where her family had lived before relocating to Kensington.

“She won a Unisa [University of South Africa] piano competition in 1937, and a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, leaving South Africa for London in July 1938,” said Tait of Mehr.

In London, she was given the singular honour as a first-year student of being selected to perform as a soloist at the Queen’s Hall under the baton of Sir Henry Wood, he said. However, her life then took an unexpected turn when she got caught up in the war while visiting family in Poland in 1939.

The Piano War is about Mehr and her sweetheart, Bennie Hermer, whose mutual love for playing the piano and music brought wonder to their extraordinary romance. They were impacted by World War II and the atrocities which occurred during the period.

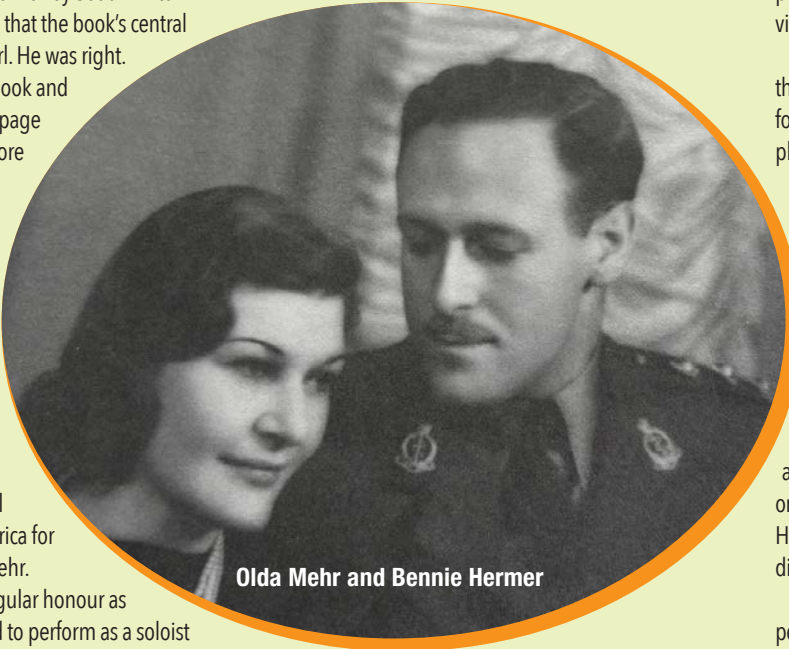
It recounts the miraculous moment the couple were reunited after their ordeal – in Cairo in Egypt, of all places. He spotted her from his army vehicle as she walked down the street.

Tait said Mehr’s life embodied the saying, “Forti nihil difficilius” (Nothing is too difficult for the brave), the Jeppe motto. “Olda was quite something,” he said.

Friedman, who now lives in Australia, told the *SA Jewish*

Report that he and his wife, Tracey, had been running a biography writing service called The Life Story Project, mainly for private publication. They were approached by the Hermer family many years ago to write Olda and Bennie’s story. “The couple’s story had made international news in 1942, and was bursting to be out in the world again,” said Friedman.

Mehr had already died by the time Friedman began writing the book, and he learned about her and her story through audiotapes of interviews and the oral history she shared with her children.



Olda Mehr and Bennie Hermer

Hermer, however, was “very much alive and full of beans”, said Friedman. “Bennie had a treasure trove of material in a trunk tucked away at the bottom of a closet, including letters, photographs, and documents that revealed secrets even he didn’t know!”

Friedman told how he had interviewed the couple’s family members, and was lucky enough to track down someone who had served “up north” with Hermer. In addition, deep dives into archives in South Africa and England, with the help of several librarians, historians, and translators, also offered up gems.

“Bennie was a fabulous storyteller, such a lovable man,” said Friedman. “He’d be in the middle of describing a song he’d play on the piano for his fellow officers in the army and, despite an ever-present tremor, he’d get up and seat himself at the piano in his living room, and play the song for us.”

Friedman learned many wonderful secrets from Hermer about this period of history that he had not known before. “There was so much lived experience, for instance, of the ‘U-boats’; Jews in hiding; or the Catholic priests and nuns who defied the church hierarchy and the Gestapo to help Jews. The creativity and determination with which prisoners of war kept up their morale was also awe-inspiring.”

Friedman and Tait believe that the story told by *The Piano War* continues to be relevant today. “We find ourselves once again in a world where authoritarian, racist regimes are in the ascendency; where families are being ripped apart by polarised political views or worse; and by deportations or violence of one sort or another,” said Friedman.

“We need to remind ourselves that we have been through this before, and the forces of concern and care for others can prevail, that hope is alive in the deadliest of places.”

He said he would never forget how Hermer’s face was so alive with wonder as he described listening to Olda’s musical voice that it left him wondering whether he fell in love with the pianist first and the woman second.

The most striking part of the book is how the couple’s romance kept their hope going during the war while they were separated, and how their paths crossed again in an extraordinary coincidence, in Egypt.

After their unlikely reunion, they eventually married and settled in Bedfordview. Publisher David Rossouw wrote on Tait’s Facebook page that he remembered Dr Bennie Hermer’s rooms in Bedfordview and the pro-bono work he did at St George’s Home.

Sadly, after her trauma during the Holocaust, Mehr never performed the piano in public again. Friedman believes the psychological trauma of her experience and the losses she endured were behind her decision not to perform on stage again.

“The world missed out on an incredible performer,” said Tait. “Hopefully, telling her story will give her the stage she deserves.”

Friedman has stayed in contact with the family, even more so in recent weeks, as they are working with South African Jewish filmmaker Kevin Harris to create a docu-drama series on the book. “We are well into the early stages of the project and establishing ties with investors who share our vision for telling this remarkable story,” he said.

“Strangely, I received Kevin’s email enquiry when Tracey and I were in Warsaw not long ago,” he said. “More than two decades after the publication of the book, Kevin contacted me on the one day of my life I have spent in the city so central to the story. How to explain that?”

A tender look at ageing and family

Award-winning performer **Camilla Waldman** speaks to the SA Jewish Report in between rehearsals of *Ladies of Lavare*, in which she plays the elderly sister, Vera.

What drew you to this play?

Ladies of Lavare is beautifully crafted theatre storytelling. I appreciated the script from my first encounter with it, in the audition pages, and my respect and delight in the magical realism Tammany Barton creates with her two characters, the sisters Vera and Maureen, continue to deepen.

Why do you believe it is an important work and one that people need to see?

The director of *Ladies of Lavare*, Juliette Jenner, spoke to us about the “golden thread” as she described this story’s significance. It’s a journey of finding connections; remembering and repurposing, of community, of forgiveness – of working it through with one another.

What is it that young people don’t understand about ageing?

That people have value at each stage of their lives: in the fledgling moments, the growing ones, the elderly ones.



What freedom have you personally found in ageing?

Dr Maya Angelou describes success as “liking yourself; liking what you do and how you do it”. My 50s have carried many brave changes, moments when I realise: I didn’t do this in this way; this is new – and I am awed at the ways new understanding has transformed the way I see myself, and, in turn, inspired new ways of relating to the world. I have realised we can change our thinking, that we don’t need to live captive to thoughts that oppress. I now understand that freedom and responsibility are interdependent and safe spaces are not only places of support; they are also containers in which we can be vulnerable, have hard conversations in, and transformation is invited in.

Through this experience, what have you learnt about getting older that has amazed or excited you?

That you can still play when your knees are creaking and your eyes are not seeing as well as they did.

Do you believe your sisters, or perhaps siblings, become more important to you in your later years? If so, why?

I don’t have a sister, and I have a brother, two years younger than myself. We lost our mother six years ago and our sibling relationship has grown more precious as we navigate life without her presence in our lives. Making time for one another has become intentional and cherished.

What has been most special or difficult for you in this play?

It has been special working with the writer in the rehearsal room. Tammany has been so supportive from a creative and production place. And working alongside Shaeleen Tobin; she is a generous actor with so much heart – and humour; we laugh a lot.

Who is the audience this play would most appeal to and why?

Young and older will enjoy it. I’ve laughed

a lot in the rehearsals and I hope we serve the play well that audiences can laugh too. There is a lot we recognise as true about being human and being part of a family.

What do you believe will resonate most with the Jewish community, if anything?

Ladies of Lavare is about the significance our elders bring to our daily lives. Our current world is often so busy and full that we can forget to pause, allow ourselves to look skywards, and appreciate this

beautiful creation and the people that make it possible and precious. And the reminder to check in with those who may move a little slower than us. I know community is at the centre of Jewish life and the play is a rally call to remember this in each new day.

• *Ladies of Lavare* is on at the Theatre on the Square in Johannesburg from 1 to 17 October.



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Community the biggest winner at SA Maccabi Games

LEE TANKLE

Maccabi South Africa turned the disappointment of not being able to play in the Maccabiah in Israel into a brand-new exciting and inclusive tournament called the Maccabi SA Junior Games. Tournament director Darryn Edinburg had this vision after the postponement of the 2025 Maccabiah and the subsequent decision not to send a South African junior delegation to Israel in 2026 because of security concerns and logistical challenges. He recognised that young athletes were left disappointed at missing their chance to compete on the international Jewish sporting stage, so a plan was made. Held from 22 to 24 September at King David High School, the Maccabi SA Junior Games brought about 500 young athletes together for three days of competition, camaraderie, and community, allowing them to experience some of the sporting excitement and Jewish connection they would've enjoyed at the Maccabiah.



A netball game

steering committee from Cape Town and co-chairperson of Maccabi Western Province, said the “85 Cape Town participants competed with enthusiasm and pride, supported by 12 young coaches, most of whom have themselves participated in international Maccabi Games. They returned to give back, motivating, supporting, and inspiring the next generation”. For Edinburg, the opening of the tournament was particularly emotional.

“For months the Games had existed in meetings, WhatsApps, spreadsheets, lists, and conversations. Suddenly I could look across the field and see children, parents, Johannesburg, Cape Town, our invitational teams, and our community standing together,” he said.

Isserow explained that the athletes from the Western Cape brought home medals in chess, dance and soccer, in three age groups, and in padel and tennis. But above all, “Cape Town participants were continually recognised for their sportsmanship, respect, and positive spirit, showing that Maccabi is about competing with pride while building a stronger Jewish community”. Taylor Garnitz, one of the star tennis players, said, “It was such a privilege to play in the Maccabi Games. It was a fun environment playing with boys and girls of all ages. I’m grateful Maccabi South Africa was able to create this opportunity for the juniors to experience.”

Yonah Michelson, another young athlete, explained that he’d attended without having a team, but after half an hour was able to join the team. “The players and the coach were very welcoming. I had such fun playing with this team, and they were all so skilled. We had a great two days and it was so amazing that we won our age group. I can’t wait to play Maccabi next year, and a special thank you to Darryn Edinburg for putting such a nice event on,” he said. “What I really enjoyed about these Games was how structured the tournament was and also how competitive it was,” said Cape Town soccer player Ethan Copeland. “I felt proud and excited to be part of Maccabi, and it was a great experience that I would do again.”

Edinburg said, “I hope that a child may have arrived simply wanting to play soccer, netball, padel, or tennis, and left feeling that they had become part of the Maccabi family. When I finally stood there and watched the children enjoying what we had built, every meeting, every phone call, every late night, and every problem suddenly felt worthwhile. Sport was the medium. Community was the purpose.”



Adam Phillips on the golf course

The programme included soccer, netball, tennis, padel, chess, golf, and dance, across multiple age groups. There were 350 Johannesburg and Cape Town athletes, and invitational teams from Balfour Park, City Ballers, Summerhill, and UF Academy. “I pictured a genuine multi-sport Maccabi festival in South Africa. Johannesburg and Cape Town together; team sports and individual sports; serious competition, but also friendship, Jewish identity, belonging, and fun,” said Edinburg. “I wanted an opening ceremony, an athletes’ village, social events, medals, and children walking around proudly in their Maccabi colours, feeling that they were part of something bigger than themselves.” He explained that this tournament was more open than the official Maccabiah. “You could create your own team with your friends, use a school team, or put together whatever team you wanted. It was competitive, but within a social structure where the kids could enjoy themselves and play with their mates. In Cape Town, for example, many of the players who had wanted to be part of the Maccabi team played together. Generally, it was an opportunity for everyone to compete while still having fun with their friends.” Gina Isserow, one of the members of the

Maccabi – a great community-building exercise

OPINION

ADAM THAL



There are sporting achievements. And then there is successfully organising three days of sport involving hundreds of South African Jews, children and parents, schedules, referees, food, weather, opinions, and, most frighteningly, South African Jewish mothers. For that alone, Darryn Edinburg deserves a gold medal. Possibly two. And a week somewhere without cellphone reception! The inaugural Maccabi Games South Africa took place in Johannesburg last week and what an unbelievable few days it was. Five-a-side soccer, netball, tennis, table tennis, padel, golf, chess, and probably another sport I’ve forgotten because I spent most of my time next to a soccer pitch watching fathers think they were Pep Guardiola, or maybe Enzo to be more relevant. But the sport was almost secondary. What was special was seeing our community together. A huge contingent came up from Cape Town as an incredible united force, Johannesburg had teams from different schools and clubs, and suddenly hundreds of Jewish children who might never normally cross paths were competing, laughing, chirping each other, and making new friends. And obviously eating. Lots of eating. Because apparently Jews cannot simply play sport. We need to play five-a-side soccer and follow it with a Burger & Brew burger and chips. Netball requires Michelos pizza. Synchronised dancing apparently burns exactly the number of calories contained in a freezeo or a slush from Brewsky. And I’m fairly certain that padel existed only so that everyone could justify the tacos afterwards. Basically, it was less Maccabi Games and more Jewish Uber Eats with intermittent exercise. Was everything perfect? Of course not! It was the first local Maccabi Games. There were always

going to be hiccups, teething problems, and lessons for next time. And yes, there were possibly one or two parents who seemed to believe Olympic selection was taking place and their child’s future Nike contract depended on the result of an U12 five-a-side match. But that’s a pos for another day. What the Maccabi team, organisers, volunteers, and sponsors created was something far bigger than a tournament. They created community! For three days our kids competed against each other, supported each other, ate together, laughed together, and were reminded that although they may come from different schools, cities, teams, and backgrounds, they belong to something much bigger. And right now, with what’s going on in the world, there is something incredibly beautiful and important about that. Sport. Food. Friends. Family. Community. And approximately 47 000 WhatsApp messages required to make it happen. Side note: do you know how hard it is for a Jewish parent to belong to a WhatsApp group that they can’t message or reply to? These games deserved 10/10. *Kol HaKavod*, Maccabi South Africa and everyone who played a part. You didn’t just organise a sporting event, you brought people together. And you gave our children some pretty special memories along the way. Sure we missed the real deal in Israel this year, but this was a great consolation prize. Maybe next year the people who were too brave or too scared to enter, will join the fun of Maccabi South Africa’s 2nd Games.

• Adam Thal is a multi-award-winning South African filmmaker and executive producer who is known for bringing powerful human stories to global audiences.

Ethiopian Jews always dreamed of Jerusalem

GILANA LAB

For generations, Ethiopian Jews dreamed of Jerusalem while living largely separated from Jewish communities elsewhere in the world. In villages across northern Ethiopia, they preserved their faith, developed their own traditions and religious leadership, and maintained a connection to a place most had never seen. Their story is a striking reminder that Jewish culture has never looked the same everywhere. As the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards celebrate “Le Festival des Juifs, a tapestry of culture”, Ethiopian Jewry adds a distinctive African thread. The Ethiopian Jewish community is known as Beta Israel. Historically concentrated in the north, the community developed distinctive Jewish customs. Spiritual leaders known as Kessim led its religious life, and some of its traditions differ considerably from those familiar to Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. One of the clearest examples is Sigd, a festival particular to Ethiopian Jewish tradition. Celebrated 50 days after Yom Kippur, it is a day of prayer, communal reflection, and renewal of the covenant between the Jewish people, G-d, and the Torah. Central to Sigd was the yearning to return to Zion. Ethiopian Jews would pray for Jerusalem, turning a distant city into something deeply present in their religious lives. That longing took on a very different meaning in the late 20th century. Between 1980 and 1984, large numbers of Ethiopian Jews left their villages and travelled through Sudan in the hope of reaching Israel. The journey could take weeks or even months and refugees faced hunger, disease, violence, and dangerous conditions in Sudanese camps. According to the Knesset, about 4 000 Ethiopian Jews died on the way and in the camps. For those who survived, Israel eventually became a reality. Operation Moses, which began in 1984, brought about 8 000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel before publicity surrounding the secret operation led to it being halted. Families were separated and many

members of the community remained behind. Then, in May 1991, came Operation Solomon. With Ethiopia in the midst of civil war, more than 14 000 Ethiopian Jews were taken to Israel in just 36 hours. Their arrival represented the fulfilment of a dream that had shaped Ethiopian Jewish life for centuries. But arriving in Israel also meant beginning again. Ethiopian Jews had to establish themselves in a society with different languages and customs, while preserving a heritage that had survived for generations in Ethiopia. Their traditions ultimately became another distinctive part of the extraordinary mix of cultures that make up Jewish life in Israel. Their story also raises a bigger question about what Jewish culture looks like. For many South African Jews, their traditions have roots in Lithuania, Poland, and other parts of Europe, while some trace their customs to Morocco and other communities across North Africa and the Middle East. Ethiopian Jews bring another African culture into the picture, with its own religious traditions, foods, music, and history. That is what makes Ethiopian Jewry fitting in this year’s Investec Jewish Achiever Awards theme. “A tapestry of culture” isn’t simply about celebrating different foods, music, and clothing. It’s about recognising the vastly different histories that Jewish communities have carried with them while remaining part of one people. Ethiopian Jews carried theirs through centuries of relative isolation, enormous upheaval, and an extraordinary journey to Israel without losing what made their culture distinctive. Their traditions didn’t have to look like those of Jews in Johannesburg, Jerusalem, Warsaw, or Casablanca to belong to the same story. It is precisely those differences that make the Jewish tapestry what it is.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Ethiopian Jews arriving in Israel during Operation Solomon

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Safe cities for everyone

The festival of Sukkot has always fascinated me. It is weird and wonderful. A non-Jewish colleague came to my house yesterday and I noticed her puzzled glances at the sukkah on my patio. A dining table under the strange bamboo cover, rather than under the patio roof, and some posters and greenery looking decidedly *verlep* in the Johannesburg thunderstorm. I explained that it was a Jewish festival and we celebrate by building these “booths”, representing a temporary shelter, barely shielded from the elements. A symbol of vulnerability and faith.

Vulnerability is an emotion we are all too familiar with both as Jews and as South Africans. Since October 2023 there has been a spike in global antisemitism, including attacks on synagogues, schools, and individuals. Last week, we were horrified to learn of yet another shooting at a shul, in Belleville, Ontario, over Yom Kippur. And in South Africa, in a society that is rarely shocked by crime any more, the murders of at least 11 women near Kempton Park have shaken us to the core.

It is against this background that I reflect on some interactions on X, prompted by my last column. I am delighted that my column has reached the shores of the US, where former radio presenter Redi Tlhabi felt strongly enough about our Jews for Jozi walk to castigate us for having the chutzpah to walk in the inner city of Johannesburg as proud Jews. Our crossing Nelson Mandela was clearly a bridge too far for this X commentator.

I was slightly taken aback by Ms Tlhabi’s objection. Her post stated, “I co-ask, when were Jews in South Africa ever prevented from walking the streets? Who prevented them? Does the SAJBD see fellow Johannesburg residents as a threat to their existence?”

In a country rife with gender-based violence, as a woman I do not take the opportunity to walk safely in the streets of Johannesburg for granted. I do celebrate an opportunity to do so, and mourn deeply the women who were not afforded that right so recently.

As a Jew, I am also sharply aware that for many Jews around the world, walking proudly as a group is a dangerous endeavour. While it is true that we

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ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

have never been legally barred from walking on Johannesburg’s streets, our capacity to do so as identifiable Jews, is something worth celebrating. As Britain’s Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, said at the Manchester synagogue where a terrorist murdered two of his congregants a year ago, “We have never wanted to be defined as victims. We see ourselves as proud Jewish people, proud British citizens, proud of our values, and that is how we want to live our lives.” Jewish South Africa feels this just as keenly. We do not see our fellow Johannesburg residents as threatening. On the contrary, we want all South Africans to feel safe on the streets and to contribute to that goal. We walked to affirm our place as Johannesburg citizens, contributing to the amazing diversity of the city in which we live.

It should go without saying that the right to walk, or drive, in our city without fear of abuse or harassment, or worse, is a right that should be afforded to everyone, regardless of race, religion, or creed. That is why we were so horrified to see a Jew subject a Muslim man to racial abuse right outside a synagogue on Yom Kippur. Both the SAJBD and the synagogue issued statements condemning this behaviour. We were contacted by many members of our community who were appalled by what they saw, and it was clearly evident that these views do not reflect the attitudes and values our community holds dear. The actions of one individual do not represent a community, but we called this out in the same way that we expect other institutions to call out antisemitism when it occurs in their communities.

Finally, on the topic of making Joburg’s streets safe for all, municipal elections to determine the future of our city are coming soon. The SAJBD will hold mayoral debates in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Journalist Mandy Wiener will moderate the Johannesburg debate, on 11 October. This is your chance to hear directly from the candidates, ask the questions that matter, and get informed before voting. I encourage everyone to register and join us for what promises to be a fascinating event.

Quivering before lightning

The first flash lit up the room, and I looked across at Gatsby. Our Swiss Shepherd was beneath his weighted blanket, looking like a large, anxious parcel we had decided not to post. I was holding my phone, checking whether the little rain cloud on the screen had moved.

Gatsby was receiving help with his fear. I was wondering, with apologies to the high holy day liturgy, whether “Who by Gauteng thunderstorm” had somehow been left off the list. And whether I was, in fact, on it.

Gatsby is frightened of thunder. I understand him, although thunder isn’t really my problem. Thunder is all bluster. Lightning is the main event. It arrives without consultation and before I’ve had time to prepare.

I count the seconds until the thunder. This is supposed to tell me roughly how far away the lightning is. What it actually does is give me something to do with my fear. I refresh the radar. I study the clouds. I ask ChatGPT whether the storm is moving towards us. A few minutes later, I ask again, in case the weather – or its opinion – has changed.

Even ChatGPT is getting tired of me asking. This fear is awkward for me to admit. I take on people, organisations, and governments in public. I speak about Islamism, challenge lies, and argue with people who’d prefer that I stop. I receive death threats with depressing regularity. Many of them amuse me more than they frighten me. An angry person can be answered, ignored, or turned into a column. I know how to do all three.

Jew-haters are predictable. Lightning is not. Lightning has never read a word I’ve written. It doesn’t listen to me on ChaiFM, doesn’t follow me on X, and would be unmoved by my best argument.

On Sunday night, I developed a migraine that stayed with me through Monday. Then came the storm. Someone suggested that the headache might have been a warning. Changes in atmospheric pressure may trigger migraines in some people, although I have no idea whether that explains mine. Still, I liked the



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

possibility. It made the headache seem almost useful. Gatsby and I could both claim to have sensed something coming, although his response was to seek shelter and mine was to develop a theory.

Perhaps my composure depends on being able to imagine the next move. With lightning, it’s the suddenness that gets me: the knowledge that a perfectly ordinary evening can be interrupted before I’ve had time to prepare my response.

Watching Gatsby beneath the blanket, I wondered why his fear seems perfectly reasonable while mine requires a weather app, a radar map, and a second opinion from ChatGPT. He can take on the neighbourhood cats and the Checkers Sixty60 drivers, then come inside and ask to be tucked in. Nobody accuses him of inconsistency.

Perhaps courage is like that. It isn’t something we either have or don’t have. We can be brave in one world because we understand its rules, and frightened in another because there don’t seem to be any. Gatsby knows what to do with a cat. I know what to do with an argument. Neither of us knows what to do with the sky.

It’s an uncomfortable thought at this time of year. We have just spent the high holy days speaking about how little we know of what lies ahead. Now, for Sukkot, we sit beneath a roof deliberately unable to keep the weather out.

It is easy to admire the sukkah’s vulnerability when vulnerability feels symbolic. It becomes more complicated when the sky begins flashing and the symbolism starts behaving like weather.

The next time a storm approaches, I’ll probably check the radar too often. Gatsby will head for his blanket. I may sit beside him, where I can still see the sky but don’t have to watch it alone.

Scramble to remedy road rage damage

>>>Continued from page 1

It echoed Rodal’s call for something constructive to emerge from the debacle, saying Johannesburg should “use this opportunity for bridge-building going forward”.

The saga began on Yom Kippur afternoon, 21 September, following a road rage incident between Plett and Aziz in Norwood.

The men gave differing accounts of what precipitated the confrontation. Plett previously told the *SA Jewish Report* that he was driving towards Chabad of Norwood, where he was due to perform security duty, when he believed Aziz had nearly collided with him, driving at speed and failing to indicate he was turning.

Footage filmed by Aziz outside the shul showed Plett making racial slurs and remarks referring to the war in Gaza. The footage spread across social media. Chabad of Norwood and the SAJBD immediately condemned Plett’s actions.

Aziz subsequently went to Norwood police station to lay charges against Plett. The matter has since moved into the hands of lawyers representing both men.

The controversy widened further on the weekend when the African National Congress

(ANC) parliamentary Caucus entered the fray, issuing a statement condemning what it called the “racist and Islamophobic verbal abuse” directed at Aziz. The ANC described the incident as a reminder of the continuing threat posed by racism and bigotry in South Africa.

For Rodal, however, the challenge now is what happens after the outrage.

In his Sukkot sermon, he cautioned congregants that condemning Plett’s behaviour should not become licence to destroy the man himself.

“We can and must condemn the behaviour,” he said. “But there is a difference between saying, ‘What this person did was wrong’ and turning that into an opportunity to attack the person, spread unnecessary details, ridicule them, or destroy their character.”

His message was unequivocal: racism had to be rejected, but the community also had to decide what it would do with the moment.

“One person can change the way the world sees every one of us,” Rodal said. “And any one of us can be that person.”

“Let’s ensure our ripple is always a good one.”



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Daring to dream leads to young talent on stage

LEE TANKLE

For many children, singing along to Disney songs happens in front of the TV or in the back seat of the car. For Redhill pupils Rafael Spira, 12, and Rebecca Damelin, 13, those familiar songs have taken them somewhere considerably bigger – the stage of Johannesburg’s National Children’s Theatre. They’re bringing some of Disney’s best-loved stories and songs to life in Disney’s *Dare to Dream JR* until 11 October.

Directed by Ivor Jones and performed by an ensemble of performers aged 13 to 18, this exhilarating musical revue brings together more than 20 songs spanning a full century of Disney storytelling, from the golden

classics of *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* to contemporary anthems from *Frozen*, *Encanto*, *Moana*, *Coco*, and *The Lion King*.

Damelin has always loved Disney and its music so when she read about the open auditions for this production, she knew she had to go. When she was cast, she was over the moon; for her, this seemed like a fun experience and she couldn’t wait to perform on stage again.

Spira was shocked to find out he’d been cast as he’d forgotten words to his song during the audition.

As part of a young cast, Spira and Damelin are experiencing the excitement, discipline, and teamwork that go into a professional production, while performing material that’s been part of their own childhoods.

Dare to Dream JR is a new musical revue, written by the Disney Theatrical Group to celebrate 100 years of Disney music. The show follows a group of “Junior Imagineers”, trainees on their first day at Walt Disney’s legendary Imagineering studios as they discover, together, the power of dreams to inspire, connect, and transform.

“They’re all searching for their dreams, and each character has a different personality and a different dream,” says Spira. “My character is a young teenager who is quite impatient and very confident, but that confidence takes a bit of a knock when he realises achieving his dream isn’t as easy as he thought.

“At first, he wants his dream to happen instantly, but as the story progresses, the others help him realise that isn’t really what he wants. He learns that he wants his dream to find him eventually, rather than forcing it to happen straight away. He’s also a bit of a comic-relief character.”

Damelin says, “My character starts as a very shy character who doesn’t know what their dream is yet, but they slowly figure out that they can be a dreamer

even though their dream hasn’t found them yet. I love this character because I love how she slowly gains more and more confidence throughout the show.”

The two have been devoting their weekends to rehearsing for their debuts and have loved the process. They’re even more excited about showing audiences all the hard work they’ve been putting in since July.

“It’s been really fun. I’ve got to know so many new wonderful people, and it’s been really, really fun so far,” says Damelin.

“Rehearsals have been very tiring, but also a lot of fun,” says Spira. “Every day is different, and you have such diverse conversations with everyone. Rehearsals sometimes consist of vocal training, but as

we got closer to the start of the shows, we focused mostly on choreography.

“They can be tiring because they go on for a long time, but they’re really enjoyable.

You make so many memories with the people around you, while also discovering new things about yourself,” he says.

“The most fun part is probably singing all of these Disney songs because I’ve always loved Disney,” says Damelin.

Working on this show has convinced both that they want to pursue performing in the future.

“I’ve always loved theatre and singing. And being in shows like this one really makes me want to go into theatre when I grow up,” says Damelin.

“It’s made me want to be an actor even more when I grow up,” says Spira.



Rebecca Damelin



Rafael Spira

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