

Israeli technology turns on the tap for another SA village

CLAUDIA GROSS

On Sunday, 11 October, the 228th village in South Africa received running water due to Sivan Yaari and Innovation: Africa, a non-profit organisation that brings Israeli technology to rural African communities.

The organisation has so far brought water to 1 487 villages across the continent.

For generations, women in a northern KwaZulu-Natal village walked down a steep hill several times a day to collect water from an open, contaminated source. Now, a tap of clean water has opened up new possibilities for more than 3 000 people.

On Sunday, Innovation: Africa opened a solar-powered water system in Okledeni, near Nongoma, funded by The Victor Daitz Foundation.

Yaari, the organisation's founder and chief executive, said the event brought together community members, royalty, and traditional and local government leaders to celebrate access to clean water. During the ceremony, one of the new taps was turned on, prompting great joy among the Okledeni community.

The project involved finding water at a depth of 150m, with a flow rate of 2.1 litres a second. More than 3km of piping was installed to supply clean water to 11 taps around the village.

"Before the opening of the tap, we went with the donors to see where women were collecting water [before]," Yaari told the *SA Jewish Report*.

She described how women had been going up and down a steep hill for decades. They made the journey two to three times a day, sometimes walking for as long as an hour each way. The water was visibly dirty, she said, raising concerns about the risks associated with drinking and using it.

Community members expressed relief at no longer having to depend on that source of water. Yaari said women spoke about the prospect of protecting their families from waterborne illness and having access to water for personal hygiene.

They also spoke about what the new supply could mean for their economic prospects. "They want to open businesses now that they will have more time and they can use the water to open new businesses," she said.

Access to water can affect far more than a household's ability to drink, cook, and wash. When families no longer need to spend hours collecting water, they can redirect that time towards education, paid work, and other activities. For women and girls, who often carry

much of the responsibility for collecting water in rural communities, a nearby supply can also reduce the daily burden of these journeys.

Innovation: Africa works to address these challenges by using solar energy to pump water in communities where reliable infrastructure is lacking.

Founded 18 years ago, the organisation operates in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, and

Cameroon.

In South Africa, its projects have reached villages in several provinces, including Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape. The Okledeni installation uses solar panels to supply the energy needed to pump

water, reducing reliance on conventional electricity infrastructure.

However, installing the equipment is only one part of the process. Keeping it operational requires local knowledge, technical skills, and a system for funding maintenance and repairs.

At Okledeni, 14 people from the village worked alongside the contractor for four months, learning to operate, repair, and maintain the solar-powered system. They received certificates of completion at the opening ceremony. Yaari said the training could improve their prospects of finding employment by giving them practical technical skills.

The project also includes a structure intended to support the system over the longer term. A water

committee elected by the community signed a memorandum of understanding confirming its ownership of the installation.

The committee has opened a bank account, with each household contributing towards protecting and maintaining the system. This arrangement is intended to help the community take responsibility for the infrastructure and ensure funds are available when maintenance is needed.

For Innovation: Africa, community participation is central to making projects sustainable. A system must continue working after the installation team leaves, or the benefits of the initial investment can be lost.

The Victor Daitz Foundation funded the Okledeni installation. The foundation supports projects exclusively in KwaZulu-Natal and has funded four villages in the province. The donor involved has supported four villages across Africa, including projects in KwaZulu-Natal.

Yaari described how the community responded to the fact that the technology came from Israel. "We mentioned that we're from Jerusalem," she said. "It was well received."

The participants even danced together to the song *Jerusalem*. For Yaari, the reception was significant because the project brought together Israeli technology and a rural South African community around a practical need.

Innovation: Africa's work in South Africa has expanded considerably since the organisation first began operating in the country. In a previous interview with the *SA Jewish Report*, Yaari described how she had initially doubted that South Africa needed its assistance because she believed the country was comparatively wealthy.

Her perspective changed after visiting rural villages and seeing women walking long distances to collect dirty water despite the presence of electricity and other modern amenities in some communities.

Yaari said the organisation intends to continue expanding its work in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent.

• *Sivan Yaari was hosted on 13 October by the Union of Jewish Women at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre.*

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The foundation of our claim to the land of Israel

As we begin reading the Torah anew with Sefer Bereishis, we encounter one of the most fundamental questions in Jewish thought: Why does the Torah begin with Creation rather than with the first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish people?

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, addresses this question in his very first commentary on the Torah. Instead of beginning with the *mitzvah* of declaring the new month, the Torah opens with the words "*Bereishis bara Elokim es hashamayim ve'es ha'aretz*" (In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth)".

Rashi explains that this establishes a principle for all generations: G-d created the world and has the authority to give its lands to whomever He chooses. Should the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel be challenged, our response begins with the very first verse of the Torah: The Creator promised this land to our ancestors.

Parshas Noach continues this story. After the flood, humanity begins again, and the Torah traces the generations leading to Avraham Avinu. In next week's parsha, Lech Lecha, G-d commands Avraham to travel to the land He will show him and promise that it will be given to his descendants.

From Creation, through Noach, to Avraham, the Torah lays the foundations of our connection to the land of Israel.

It is remarkable that a teaching recorded by Rashi nearly a thousand years ago, based on an ancient Midrash and a verse in the Torah given more than 3 300 years

ago, speaks so directly to the debates of our own time.

The legitimacy of Israel's connection to the Jewish people remains a central issue in political debates across the world. Yet our bond to the land is neither a recent political development nor a claim born in modern times. It is woven into the fabric of Jewish identity.

According to traditional Jewish chronology, 3 764 years ago Hashem promised the land of Israel to Avraham Avinu and his descendants. The Jewish people entered the land under Yehoshua 3 300 years ago, beginning centuries of Jewish life in their ancestral homeland, marked by the reigns of Israel's kings, the words of its prophets, and the building of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem.

Even during subsequent centuries of exile, Jews always maintained a presence in the land and never ceased praying towards Jerusalem, yearning for Zion, and hoping to return to their ancestral homeland. This connection predates the emergence of Islam by many centuries and has remained central to Jewish faith, prayer, and identity.

As Jews, we must hold our heads high and understand the depth of our historical and spiritual connection to Israel. We should never allow the distortion of history or hostility towards the Jewish

Torah Thought



Rabbi Danny Sackstein
Sunny Road Kehilla

people to diminish our understanding of our heritage.

As we begin the Torah again, we are reminded that our story began long before modern politics and international resolutions. It began with the Creator of heaven and earth and a promise that has sustained our people through generations of triumph, tragedy, exile, and return.

The land of Israel is not merely a place on a map. It is an essential part of the Jewish people's history, faith, and destiny.

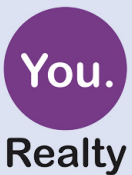
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Surprise reunion helps Israeli family get father’s body home

CLAUDIA GROSS

An Israeli family's efforts to bring their father home for burial took an unexpected turn when a Namibian pathologist recognised a ZAKA volunteer he had met nearly two decades earlier. The encounter helped secure the release of the deceased without an autopsy, following intervention by Chabad of Windhoek and ZAKA's international unit.

Rabbi Yosef Rahimi, Chabad emissary to Namibia, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the man, who was about 70, had died after suffering cardiac arrest while travelling with his wife during the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Emergency personnel attempted to resuscitate him, but their efforts were unsuccessful.

Police subsequently took the body to Walvis Bay, a coastal city in Namibia. Authorities indicated that an autopsy would be required, creating a challenge for the family, who wanted his body returned to Israel for burial in accordance with Jewish law.

In Jewish tradition, the body is treated with profound respect after death. Orthodox Jewish practice generally prohibits unnecessary post-mortem examinations because the body must remain intact. However, local legal requirements governing deaths and investigations must also be considered.

Rahimi said he had contacted the family, spoken with the deceased's wife, and begun coordinating with Israeli authorities. He'd also contacted ZAKA, the Israeli organisation that specialises in responding to traumatic deaths, identifying victims, and ensuring that the deceased are treated in accordance with Jewish law.

The efforts involved several parties, including the Israeli government, ZAKA's international unit, and Namibian authorities. Rahimi said the team supplied medical documentation showing that the deceased had a history of heart problems. They also arranged for the Israeli doctor familiar with his medical history to be contacted.

The aim was to establish the circumstances surrounding the death and address the concerns that had led authorities to consider an autopsy.

The case then took an unexpected turn. During a video call arranged by Rahimi, ZAKA volunteer Yossi Landau spoke with the Namibian pathologist about the religious significance of avoiding an autopsy.

A ZAKA team at the site of the plane crash in Namibia 19 years ago



The doctor recognised Landau from an encounter 19 years before following a plane crash in Namibia that had killed five Israelis. ZAKA volunteers had travelled to Namibia after that disaster, helping at the crash site, identifying victims, and arranging for their return to Israel for burial.

According to ZAKA's account, the pathologist remembered the organisation's work and its efforts to preserve the dignity of the dead. Landau explained the Jewish religious considerations surrounding the proposed autopsy. Following their conversation, the pathologist agreed to release the deceased without performing one.

The earlier encounter had therefore become relevant to a new family's efforts to secure a dignified burial for their loved one.

For Rahimi, the case was about supporting a family experiencing an unexpected loss far from home. The deceased's wife was travelling with him, while their sons remained in Israel.

Rahimi said the family was shocked by the death. He'd spoken to the sons several times a day while working to resolve the arrangements. The widow also spent time with the Chabad community in Windhoek. "She was very upset," Rahimi said, describing how the woman cried throughout the day. He said she appreciated the support she'd received from the community.

Rahimi explained that Chabad helped provide practical assistance and emotional support while the family navigated the arrangements.

a stronger connection to Jewish life. Rahimi said the man's son later decided to have his own son circumcised. Two weeks afterwards, the father, then 65, decided to undergo the ritual himself.

Rahimi contacted the *mohel* in Israel who'd performed the procedure to verify the details. The records showed that the circumcision had taken place on 18 Tishrei, during the intermediate days of Sukkot.

The man died three years later, on 19 Tishrei, according to Rahimi. He regarded the timing as particularly meaningful because the death occurred close to the anniversary of the man's renewed religious commitment.

The rabbi said the experience reinforced his understanding of the importance of respecting the deceased and supporting their families. "The body is holy," he said.

The successful resolution also demonstrated the cooperation

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between Jewish organisations, diplomatic representatives, and local authorities. Rahimi said the paperwork required coordination across borders because Israel doesn't have an embassy in Namibia. He worked with consular representatives to secure the necessary documentation. The arrangements included assistance from the South African side, which helped with the paperwork needed to transfer the body.

By the time Rahimi spoke to the *SA Jewish Report*, the coffin was scheduled to leave Namibia on a flight that afternoon. He said the process had moved faster than he'd initially expected, given the administrative requirements involved.

The case also reflects the role Chabad plays in supporting Jewish travellers and residents in countries where Jewish communities are small. Rahimi said that when he had arrived in Namibia about five years ago, the community believed there were approximately 30 to 40 Jews living across the country. He now estimates that there are close to 150. The community has developed religious activities, including services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and provides kosher food for residents and visitors.

Rahimi said Chabad aims to assist every Jewish person who comes to Namibia, regardless of their level of religious observance. "Every Jew is important for us,"

For the Israeli family, the immediate priority was to bring their father home. The intervention of Rahimi, ZAKA, and their contacts in Namibia helped them do that.

Pillay’s Peace Prize ‘a moment of disgrace’

>>Continued from page 1

But the point is that the Peace Prize is not a lifetime-achievement award for distinguished lawyers. It is supposed to advance the cause of peace."

"It is impossible to regard the timing of the award as politically neutral," said Cohen.

"What exactly does this award accomplish?" he asked. "The [Nobel] committee declares that peace requires justice. But justice requires more than confidence in the righteousness of one's position. It requires consistency, impartiality, and a willingness to subject one's own conclusions to the same scrutiny imposed on everybody else."

Israeli journalist Ben-Dror Yemini, the author of *The Industry of Lies: Media, Academia, and the Israeli-Arab Conflict*, wrote that this is "a moment of disgrace for the international community. It has proved that there is no bottom to the pit of hostility, hypocrisy, and racism directed against Israel."

He says that the UN Human Rights Council appointed Pillay to chair the commission investigating the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories. On 22 September 2024, the commission submitted a 28-page report to the UN General Assembly in which Israel is mentioned 277 times. "How many times is Hamas mentioned? Zero. The word 'terrorism' does not appear in the report either," says Yemini.

He says Pillay was "not awarded the Nobel Peace Prize despite being consumed by a profound hatred of Israel. She was chosen

precisely because hostility toward Israel is such a central part of her work."

And even now, while serving as an ad hoc judge in the Myanmar case before the International Court of Justice, "she is attempting to change and broaden the rules governing the crime of genocide to pave the way for Israel's conviction".

Director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, Benji Shulman, agrees that Pillay's antizionism may have clinched her the award, and that the Nobel may give her more influence to change the definition of genocide, in order to convict Israel of that crime.

The Iranian Embassy in South Africa congratulated Pillay, as did many South African institutions. President Cyril Ramaphosa said her Nobel "allows us to celebrate the progressive contributions she has made to strengthen peace, uphold human dignity, and bring hope in South Africa and to peoples globally".

Yet the Simon Wiesenthal Center said the Nobel Peace Prize should embody "a commitment to justice that does not bend to politics or prejudice, one that holds every nation to the same standard. This award risks reinforcing concerns that those standards change when Israel and the Jewish people are involved."

For Yemini, "We thought the international community had already reached the bottom of the barrel. We were wrong. When the most prominent defender of hatred toward Israel is awarded the highest honour of all, it is not only Goebbels who must be smiling in his grave. Orwell, too, must be turning in his."

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Israelis’ votes will shape the future of Jews everywhere



OPINION GERSHON BASKIN

On 27 October, Israelis will vote in one of the most consequential elections in our country's history. This election is about much more than who will be prime minister. It's about what kind of Israel we want to live in, what kind of democracy we want to preserve, and what future we envision for our children and grandchildren.

The consequences of this election will not stop at Israel's borders. They will reach Jewish communities throughout the world, including South Africa, and extend far beyond the Jewish people.

The past three years have demonstrated something that should now be obvious to every Jew, wherever they live: what Israel does, and what Israel fails to do, affects Jewish lives everywhere.

Since 7 October, Jews across the world have experienced the consequences of Israel's reality in profoundly personal ways. Antisemitism has surged, Jewish communities have faced hostility and intimidation, and Israel has become a central issue in political and social debates around the world. Jewish students have found themselves defending their identity on university campuses. Jewish communities have faced painful divisions. Israel's actions have influenced how Jews are perceived, whether they agree with the policies of the Israeli government or not.

We must never accept the idea that Jews abroad are responsible for the actions of Israel's government. They are not. But that doesn't change the reality that they are directly affected by those actions.

South African Jews know this especially well. That is why I want to address Israelis living in South Africa and elsewhere who remain eligible to vote in Israel.

Your voice matters. Your vote matters. And if you can make the journey to Israel to vote on 27 October, I urge you to consider doing so.

I understand that returning to Israel to cast a ballot is expensive and inconvenient. It requires time away from work and family. But the consequences of this election will accompany you long after election day, wherever you choose to live.

You may have built your lives in Johannesburg, Cape Town, London, New York, or elsewhere. But Israel remains part of your identity and part of your future. The decisions made by its government affect your families, your communities, your relationship with Israel, and the environment in which your children grow up.

Israel generally does not permit citizens to vote abroad. If you are eligible to vote, returning to Israel may be your only opportunity to participate.

This is not an appeal to support any particular party or candidate. Israelis will disagree, sometimes passionately, about the choices before them. That is the essence of democracy. But the stakes deserve serious attention.

Israel faces fundamental decisions about the independence of its judiciary, the relationship between religion and state, equality among its citizens, accountability for 7 October, the burden of military service, and the future of its democratic institutions.

And above all, Israel must decide where it is going in its relationship with the Palestinians.

For decades, Israeli governments have tried to manage the conflict rather than resolve it. The attack of 7 October demonstrated the catastrophic failure of believing that an unresolved conflict could remain contained indefinitely. The terrible war that followed demonstrated that even overwhelming military power cannot substitute for a political strategy.

There are millions of Palestinians living alongside us. They are not going anywhere. Neither are we. The fundamental question remains whether our future will be one of permanent conflict or whether political leadership can create a different reality.

I have spent nearly five decades working towards Israel-Palestinian peace. My conviction remains

unchanged: Israel will never have security until Palestinians have freedom, and Palestinians will never have freedom until Israel has security.

Whatever one's view of that proposition, the next Israeli government will make decisions with consequences for generations.

I am deeply concerned by Israelis who say they are so disappointed with politics that they no longer intend to vote. I understand their frustration. We have endured years of political divisions, broken promises, war, grief, and loss of trust in our leaders.

But withdrawing from democratic participation doesn't resolve those frustrations. It leaves decisions to others.

Democracy is not something we possess permanently. It is something we must continually sustain through participation, accountability, and respect for institutions. Elections are among the most important opportunities citizens have to influence the direction of their country.

The Jewish world also has an enormous stake in Israel's future. Israel's strength has never rested only on its military capabilities. It has also depended on its democratic character, moral purpose, social resilience, and its connection to Jewish communities everywhere.

The decisions Israelis make on 27 October will affect those foundations. They will influence Israel's standing internationally, its relations with other nations, its prospects for peace and security, and the relationship between the Jewish State and the Jewish people.

And those decisions will affect Palestinians, our neighbours across the Middle East, and many others who have no vote in Israel's election but will live with its consequences.



That is an extraordinary responsibility for every Israeli voter.

For Israelis living in South Africa, this election isn't a distant political event taking place in another country. It concerns a state whose decisions continue to have direct consequences for your lives and your communities.

If you are eligible to vote, don't underestimate the importance of your participation. If returning to Israel is possible, give serious consideration to making that journey.

Whatever your political beliefs, whoever you support, the future of Israel is too important for its citizens to abandon their role in shaping it.

Election day will come and go. But the consequences of the choices made on 27 October will be with Israelis, Jews throughout the world, Palestinians, and the entire region for many years to come.

We cannot afford indifference to our own future.

- *Gershon Baskin is a political and social entrepreneur who has dedicated his life to peace between Israel and her neighbours. He's a founding member of the Kol Ezraheihā – Kol Muwanteneihā (All of Its Citizens) political party in Israel. He's now the Middle East director for ICO (the International Communities Organisation), a United Kingdom-based nongovernmental organisation.*

Israel’s fateful election: A nation at war, a government in doubt



OPINION DR DAN DIKER

Israel is approaching one of the most consequential elections in its 78-year history. Unlike previous electoral contests dominated by economic concerns, judicial reform, or competing political personalities, this election is unfolding in the shadow of an existential, eight-front war against the Jewish and democratic state.

The stakes are even higher due to the sense of unprecedented antisemitism, defamation, and demonisation of Zionism and an inversion of moral clarity. The victim of genocide has been Nazified and placed in the defendants’ dock in the international court of public opinion. The moral inversion that’s gripped the international community, primarily in the West, has stunned even the most resilient and cynical Israeli thinkers.

The 7 October Hamas invasion and massacre represented the worst mass murder of Jews in a single day since the Nazi Holocaust. In American terms, the slaughter of approximately 1 200 Israelis would be proportionately equivalent to some 40 000 Americans murdered in 24 hours, roughly 13 September 11 attacks in a single day.

Yet the international response has produced a staggering inversion of moral and political legitimacy.

Israel, the victim of the worst terrorist invasion in its history, finds itself increasingly isolated, defamed, and delegitimised across much of the Western world. The world's only Jewish State is routinely denounced as a genocidal, apartheid, and racist entity, while its enemies wage an increasingly sophisticated campaign to undermine its very right to exist.

This is not simply a public relations challenge. It's the eighth front of Israel's war, a multidimensional

of political paralysis, potentially requiring additional elections. Netanyahu would remain caretaker prime minister until a successor government is sworn in, although the existing coalition wouldn't necessarily remain politically intact.

Three domestic issues are likely to prove decisive.

The first is the increasingly explosive controversy surrounding military service by ultra-Orthodox Jewish men.

After years of exemptions and deferments, growing numbers of Israelis are demanding a more equitable sharing of the country's military obligations through across-the-board military service.

The issue has become particularly emotional following 7 October, as hundreds of thousands of reservists and their families have carried the enormous burdens of prolonged military service.

Public frustration has intensified over ultra-Orthodox political resistance to conscription, including confrontations surrounding anti-draft demonstrations.

For Bennett, Lieberman, and other political leaders, the demand for across-the-board military service has become a defining electoral issue, transcending the traditional divisions between Israel's political right and left.

The second major issue is accountability for 7 October.

More than three years after the Hamas massacre, Israelis continue to demand answers about the catastrophic intelligence, military, and political failures that enabled thousands of terrorists to penetrate Israel's defences.

The controversy surrounding an independent state commission of inquiry remains inseparable from the broader question of political responsibility.

The third, and perhaps most fundamental issue, is national security.

The recent terrorist incident in which a flydubai copilot allegedly attempted a September 11-style mass-casualty assault has heightened concerns about the vulnerability of Israeli civilians beyond the country's borders. The incident's circumstances and reported findings still require additional verification. But the results to date are clear. The terror pilot had flown into Israel before, raising questions about the security vetting and profiling of foreign pilots, particularly from Muslim countries.

For Israeli voters, such threats reinforce an overriding question: Who can be trusted to keep Israel safe?

That question extends directly to the future of Judea and Samaria, commonly referred to internationally as the West Bank.

Despite substantial disagreements over domestic policy and political leadership, Israeli Jewish public opinion has shifted sharply against the establishment of a Palestinian state following 7 October.

Surveys conducted by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs over the past year indicate that approximately 68% to 72% of Jewish Israelis oppose Palestinian statehood under the circumstances examined.

For many Israelis, the prospect of another Hamas-controlled territory overlooking Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Israel's narrow coastal plain represents an unacceptable strategic danger.

The next prime minister will therefore face a difficult dual challenge: defending Israel's security requirements against international pressure for Palestinian statehood while rebuilding relationships with Western governments increasingly hostile to Israel.

Ultimately, this election is about far more than Netanyahu's political survival or the ambitions of his challengers.

It's about whether Israel can preserve its national security, democratic cohesion, and international legitimacy simultaneously.

Israel's next government must understand that winning on the battlefield is no longer sufficient. The Jewish and democratic state must also prevail in the international battle over its legitimacy, sovereignty, and right to defend itself.

That is what makes this election among the most fateful in Israel's history.

- *Dr Dan Diker is president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, diker@jcfa.org*

Dilemma of drunken teens at shuls

LEE TANKLE

It's a familiar sight at shul events: groups of teenagers chatting outside, catching up with friends and enjoying a degree of independence in a space their parents trust. Less visible is the alcohol that can change hands among them, and the teenagers who end the night far drunker than their parents realise.

Teen drinking came into particularly sharp focus on Simchat Torah, one of the most joyous and social celebrations on the Jewish calendar, when shuls are packed, festivities run late, and alcohol often flows freely.

Amid the dancing and celebration, however, teenagers can gain easy access to alcohol, sometimes drinking far beyond the point of experimentation and into dangerous levels of intoxication.

"It's almost free rein when it comes to getting alcohol. They can go from shul to shul if they want to, and there's just very little control. Even at the shuls that think they have controls in place, what Jewish kid can't find a way around them?" said Wendy Hendler, co-founder of Koleinu SA, which deals with abuse in the community.

"My husband and I were at a wedding once when a boy of about 15 or 16 came up to us at the bar and asked if we could get him a whisky. We said, 'No, you're underage.' He then told us he had a letter on his phone from his parents saying he was allowed to have one tot."

Hendler described how, over Simchat Torah, there were teenagers who came to their shul, drank three-quarters of a bottle of whisky and then went to another shul nearby. Hendler knows of two incidents where this led to two young adults being hospitalised, but believes there might have been others.

Another community member witnessed a teenage

boy so drunk that evening that he lost consciousness and had to be taken to hospital.

Ricky Sandler, a member of Dan's Tribe, a Johannesburg-based recovery programme for people dealing with addiction, particularly within the Jewish community, explained that while he doesn't go to shul, he can understand why drinking to excess at synagogue events is easier to do than in other spaces.

"It might start with a *l'chaim* among a group of adults, but nobody is necessarily watching the alcohol," he said. "There isn't someone whose job it is to make sure that teenagers don't get hold of it. So, more than anything else, I think we have an accessibility problem."

He said when he was getting married, he'd been drawn to a certain shul because of its young demographic. But after his struggles with addiction, he realised that shul had a problem with alcohol and taking it too far.

Teenagers may drink because they want to fit in.

"I discovered later in life that I had stopped drinking to have fun a long time before. I was drinking to fit in and to avoid feeling anxious in social situations," Sandler said. "People naturally want to feel like they belong, particularly in environments where they may feel judged. Alcohol can become a way of easing that anxiety, fitting in,

and connecting with other people."

A few years ago, Rabbi Mordechai Rodal from Chabad of Norwood saw that some congregants were struggling with substance abuse and thus would avoid coming to shul because they didn't want to be in an environment where people were drinking. So he sought to make a space where no one feels they have to drink.

"I have a rule that nobody is allowed to pressure anyone to drink. If somebody says no, that's the end of it. And it's worked really well. We haven't had

son, and there's nothing I can do about that."

Rodal also explained that bottles will rarely be out on display. The shul will sometimes do Dom Pérignon in a slush machine, jelly shots, or even have a gin and tonic bar.

"It's a way of enjoying a drink without drinking straight alcohol. We have a gin and tonic bar every year, so people tend to drink less. They can enjoy one or two drinks rather than drinking excessively, and it has worked well for us," he said.

Hendler said, "We know that teenagers are going to drink and experiment, and we don't believe there is any way to stop that entirely. For most teenagers, that experimentation won't lead to a lifelong problem. The concern is that you never know which child may be vulnerable to addiction. What begins as teenage experimentation could, for some, spark a lifetime of alcoholism.

"You don't know who may be vulnerable to addiction, which is why there needs to be controls," she said. "My feeling is that we need a community-wide campaign, bringing together leading experts and backed by rabbis and shuls. And it's not only about shuls. It's *simchas*, Barmitzvahs, and other communal events. There are so many spaces in the Jewish community where teenagers have easy access to alcohol."

For Rodal, the only way that alcohol abuse can change is when people acknowledge that, while it may be fun for some, drinking is a real problem for others.

"You may not be able to relate to someone who struggles to say no, but some people have that difficulty for various reasons," he said. "Pressuring someone who may be struggling with addiction to drink is unconscionable. You have no idea what the consequences could be of pushing somebody to have just one more drink."



AI-generated image

anybody drunk here for years," Rodal said.

"I do want people to loosen up and get into the spirit of things. I actually walk around with a bottle of whisky, a bottle of tequila, and shot glasses, but otherwise everything is kept behind the bar. We have bartenders as well as two people from the shul who know everyone and their ages, and they have strict instructions not to serve anybody underage. Sometimes a father may get a drink and slip it to his

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South African
Jewish Report

Nothing noble about the peace prize

When we heard that a retired South African judge had won the Nobel Peace Prize, I am sure every one of us wanted to celebrate and feel proud. That is until we found out that it was Navi Pillay, the former United Nations (UN) human rights chief who has graced the pages of the *SA Jewish Report* whenever her bias against us has shown itself.

Unfortunately, as a Jew, I am horrified that she was given this internationally prestigious award for her work towards peace. She is clearly not a person who wants peace in the Israeli Palestinian crisis. She has for a long, long time made this clear and, in her actions, has rather entrenched the animosity and hatred between the two.

Five years ago, UN Watch called for Pillay to resign from heading a UN inquiry into clashes between Israel and Hamas the previous May. The organisation alleged that she had violated UN rules by failing to disclose statements and positions demonstrating her unapologetic prejudice against Israel. In my view, the inquiry's subsequent outcome confirmed the concern that she had prejudged the matter and could not approach Israel objectively.

"Never throughout her UN tenure did Pillay use such dismissive language regarding any other country, not even against serial abusers such as China, Russia, Iran, Syria, or North Korea," says Hillel Neuer, the executive director of UN Watch and an international human rights lawyer.

"Her narrative of who is the villain is set in stone. Ms Pillay has long ago made up her mind. Asking Navi Pillay to head an inquiry examining Israel is like asking a vegetarian to review a steakhouse. When it comes to Israel, as our legal brief demonstrates, Pillay is the complete opposite of impartial."

Her hostility towards Israel was established already by 2009, when she led the UN's Durban Review Conference in Switzerland, the follow-up to the 2001 World Conference against Racism, which had descended into an antisemitic spectacle. Pillay repeatedly lambasted Jewish community activists for challenging decisions made at the conference.

As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2010, she again nailed her colours to the mast, saying "the Israeli government treats international law with perpetual disdain". Then in 2017, she declared Israel guilty of apartheid, a declared crime against humanity.

In 2023, she gave a lecture in which she declared Israel's treatment of Palestinians "inhumane" and defended the systematic singling out of Israel under a targeted agenda item at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). She then signed a South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (SA-BDS) coalition petition to sanction Israel.

And so it continued. Five years back, the then South African Zionist Federation chairperson, Rowan Polovin, said, "Pillay is well known for her ongoing and extreme anti-Israel rhetoric and meetings with Hamas. She's a highly compromised individual whose obvious bias should render her unfit for any objective inquiry into Israel."

In the months preceding 7 October, Pillay chaired a UNHRC inquiry into "all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law" in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, arising from events in May 2021. Although 27 UN member states condemned the inquiry, the council produced findings that, in my view, portrayed Israel as predictably depraved. It is little wonder that critics described the process under Pillay as an "anti-Israel inquisition".

Following 7 October, while her commission didn't deny Israeli women were sexually abused by Palestinians, she took a far harder line in condemning Israeli soldiers for their alleged sexual assaults on Palestinians. She was also at the helm of the first UN commission to "declare" that Israel was committing "genocide" in Gaza. How could such an impartial person even accept this role? Does this sound like a peace icon?

In her position at the UN, she constantly went after and demonised the Jewish State.

This self-same woman is now being held up as an international icon of peace, someone said to have devoted her life to reconciliation. She has undoubtedly done good work in other areas, but that cannot erase the central question raised by her record on Israel: how can someone whose interventions have repeatedly delegitimised the Jewish State credibly be celebrated as a champion of peace?

We aren't privy to whom Pillay may have been up against because the Nobel Committee doesn't make the unsuccessful nominees public. But public speculation included Sudan's Emergency Response Rooms, a network of civilian volunteers providing food, healthcare, and other essential assistance amid the civil war. Had it won, the prize would have highlighted courageous grassroots humanitarian action in a gravely underreported crisis. That would have been a worthy choice.

Mykola Kuleba and Save Ukraine were also said to be contenders. Kuleba's organisation worked to bring Ukrainian children and other vulnerable civilians back from Russian-controlled areas. This would have emphasised protecting children from the consequences of war.

And I am sure there were many other legitimate recipients. However, in Pillay's case, her record on Israel surely raised legitimate questions about her impartiality, which should have been red-flagged by the Nobel Committee.

What exactly has her recent contribution been towards humanitarian protection, peace, and stability? In my view, she has done exactly the opposite in thriving on and nurturing the hatred against Israel.

The fact that Hamas – the very terrorist organisation that massacred 1 200 Jews in Israel and violated, raped, and brutalised so many more in southern Israel on 7 October – congratulated Pillay for her prize is profoundly telling. What kind of peace activist is lauded by terrorists?

Now, as we have acknowledged, it is not that in her lifetime Pillay hasn't done good. She has. However, it is not just Israel she has crossed. Under her leadership, the UN human rights office was said to have exposed more than 50 vulnerable Uyghur activists to the Chinese government, putting their and their families' lives at risk. The World Uyghur Congress has formally objected to her peace prize.

I recognise that when Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, there were many who felt De Klerk shouldn't have won it. Perhaps it can be a controversial prize. However, when someone holds an office where they make international decisions and inquiries into humanitarian issues, surely the very position itself demands that you need to be impartial, unbiased, and fair.

Nothing in Pillay's behaviour has shown her to be anything but unapologetically anti-Israel. Her behaviour, I believe, has impacted on the world's view of Israel and the Jewish people. When there is such a huge increase in antisemitism the world over, giving such a person a peace prize is a true slap in the face to the Jewish world.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Protecting women needs to be as vital as community safety

OPINION

ROZANNE SACK



Since 15 July, the bodies of at least 11 women have been found across Ekurhuleni, in Kempton Park, KwaThema, Dawn Park, Tembisa, and beyond. Some were dumped beside roads. One lay half-naked near a cemetery. Several have still not been identified, and only two had been reported missing.

The police have not confirmed a serial killer, and President Cyril Ramaphosa told the nation on 29 September that there is no evidence yet of a single perpetrator. We take that seriously and will not speculate. But it cannot be where the conversation ends.

Whether these women were killed by one man or by 11 different men, the message is the same. In South Africa, a woman can vanish, be murdered, and lie unnamed, with almost nobody noticing until there are enough bodies to make the news. That is not a crime story. It is a red alert.

Between April and June this year, 559 women were murdered in South Africa and 9 201 rapes were reported to the police. That is roughly six women killed and 100 rapes reported every single day – and rape is one of the most under-reported crimes there is. In 2023/24, 3 422 women were murdered. UN Women ranks South Africa's femicide rate among the highest in the world.

Gender-based violence (GBV) was declared a national disaster last year. But on 29 September, Ramaphosa admitted that the state had failed women, and that seven years ago, in the same month, he had stood before the nation about the very same crisis. "The women of South Africa are angry," he said. He announced a 60-day audit of women's safety, a 90-day review of unresolved GBV cases, and a crackdown on alcohol abuse.

These steps are welcome. But we have heard speeches, summits, and national strategies before. Meanwhile, Ekurhuleni station commanders have been telling the police minister about broken landlines and staff shortages. Women don't need more jaw-jaw. They need a police station that answers the phone, victim support, cases that reach court, and perpetrators who are convicted.

It is tempting for the Jewish community to read these headlines as something happening far away. At Koleinu SA, we know better. We sit with women and children from our own community who've been abused in their homes, in their relationships, and in institutions they trusted. Being white, being Jewish, and living behind a boom gate doesn't make us protected. Abuse happens in Glenhazel and Sea Point, just as it does in Tembisa.

That is not to diminish who is bearing the brunt. The Ekurhuleni victims are overwhelmingly black women from working-class communities, with far fewer resources than most of us have. Our privilege may buy us distance from some risks. It doesn't buy us safety, and it must never buy our silence.

Think about how we move through the world. When we travel to Israel, many of us walk alone to shul, to a friend, or back from dinner without a second thought. At home, most of us would never walk on our own, even when we have to. We have accepted panic buttons, locked car doors, and "text me when you're home" as normal. It is not normal.

Our community is very good at programmes: self-defence classes, safety talks, awareness workshops. Koleinu SA runs many of them, and they matter. But a workshop teaches a woman how to survive a system that has failed her. It does not fix the system. We can attend every course on offer and still have no real protection.

The question is what real protection looks like for the South African Jewish community, and what we owe to the women beyond it.

Bring the same seriousness to GBV that we bring

to security. Our community has built impressive infrastructure to protect us from antisemitic threats. We should ask how that expertise, and that sense of urgency, can be turned towards women's safety, in public spaces, at communal events, and in getting women home at night.

Make every institution safe by policy, not by goodwill. Every shul, school, youth movement, and communal organisation should have a written safeguarding and abuse policy, a named person to report to, trained staff, and a commitment to involve the police when a crime is disclosed. Parents and congregants should ask to see these policies.

Our rabbis must speak plainly. Abuse thrives on silence and on misplaced loyalty. Rabbinic leaders can say from the *bimah*, as many leading *poskim* (legal scholars) have, that reporting abuse to the police is not *mesirah* (reporting of a Jew to non-Jewish authorities). They can make clear that no woman should be pressured to stay in a dangerous home for the sake of *shalom bayit* (peace in the home), and that no woman should be trapped in a marriage because a husband withholds a gett.



Believe women, no matter who the abuser is. In a small community, the abuser is often someone we know – a donor, a professional, a well-liked father. When status protects perpetrators, victims stop coming forward. We must back victims publicly, not just in private.

Fund the response, not just the awareness. Survivors need counselling, legal support, and, often, money to leave. Communal funders should treat this as core welfare, not a once-a-year campaign.

Involve men. Fathers, teachers, and youth leaders shape how our boys understand respect, consent, and power. GBV is not a women's issue that men attend workshops about. It is a men's issue first.

Stand with women beyond our suburbs. We can hold our leaders to the 60-day audit and 90-day review, support shelters and organisations working in Ekurhuleni, and show up at vigils and marches rather than retreating further behind our walls.

Busisiwe Mahlangu, Itumeleng Kekana, Nomfesane Mjobo, Elizabeth Moselakgomo, and Dineo Motapane were daughters, sisters, and mothers. Others still have no names. Every one of them deserved to walk home.

• Rozanne Sack is a co-founder of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jewish and wider community.

Bomb threat puts Florida’s united front against antisemitism to the test

NICOLA MILTZ

A bomb threat at a Jewish preschool in Florida, United States this week triggered a swift, coordinated police response, highlighting the extensive security measures protecting Jewish communities amid growing concerns about antisemitism.

A threatening phone call to the Donna Klein Jewish Academy in Boca Raton, north of Miami, prompted the evacuation of several nearby buildings at the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County campus on Monday, 12 October. The campus houses four other Jewish schools.

“I received a message from the school around 16:45 to say the school was in lockdown as there had been a bomb threat,” said one mom who grew up in Johannesburg. “My son was on the soccer fields at the time. There are many South African expats here. You can imagine how we all charged to the school frantically to see what was happening.

“It was frightening. Police and campus security acted very swiftly, cordoning off the roads and making sure things were under control.”

Authorities subsequently determined there was no credible threat and all children and staff were safe.

The threat underscored the importance of close cooperation between Jewish institutions, communal security organisations, and law enforcement agencies, a defining feature of the approach that the *SA Jewish Report* witnessed on a recent trip to the United States.

Across South Florida, a coordinated effort involving police, government authorities, university administrators, religious leaders, and Jewish security organisations is helping communities confront threats through legislation, intelligence-sharing, government funding, and extensive security preparations.

For Johannesburg-born Jemma Blumenthal, 20, this commitment to protecting Jewish life in Miami is deeply personal.

At Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, where she studies, Blumenthal enjoys something increasingly precious on university campuses grappling with antisemitism: the freedom to be openly and proudly Jewish without fear.

“I love it here. It feels like a home away from home,” said Blumenthal, who matriculated from King David Linksfield before moving to Miami 18 months ago.

At FIU, a sprawling public university of approximately 55 000 students, including 3 500 Jewish students, Jewish life is visible and vibrant.

“Students can wear *kippot*, celebrate Shabbat, attend Jewish educational programmes, and openly express their connection to Israel,” said Jon Warech, executive director of FIU Hillel.

The university received an A rating from the Anti-Defamation League for its response to campus antisemitism.

Yet Blumenthal knows that even here, antisemitism hasn’t disappeared. On 7 October, the third anniversary of the Hamas massacre, protesters confronted Jewish students on campus.

“It was a very difficult day for us. Protesters chose that day to come and shout at us. It made me feel sick,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. “It was a little scary, but the police and Hillel representatives made us feel safe at all times.”

For Lia Mitrani, 19, a business analytics and marketing student from Spain, the contrast with university life in her home country is stark. “No one wants to be a Jewish student in Spain anymore. Campuses are super pro-Palestine and super anti-Israel. It’s frightening, horrible,” she said.

On 7 October, FIU president Jeanette Nuñez addressed Jewish students in solidarity, while a minute’s silence was observed at a

university sports match in memory of the Hamas victims.

FIU Chief of Police Alexander Casas said building relationships with students before crises arise is central to the university’s approach.

“The students see us as their friend. They feel seen,” he said.

“Relationships happen when nothing’s going on, not when you are commemorating something.”

His officers know Hillel students personally and have attended Shabbat dinners.

Ahead of the 7 October protest, police conducted a major threat assessment, deploying additional officers to protect students while respecting lawful protest.

US Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon warned on 6 October that universities failing to protect Jewish

students risk serious consequences.

“Universities that tolerate this behaviour or mollicoddle these students and faculty are doing so at their peril,” she said.

Universities receiving federal funding are bound by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, colour, or national origin, including certain forms of antisemitic discrimination involving shared ancestry.

The Trump administration has prioritised enforcement through federal investigations and potential funding consequences, although its approach has sparked debate over academic freedom and political expression.

Beyond university campuses, Miami’s law enforcement agencies have adopted a similarly proactive approach.

Miami-Dade Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz declared, “We will not tolerate antisemitism or hate in any form.” Her office has increased patrols around houses of worship, conducted hate-crime prevention briefings, and reinforced security during Jewish holidays.

Unusually, rabbis play an active role within Miami-Dade’s law enforcement structure. Rabbi Mark Rosenberg serves as senior adviser to the sheriff and chief chaplain. Together with Rabbi Bentzion Korf, head emissary of Chabad-Lubavitch of Florida, they help bridge religious and cultural differences.

Rosenberg, who testified before the US Senate last year, stressed the importance of legislation in confronting antisemitism before it escalates.

Florida’s House Bill 269, enacted in 2023, introduced offences addressing certain forms of religious intimidation, harassment, and threatening conduct. Separately, painting a swastika on a synagogue wall can constitute a third-degree felony under Florida law, depending on the damage caused.

“If we take legitimate action like this today, then we can stop hate and antisemitism before it spirals out of control like it has so many times in history,” Rosenberg said.

The legislation doesn’t prohibit peaceful criticism of Israel or lawful protest, but seeks to distinguish constitutionally protected expression from criminal intimidation.

This collaborative approach extends to the Miami Beach Police Department, where officers work closely with Jewish communal leaders, synagogues, and schools.

Florida has also incorporated the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism into state law and adopted legislation restricting certain government contracts with companies boycotting Israel.

Crucially, Jewish institutions aren’t expected to shoulder the enormous financial burden of protecting themselves.

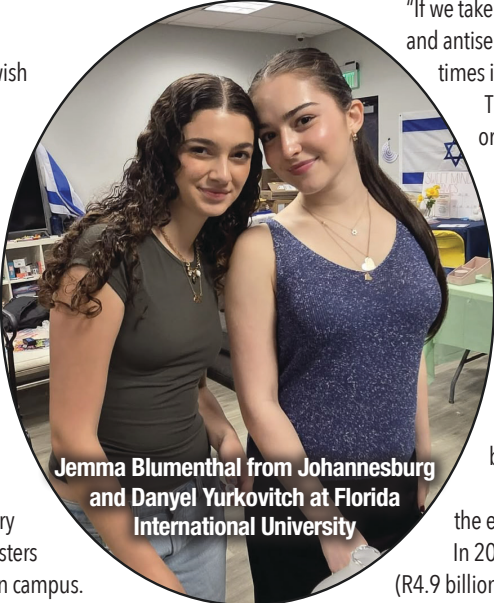
In 2026, the federal government made \$300 million (R4.9 billion) available nationally through its Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Eligible institutions could apply for grants of up to \$200 000 (R3.3 million) per site for security improvements, including surveillance cameras, reinforced entrances, protective barriers, and security personnel.

Working with the Secure Community Network (SCN) and Community Security Service, Miami’s Jewish community has developed sophisticated intelligence-gathering and threat-monitoring capabilities.

SCN uses real-time intelligence and digital mapping to monitor potential threats to Jewish communities, including internationally. Specialist analysts track extremist rhetoric, online activity and the digital footprints of potential threat actors.



Rabbis Mark Rosenberg and Bentzion Korf with Miami-Dade Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz



Jemma Blumenthal from Johannesburg and Danyel Yurkovitch at Florida International University



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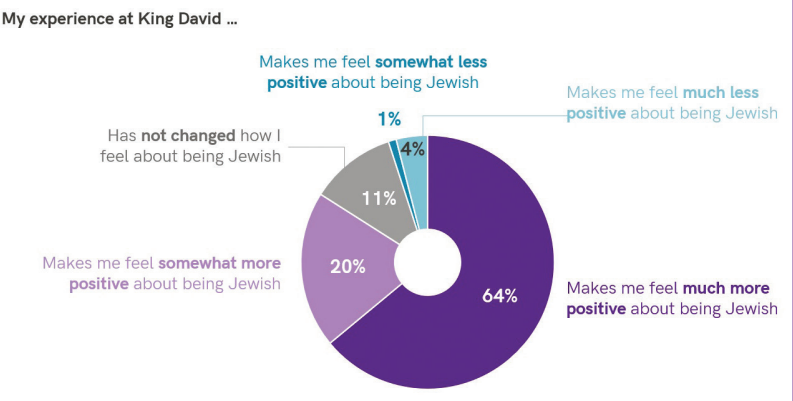
Jewish pride rising even as teens navigate antisemitism

CLAUDIA GROSS

King David High School pupils are increasingly proud of being Jewish and feel emotionally connected to Israel, according to the latest research conducted by the South African Board of Jewish Education.

However, pupils reported different experiences of antisemitism, with some having become more anxious about identifying publicly as Jewish.

Josh Sevitz, head of Jewish education at King David Schools, said the findings continued a positive trend seen since the research began in 2014.



“What I’ll say for all the studies, which is quite remarkable from the 2014 trajectory through to now, is that there’s been this upward trajectory of pride in being Jewish and association to being Jewish, and comfort with being Jewish,” he said.

The survey examines Jewish identity, attitudes towards Israel, perceptions of antisemitism, and pupils’ experiences of their school. It is conducted every four years to track pupils from when they begin high school until their final year.

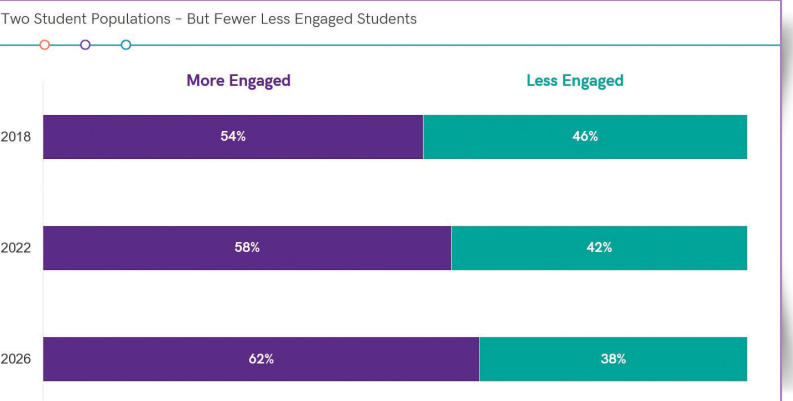
The 2026 research surveyed 161 Grade 8 pupils and 180 in Grade 12. Among the matrics, 110 had also been surveyed as Grade 8 pupils in 2022, allowing researchers to examine attitude changes as they’ve grown older.

Sevitz told the *SA Jewish Report* that the research helped the school identify areas requiring attention rather than simply measuring whether attitudes had improved or declined. Earlier studies had highlighted the importance of nuanced Israel education, experiential learning, and parental involvement. The latest findings have prompted further reflection on how the school teaches formal Jewish studies.

One of the strongest findings concerned the effect of the school itself on Jewish identity. Asked how their experience at King David had influenced their feelings about being Jewish, 64% said it made them feel much more positive. Another 20% said it made them feel somewhat more positive.

Eleven percent said their experience had made no difference. The remaining 5% reported feeling less positive, including 4% who felt much less positive and 1% who felt somewhat less positive. Sevitz said the result was particularly encouraging because it showed the influence pupils believed their school had on their identity.

“How can we further uplift formal Jewish studies?” he said, describing this as a key focus for the school. He explained that Jewish studies must function both as an academic subject and as an opportunity for youngsters to find personal meaning.



The findings also point to strong Jewish pride among older pupils, with 87% of Grade 12 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel proud when people knew they are Jewish. Among Grade 8s, the figure was 80%.

Pride in the Jewish people was similarly high, with 85% of matrics and 82% of Grade 8s expressing pride. Both figures reflect a substantial increase from earlier surveys.

The research also found a stronger connection to Jews living in Israel. Among Grade 8 pupils, 68% reported a strong connection, compared with 46% in 2022. Among matrics, the figure rose to 64%, from 38% four years earlier.

Sevitz said the post-7 October period appeared to have strengthened

pupils’ emotional attachment to Israelis and their pride in Israel. “There was this major affinity to the people of Israel that jumped up,” he said, describing one of the clearest changes in the latest findings.

However, the survey also suggests that older teens are developing more nuanced attitudes towards Israel. Among the pupils followed from Grade 8 in 2022 to Grade 12 in 2026, agreement that Jews should stand up for Israel “no matter what” declined from 85% to 67%.

The proportion of pupils who said they felt upset when Jews criticised Israel also fell, from 74% to 62%. These results suggest that a strong connection to Israel can coexist with greater openness to criticism as pupils mature.

The study examined how pupils view antisemitism, both internationally and in South Africa. Thirty-seven percent said they had personally experienced some form of antisemitism in the previous year, either in person or online. Another 29% were unsure, while 34% said they had not experienced it.

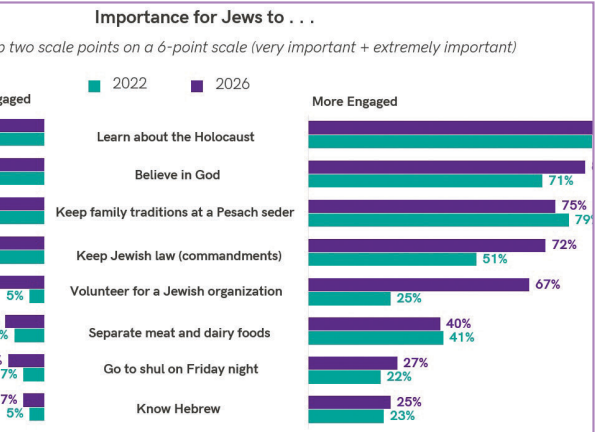
Respondents viewed antisemitism as a more serious problem elsewhere in the world than locally. Seventy-seven percent considered it a very serious problem internationally, compared with 32% who said the same about South Africa.

The survey identified experiences in everyday environments, including schools, sporting events, public spaces, and online platforms. Reported incidents included verbal harassment, antisemitic slurs, online abuse, and hostility linked to Israel that blurred the distinction between Jewish identity and political views.

Visible Jewish identity was another focus. Since 7 October, 41% of respondents said they had become more inclined to wear, carry, or display items that could identify them as Jewish. Thirty-six percent reported no change, while 23% had become less inclined.

Online expression produced a different picture. Twenty-eight percent said they were more inclined to post content identifying them as Jewish or expressing their views on Jewish issues. Forty-two percent reported no change, while 31% were less inclined.

The findings suggest that greater pride doesn’t necessarily remove concerns about public identification. Students may feel more connected



to their community while remaining cautious about expressing that identity in certain settings.

The study also examined the impact of two incidents on pupils’ feelings about displaying their Jewish identity. In 2022, anti-Israel protests in Glenhazel had left 31% of respondents feeling anxious about publicly identifying as Jewish.

In the latest survey, students were asked how an episode involving Roedeans School had affected their willingness to wear their King David uniform outside school. Roedeans tennis players refused to play King David girls. Thirty-two percent said it had made them feel very proud to wear their uniform, while 18% felt somewhat proud. Thirty-six percent reported no change, while approximately 13% said they felt anxious.

Sevitz said the response to the Roedeans episode had been markedly different from the reaction to the Glenhazel protests. He attributed this partly to how the school had responded, with pupils reporting increased pride in their association with King David.

He also pointed to the role of school leadership, experiential learning, and parental involvement in building Jewish identity. The school’s Division of Informal Jewish Education runs programmes including Shabbatonim, immersive Grade 10 and Grade 11 experiences, and additional learning opportunities.

The survey, Sevitz said, offered an opportunity to build on positive findings while identifying where further work was needed. For King David, the challenge is to sustain students’ connection to Jewish life and Israel while ensuring that Jewish education remains meaningful as they grow older. The findings indicate that pride is strong, but pupils’ experiences of antisemitism and their comfort with public Jewish identity remain varied.



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Wannabe mayors debate how to fix Joburg

LEE TANKLE

Johannesburg's mounting problems took centre stage as mayoral hopefuls faced off on Sunday 11 October over how they would get the city working again.

Moderated by journalist Mandy Wiener, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' Great Mayoral Debate brought together candidates from the ANC, DA, Patriotic Alliance (PA), Build One South Africa (BOSA), Freedom Front (FF) Plus, and African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP). They were pressed on their plans to address Johannesburg's most urgent issues and why voters should trust them to lead the city.

"For many Johannesburg residents, the challenges aren't abstract," said Wiener. "You feel them in many different ways, from potholes and traffic lights to refuse collection. But the bigger question is also one of governance: does the city, in fact, have the ability to manage its finances?"

"It is genuinely no exaggeration to say that this election is Joburg's last chance to turn around," said DA mayoral candidate and former party leader Helen Zille.

"Joburg is still South Africa's most important city, but it is failing fast. I don't have to summarise the collapse of infrastructure and the resulting collapse of basic services for you; you all know about that. But I want to make this point: It will be difficult enough to rescue Joburg now; in five years, I believe it will be too late," said Zille.

Arguing that Johannesburg's next government is likely to be a coalition, BOSA's mayoral candidate, Nobuntu Hlazo-Webster said its success would depend on competent leadership, merit-based appointments, and a clear programme of action.

"We talk about big parties and small parties, but what we're actually dealing with is old parties and new parties. Being a big party doesn't necessarily make you a big solution," she said. "If we are going to have coalitions that work, we have to make sure they are made up of competent people who appoint others on merit. Ultimately, the choice you're making is between a party like BOSA and parties such as MK [the uMkhonto weSizwe Party] and the EFF [Economic Freedom Fighters]. From what we've seen of the leadership of those parties, including the incumbent party, appointments aren't always made on merit and are often based on patronage."

For ACDP mayoral candidate Bishop Dulton Adams, the challenge is not in the choice of mayor or 240 councillors; it's whether they will value the people of Johannesburg.

"After 4 November, the city will not change immediately. The traffic lights will not suddenly be fixed, illegal dumping will not stop, the roads will not immediately be repaired, and the water problems will not disappear. What we need to do is mobilise communities. Communities are hurting, and people are saying there is no hope for Johannesburg," he said.

"You cannot look to 10 MMCs [members of the mayoral committee] or a mayor alone to rebuild Johannesburg. You have to get the people involved in making the city work.

"If I become mayor of Johannesburg, I will ask my party to allow me to take the best people from across the different parties and appoint them as MMCs. Coalitions become unstable when you have parties with different ideologies and beliefs pulling in different directions," Adams said.

There are some caveats for coalitions, though. FF Plus candidate Franco de Lange drew a hard line in the sand, saying, "MK, EFF never. Never, ever, ever. You don't work with antisemitic parties. We have always



supported Israel. It is the root of our religion, which comes out of the Holy Land."

Zille, on the other hand, said there are definitely 490 000 people in Joburg who want to save the city, so they know what they need to do, which in her view is to vote for the DA.

"But if we don't get the 50% plus one needed to implement our turnaround strategy, what happens will depend on the percentage we do get. If we get 40% or less, we are unlikely to be in government. The reason is that the ANC, EFF, MK, PA, ActionSA, Al Jama-ah, and a few other parties could

get to 50% first. That would mean more of the same.

"If we get 45%, however, we could form a coalition with some of the parties with which we have successfully governed before."

Incumbent Johannesburg Mayor Dada Morero, the ANC's candidate, said that following Johannesburg's amalgamation into a single municipality in 2000, the city had focused on addressing infrastructure backlogs and spatial inequalities, particularly in townships. He said this was followed by a 10-year infrastructure investment plan, which by 2015/2016 amounted to about

R100 billion.

However, in 2016, those plans were reversed.

Following the turnaround strategy adopted on 6 March this year, the ANC made it clear that infrastructure investment had to be a priority. "In the 2026 budget, we increased capital expenditure to almost R9 billion and our maintenance allocation from about 5.6% to 8%, with the intention of investing in infrastructure and addressing Johannesburg's challenges," said Morero.

"Johannesburg cannot rebuild through government alone. We need partnerships

with the private sector, such as in Midrand, where we are completing a 10-megalitre water reservoir with developers," he said.

PA mayoral candidate and deputy president Kenny Kunene, Johannesburg's MMC for Transport, identified financial sustainability as the city's biggest challenge.

"We need to improve revenue collection. The city is bleeding money through illegal electricity and water connections, including at hijacked buildings and houses, and through water leakages," he said.

Kunene called for Johannesburg's financial model to be restructured, including ring-fencing revenue for entities such as the Johannesburg Roads Agency. He argued that the city needed to move beyond repeatedly repairing potholes and instead reconstruct ageing roads, bridges, and stormwater infrastructure, which he estimated would require R100 billion.

He also identified unfunded provincial mandates, including health services and libraries, as a drain on the city's finances.

Gaza, Haredi enlistment, and Netanyahu dominate election debate in English

CLAUDIA GROSS

Nine Israeli political representatives faced questions about Gaza, military service, and the failures surrounding 7 October during an online English-language election debate on Sunday. Their exchanges exposed sharp divisions over Israel's security, political leadership, and the future direction of the country, ahead of the 27 October election.

Presented by Yad L'Olim, the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), and Telfed, the online debate was moderated by former Knesset member Dov Lipman, alongside JNS journalist Ruthie Bloom.

The participants represented parties across Israel's political spectrum. They included Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli of Likud, Alex Rif of Yashar, Oded Forer of Yisrael Beiteinu, and Gilad Kariv of the Democrats. Also participating were representatives of B'Yachad, Religious Zionism, Otzma Yehudit, Amcha Yisrael, and The Reservists-Economic Party.

The first question they were asked is how Israel could prevent another attack like the Hamas-led massacre of 7 October. Candidates offered sharply contrasting assessments of the government's conduct and the steps needed to prevent Hamas rebuilding its military capabilities.

Chikli argued that Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza, when it withdrew its settlements and permanent military presence, had been a fundamental mistake. He also criticised the Oslo agreements and the 2011 prisoner exchange that secured the release of hostage Gilad Shalit.

He maintained that Israel needed to retain control over its security position in Gaza and continue targeting Hamas commanders. He argued that previous Israeli governments' decisions had contributed to the conditions preceding the October 2023 attack.

Rif offered a different assessment, accusing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government of failing to turn military achievements into lasting strategic change. "We will not buy temporary quiet while Hamas prepares the next 7 October," Rif said.

He called for the dismantling of Hamas's military and governing power, and prevention of it rebuilding. He advocated cooperation with the United States and regional states to protect Israel's long-term security.

Forer criticised Netanyahu's decision to continue transferring money to Hamas before the attack. He argued that Israel should end its responsibility for Gaza's civilian population and transfer that responsibility to Egypt. He called for the Israel Defense Forces to retain freedom of action against terrorist organisations, including before they launch attacks.

Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, representing Amcha Yisrael, proposed separating Gaza's civilian population from Hamas fighters. She advocated establishing a weapons-free zone and facilitating voluntary emigration for Gazans who wished to leave.

Yishai Fleisher of Otzma Yehudit argued that Israel should regain control of Gaza and encourage emigration. He opposed transferring control to Egypt, warning that this could create further security threats.

Kariv called for a change of political leadership, arguing that Netanyahu's government had failed to prevent the attack. He said Israel should begin implementing US President Donald Trump's proposed 20-point plan for Gaza.

Moshe Tur-Paz of B'Yachad also criticised the government's handling of the war. He advocated disarming Hamas, replacing Qatar and Turkey with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in Gaza's future arrangements, and increasing the number of soldiers available to protect Israeli communities.

The candidates also debated compulsory military service for Haredi men, an increasingly contentious issue as Israeli reservists continue serving repeated tours during the war.

Forer called for every Israeli citizen to serve from the age of 18. Those unsuitable for

military service would instead perform national service in hospitals, police departments, and fire services. He argued that exemptions placed an unfair burden on people who serve, work, and pay taxes. Forer proposed withholding state benefits from people who refused both military and national service.

Simcha Rothman of Religious Zionism defended his party's approach, saying it sought to increase Haredi participation in the army, society, and the economy. He rejected proposals that would alienate the community from the state.

Rif also called for a practical and enforceable arrangement to increase enlistment. The exchanges reflected a broader dispute over equality of responsibility, religious identity, and the state's obligations to different communities.

Another major point of disagreement was how Israel should investigate the security and political failures of 7 October.



Chikli called for a national, parity-based investigative committee rather than one controlled by the judiciary. He argued that the investigation should examine events before the attack as well as the failures on the day itself.

Rothman similarly supported a committee backed by at least 80 Knesset members from the coalition and opposition. He argued that the judiciary should not investigate itself because it had been involved in security decisions.

Kariv rejected this approach. He called for a state commission of inquiry, arguing that government ministers who held office at the time of the attack had an interest in controlling the investigation. The government should not appoint the body responsible for examining its own conduct.

Kariv maintained that a state commission offered the appropriate mechanism for establishing the truth.

Candidates were also asked whom their parties would recommend to form the next government.

Chikli and Rothman backed Netanyahu. Hassan-Nahoum said Amcha Yisrael would support Netanyahu as the leader of the right-wing bloc, although she called for a different approach to the war. Rif named Yashar leader Gadi Eisenkot, arguing that he could unite Israelis across political divisions. Tur-Paz backed B'Yachad leader Naftali Bennett, citing his experience as a former prime minister.

Forer said his priority was replacing the current government. He identified Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman as the candidate best equipped to lead a new administration.

The possibility of a Palestinian state also revealed deep divisions. Several representatives rejected any form of Palestinian statehood. Chikli pointed to settlement expansion in Judea and Samaria as evidence of the current government's position.

Children process change in new King David musical

GILANA LAB

For the pupils of King David Ariel, preparing for their school's first-ever theatrical production has meant more than learning lines, lyrics, and choreography. It has given children with different abilities, learning needs, and levels of confidence an opportunity to work together, discover their strengths, and explore the changes they've experienced since leaving King David Victory Park.

From *Tape to TikTok*, written and produced by music and drama teacher Lorri Strauss, follows a group of Grade 7 pupils who must adjust to a new school after the closure of King David Victory Park. While unpacking boxes from their old campus, they discover a mysterious tape player that transports them through decades of music, from the 1960s to today's TikTok generation.

"The emotional heart of the story is very much inspired by their experiences," says Strauss. "I didn't want to simply recreate individual children's stories, because this is a fictional musical, but the feelings are real. The sense of losing a place that felt like home, having to say goodbye to people and routines that were familiar, and then arriving somewhere new and wondering, 'Where do I fit in?' are very real experiences for many of our pupils."

When King David Ariel moved to the King David Linksfield campus, the children left behind a school where they had spent years building friendships and memories. Strauss, who attended King David Victory Park throughout her own school career, understood their attachment to the campus. She was also experiencing her own transition, having moved from teaching drama at King David Sandton to becoming King David Ariel's music and drama teacher.

"I could see that there were still a lot of feelings that needed to be processed, such as the sadness of saying goodbye and the uncertainty of starting somewhere new. I thought, what better way to help children work through those emotions than through theatre? I created *From Tape to TikTok* as a story about saying goodbye to the past while finding the courage to embrace the future."

The pupils have played an active role in developing the musical.

"What's been beautiful is watching the children contribute pieces of themselves to the story. We workshoped a lot of the script and I allowed pupils to bring their own emotions, personalities, and experiences into the characters, which has made the production feel incredibly authentic."

For some pupils, taking part in the production has involved overcoming challenges that make performing particularly demanding. Strauss says children who struggle with anxiety, concentration, or sensory processing have shown determination throughout rehearsals, even when conventional approaches haven't worked.

"Putting on a production with children who have different learning needs, different levels of confidence, and different ways of processing

information requires enormous patience, flexibility, and creativity. You can't always approach a rehearsal conventionally. Sometimes you have to stop, regroup, change the plan, and find another way in.

"For many of these children, performing in front of an audience is a huge step. Some battle with anxiety, some struggle with confidence or concentration, and some find the sensory and social demands of rehearsals challenging. Yet they have shown such determination."

During the first dress rehearsal, Strauss was able to see the progress made since the beginning of the year. Pupils who had initially struggled to participate were now performing with confidence, including one child for whom music had previously been overwhelming.

"I looked at each child and knew the journey they had taken to get there: the struggles, the difficult moments behind the scenes, and the



incredible growth. I saw a child who had been reluctant to participate in my class at the beginning of the year now shining on stage; a child for whom music had once been such a sensory overload that he needed noise-cancelling headphones now singing his heart out; and an anxious child dancing with

confidence.

"Watching these transformations unfold was extraordinary. It reminded me exactly why I love theatre so much. There is something truly magical about creating an environment where children can move beyond what they believe they are capable of and discover what is possible."

The musical's journey through different decades allows pupils to explore how music, fashion, and technology have changed while introducing them to songs their parents will recognise. For Strauss, the journey reflects the experience of moving forward without losing the memories and friendships that shaped the past.

"There is also something quite symbolic about the journey. We literally rewind to the past before moving forward into the future. The message is that change can be frightening, but it can also be exciting. We can't stay in the past, even when the past is beautiful. We have to take the memories, friendships, and lessons with us and use them to help build something new."

Strauss credits King David Ariel principal Andrea Ben and the school staff for supporting the production. She hopes it will establish a performing arts culture that allows more children to experience the confidence and sense of belonging that comes from creating something together.

"I think one of the greatest gifts theatre can give a child is the opportunity to be seen for what they can do rather than being defined by what they find difficult. They have each brought their own personalities, humour, and individuality to the production, making the characters uniquely their own. Watching their confidence grow and seeing them begin to recognise what they are capable of has been one of the most rewarding aspects of this entire journey."



The Litvak story central to SA Jewish identity

GILANA LAB

For many South African Jews, their family story begins thousands of kilometres away in the towns and villages of Lithuania. Long before their grandparents or great-grandparents arrived on South African shores, their ancestors belonged to one of the most remarkable Jewish communities in Europe, where Torah scholarship, Yiddish culture, lively debate, and deeply rooted traditions shaped generations of Jewish life.

Known as Litvaks, Lithuanian Jews developed a distinct identity that continues to influence Jewish communities around the world. Their story is particularly meaningful to South African Jewry, making Lithuania a fitting addition to the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards 2026 theme, "Le Festival des Juifs – a tapestry of culture".

Jewish life in Lithuania stretches back more than 600 years, with communities established in the region by the 14th century. Over time, Jews became an important part of the country's commercial, religious, and cultural life, working as merchants, craftspeople, traders, and scholars. Their communities created schools, synagogues, charitable organisations, and traditions that connected everyday life to Jewish learning and observance.



At the centre of this world stood Vilna, today known as Vilnius, which earned the title "Jerusalem of Lithuania" because of its extraordinary reputation for Jewish scholarship and culture. Before World War II, the city was home to more than 100 synagogues, alongside Jewish schools, libraries, publishing houses, and cultural institutions. Its streets were filled with Yiddish, the language that connected much of Eastern European Jewish life.

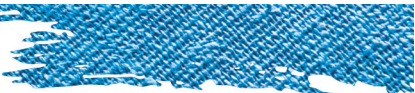
Perhaps Lithuania's most celebrated Jewish figure was Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, better known as the Vilna Gaon. Born in 1720, he became one of Judaism's most influential Torah scholars, renowned for his exceptional knowledge and rigorous approach to studying Jewish texts. His teachings helped establish Lithuania as a centre of Talmudic learning, encouraging generations of students to question, analyse, and develop a deeper understanding of their faith.

This approach became a defining characteristic of Litvak religious culture. Rather than simply accepting an interpretation, students were encouraged to examine it critically, challenge arguments, and engage in detailed discussion. Lithuania subsequently became home to some of the Jewish world's most influential *yeshivot*, including those associated with Volozhin and Slobodka. Their intellectual traditions would eventually travel far beyond Eastern Europe.

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Deadline looms to buy Stellenbosch home for Jewish students

CLAUDIA GROSS

A new Chabad house in Stellenbosch could give hundreds of Jewish students a permanent home away from home, with an ambitious fundraising campaign racing to secure the property.

Rabbi Nissen Goldman, director of Chabad on Campus in Cape Town, is leading the campaign to establish Spark House, a dedicated centre for Jewish student life at Stellenbosch University. The initiative follows years of growing demand for Jewish programming in the university town.

The campaign aims to raise at least R20 million to purchase the property, cover transfer costs, and prepare it for use. Goldman said the property had been on the market for R19 million before negotiations brought the price down to R15.5 million.

“We have about 23 days left to raise R15.5 million,” Goldman told the *SA Jewish Report*, referring to the purchase price. He explained that legal fees, transfer duty, and preparations would bring the initial capital requirement to at least R20 million.

The campaign was publicly announced on 7 October, the third anniversary of the Hamas-led attacks on Israel.

Two years earlier, his friend and supporter Marc Sternberg had offered to help secure a permanent property for Jewish students in Stellenbosch. Goldman said Sternberg had contacted him unexpectedly on the first anniversary of 7 October offering to help make the vision a reality.

Sternberg – who died recently – had said that something needed to be done following the attacks, and Jewish life needed to be strengthened. Goldman said the campaign was about creating something lasting for Jewish students, rather than simply commemorating an individual.

The need for a permanent base has developed over several years. In 2017, Goldman began travelling from Cape Town to Stellenbosch once a week after Jewish students contacted him about establishing a community. The programme initially offered occasional gatherings, including lunch-and-learn sessions and welcome events. As participation grew, the weekly visits became insufficient to meet students’ needs.

Goldman said the community had reached a point where it needed a full-time presence. Rabbi Chananyah Duthie, who grew up connected to Stellenbosch and later lived in New York, was keen to return and lead the programme.

Duthie and his wife, Eliana, eventually moved to Stellenbosch to establish a more consistent presence. Their first arrangements included living in a house next to Goldman’s home in Cape Town before finding rental accommodation in Stellenbosch.

Goldman described the rental property as poorly located and unsuitable for the growing programme. He said finding suitable accommodation close to the university had become increasingly difficult as student housing developments expanded and property prices rose.

The proposed Spark House would provide a permanent base for Duthie, his wife, and the students they serve. Goldman said the couple would live at the property, allowing them to welcome students into their home.

The planned facilities include a library, study spaces, guest accommodation, communal dining areas, and an outdoor entertainment space. Students would be able to gather for Shabbat meals, Jewish learning, social activities, and religious observances.

Goldman said parents visiting Stellenbosch would also be able to stay at the house. Students who needed accommodation for Shabbat could



Artist rendering of the proposed Chabad House

potentially use the guest facilities, depending on the arrangements. An estimated 150 Jewish students currently form part of the wider Stellenbosch community.

Chabad on Campus provides Shabbat and Jewish festival meals, prayer services, individual and group learning, and opportunities to observe Jewish traditions. It also arranges social gatherings and initiatives that bring students together outside formal religious programming.

Duthie said students who live far from their families often rely on the community for support. Many students from

Johannesburg don’t travel home every weekend, making the Shabbat table an important part of their university experience.

The support can extend beyond religious observance. Duthie described how the community had supported a student undergoing cancer treatment and helped the student’s family during a difficult period.

He said the aim was to ensure that students had somewhere to turn when they needed practical assistance, companionship, or a connection with other Jewish people. “A home away from home for Jewish students” is how Duthie described the programme’s role. He said a permanent property would make the community more accessible and provide greater stability.

The location is also important. Duthie said the current arrangements had not always placed the programme conveniently for students living in private residences across Stellenbosch. A permanent base in a more suitable area would make it easier for students to attend activities and connect with the community. It would also provide a stable environment for Duthie and his wife to develop their work.

Goldman said the campaign was an investment in the future of Jewish life in South Africa. He believes that supporting students during their university years can

help strengthen their connections to Jewish identity and community.

Duthie said the programme also reaches students who did not grow up actively practising Judaism but want to explore their heritage. Some students discover or reconnect with their Jewish identity after arriving at university. He said the community offers opportunities to learn about Jewish traditions in an environment where students can ask questions and participate at their own pace.

The fundraising campaign has received an offer of matching support from a donor who has pledged to contribute the remaining half if Goldman raises the first half. Goldman said he had also arranged meetings with other prospective donors and received expressions of interest.

However, the purchase price is only part of the financial commitment. The campaign must also cover the transaction costs and prepare the property before it can operate as a student centre.

Goldman said a separate plan would be needed to fund ongoing administrative and operating expenses. The immediate priority, however, is securing the property and establishing Spark House.

The campaign is inviting Stellenbosch alumni, families, businesses, and members of the wider Jewish community to contribute. Goldman said the project was intended to be larger than any one person or organisation.

Is Ireland supporting human rights or selective in its enmity?

OPINION

The recent Union of European Football Associations

Nations League soccer matches between Israel and Ireland brought the relationship between the two countries into sharp focus. The matches were bad-tempered affairs, and were proceeded by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish national soccer team protesting Israel’s supposed human rights abuses in Gaza by taking the following extremely harsh steps:

- Moved the home fixture to neutral ground: The FAI relocated the match scheduled for Dublin to Serbia due to “security concerns”, public pressure, and a desire to avoid having the Israeli national team in the country. The second leg in Serbia was played behind closed doors.
- No handshakes or pennant exchanges: Ahead of the fixtures, the FAI informed Israel that the Irish players would not shake hands with their opponents or exchange customary pre-match pennants. This was probably the most odious of all the measures taken, as it moved the actions taken from criticism of Israel to slighting the players personally. In addition, the absurdity of this measure was that Anan Khalaili, an Arab-Israeli winger from Sakhnin, who played for Israel in the first match in Hungary, was similarly snubbed.
- Black armbands and anthem protest: The Irish players wore black armbands and bowed their heads in silence during the playing of the Israeli national anthem.
- Donation of match fees: The Irish players chose to donate their match fees to charity.
- Stripped-back broadcasting: The Irish national broadcaster, RTÉ, broadcasted the matches with stripped-back coverage, omitting the traditional studio analysis at half-time, and even going so far as to shun advertisements during the match.
- Player and staff stances: Goalkeeper Gavin Bazunu withdrew from the matches in



protest, which left the Irish team with only two goalkeepers in the squad, one short from the standard three.

In addition, before the match even took place, more than 160 well-known Irish athletes and sports figures signed an open letter, organised by the Irish Sport for Palestine group, urging the football team to boycott the matches against Israel. It was only after an agonising debate among the players themselves that the matches even took place.

What made these actions particularly galling for Israel is the fact that Israel and Ireland are not at war, have never had any disputes over territory, or, indeed, any disputes, apart from Ireland frequently alleging that Israel is mistreating the Palestinians.

Even worse is the contrast with other countries that have fought wars, like England and Argentina, who still ensured that their players shook hands before and after their recent match in the World Cup semifinals this year. Similarly, the United States (US) and Iran have met twice in World Cups, in 1998 in France and 2022 in Qatar, and in both cases, handshakes were exchanged and the players were particularly warm to each other. For example, in the 1998 match the Iranian players gifted the US players bouquets of white roses as a symbol of peace, with the US team reciprocating with soccer pennants, and both squads breaking with standard procedure to pose together for a

- photograph.
- It’s also important to note that Irish hostility to Israel predates the current Gaza war. Some notable incidents were:
- After Hitler committed suicide on 30 April 1945, Ireland Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Éamon de Valera, personally visited Dr Eduard Hempel, the German representative in Ireland, to express official condolences under Ireland’s strict policy of wartime neutrality. He was followed by the Irish President, Douglas Hyde, the next day. This action was widely criticised, with *The Guardian* newspaper calling it “one of the most embarrassing chapters in Irish history – its decision to maintain cordial relations with the Nazis even after news of the Holocaust emerged”.
 - Although Ireland gave de facto recognition to Israel in 1949, it established full diplomatic relations only in December 1974, a full 26 years after Israel’s independence, having been, according to most reports, heavily influenced by the Vatican’s diplomatic position on Israel. When Ireland did finally establish diplomatic relations with Israel, it also recognised the Palestine Liberation Organization.
 - Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Irish public and political sympathy shifted firmly towards the Palestinians, with Ireland frequently criticising Israel in multinational forums.
 - More recently, the ongoing saga around honouring past Israeli President Chaim

BARUCH THE BALANCED



Herzog, who was born in Belfast and raised in Dublin before going on to become the sixth president of Israel, is telling. Herzog Park, in south Dublin, was named in his honour in 1995. In 2025, a campaign against the name was begun, and Dublin City Council attempted to remove the name in late 2025 following a push by councillors. The proposal was pulled in December 2025, but only on technical grounds, after the council’s chief executive advised of an error in the renaming process.

Some might argue that Ireland is simply committed to the defence of human rights and that Israel is being overly sensitive. However, a recent article in *The Economist* suggests otherwise. It details how Aughinish Alumina, a refinery in the west of Ireland, is supplying a significant portion of the alumina being used by Russia’s aluminium industry. It goes on to describe how its sales to Russia have surged since the war with Ukraine began in 2022, now totalling 68% of its exports. It goes further to detail how this alumina becomes aluminium that is used to make different weapons, from missiles to tanks.

The company apparently argues that without its sales to Russia, the plant would have to close, undermining Europe’s aluminium industry. However, *The Economist* counters this by showing that the European Union already imports most of its aluminium, and even if the plant stopped supplying Russia and was forced to close, Europe’s smelters could easily find alumina from other refineries in Europe. In fact, Aughinish supplies European smelters with only a very small amount of alumina. As *The Economist* says, this is very bad optics for Ireland.

The fact that the Irish government allows this to continue makes a mockery of its supposed commitment to human rights and leads many to question whether there are other factors at play in its strident and frequent hostility towards Israel.

- *Baruch The Balanced is an attorney who can’t be named for professional reasons, but who also studied both politics and international relations at university.*

Festival bows to pressure and drops Jerusalem photographer

LEE TANKLE

Israeli photographer Sharon Gabay's book *Jerusalemites* was selected on artistic merit for the Indian Photo Festival. Hours after his name and nationality were made public, it was dropped from the exhibition following outside objections.

Gabay's book portrays the diverse people of Jerusalem through photographs, accompanied by English, Hebrew, and Arabic text. It was selected for exhibition by a five-member jury that included two *National Geographic* photo editors, who judged submissions without knowing the photographers' names or nationalities.

Gabay received an official email on 18 September congratulating him on being selected for the festival's Photobook Exhibition and instructing him to confirm his participation, submit promotional material, and send a physical copy of the book to Hyderabad. His name was published on the festival's list of selected photographers as "Sharon Gabay / Israel".

However, when he went to look at the festival website a few hours later, he found that his work wasn't there.

"I refreshed the page and saw that my name still hadn't come back, so I sent them an email asking what had happened," he said. The festival had decided to remove Gabay's submission after "certain concerns" were raised about his inclusion. It also stated, "We stand against genocide, violence against civilians, and all forms of human rights violations."

Gabay, whose family has lived in Jerusalem for generations, compiled his book from 15 years of street photography between 2011 and 2026. Rather than focusing on Jerusalem's landmarks or presenting the city primarily through politics and conflict, Gabay focuses on the people who live there and their everyday interactions.

Over those 15 years, Gabay said, he had taken roughly 1.5 million photographs, eventually selecting 233 images for the 304-page book. The photographs are unstaged and depict Jerusalem's Jewish, Muslim, and Christian residents, religious and secular people, young and old, going about ordinary life – eating, laughing, praying, travelling, dancing, and interacting in the city. Gabay describes the work as a visual essay of the Jerusalem rarely seen in the news – and ultimately, about the possibility of coexistence.

"We know how to live together. I go into every neighbourhood in Jerusalem, east and west, and I feel at home. You see Muslim families shopping alongside ultra-Orthodox Jewish families, passing each other and smiling. All of that is in the book. Jerusalem is one of the most complicated cities in the world, and everyone talks about its potential to explode, but 99% of the time, we are okay. That's the Jerusalem I wanted to show."



Sharon Gabay and Abu Yasser with *Jerusalemites*

The festival confirmed that the objections to Gabay's inclusion had been raised by people outside the jury process, after the selection was announced, and that those objections – and the likely consequences of proceeding despite them – had informed its decision not to exhibit the book. It maintained that the reversal was separate from the artistic evaluation of *Jerusalemites* and didn't reflect its artistic merit.

"They later told media outlets that the decision wasn't related to the quality or artistic merit of the book. In fact, they said the book was appropriate and was one of the best they had received," said Gabay.

The festival also said that its anonymous selection process doesn't allow evaluators to see the photographer's "name, nationality, or background". It added that in future, it would "introduce additional measures to ensure greater alignment with its vision, values, and commitment".

Gabay explained that while having his work removed from the festival was insulting, "I wasn't angry because, in a way, it was predictable. But because of the character of the book, the three languages, and the fact that you cannot tell from the photographs who created it, I had hope. When they selected me, I thought, 'Okay, they have overcome their prejudices.' But in the end, they didn't overcome the pressure and the threats.

"Now everyone should know that this festival isn't necessarily presenting the best photobooks; it's presenting the best photobooks that it is willing to show.

"I also have French citizenship and a French passport. I could have submitted the book as a French citizen, but I didn't. I am first and foremost a proud Jewish Israeli. I haven't done anything wrong – quite the opposite – and I didn't deserve to be treated this way. Seeing the consequences the festival is now facing does give me some satisfaction," he said. There has been widespread criticism of his exclusion, including from US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee.

Gabay explained that while this isn't the first time something like this has happened to him, it's the first time it's been so blatant.

"They chose the book, they published my name, and then they went back on their decision. Now I have documentation of everything. I'm not just telling a story; it's all there on paper.

"I hope this can influence people to judge art as art, rather than looking at who the artist is or what passport they hold. There was an Iranian photographer selected for the festival, and I didn't care. In fact, I was happy and thought maybe I would meet them there. I never look at where an artist comes from.

"After they removed me, I thought about whether they had removed anyone else, but they hadn't. In my view, this wasn't about the work; it was about me being Jewish and Israeli," he said.

The Litvak story central to SA Jewish identity

>>>Continued from page 11

Yet Lithuanian Jewish life was never confined to the study hall. Vilna became a centre of Jewish literature, theatre, journalism, and political thought. Jewish writers and intellectuals contributed to a flourishing Yiddish cultural scene, while the establishment of the YIVO Institute in Vilna in 1925 reflected the growing importance of preserving and studying Jewish language, history, and traditions. The city was home to religious scholars, secular thinkers, Zionists, and followers of various political movements, each contributing to a diverse and sometimes fiercely argumentative community.

Food was another important part of this cultural identity. In Lithuanian Jewish homes, familiar Ashkenazi dishes such as kugel, gefilte fish, chicken soup, and potato-based dishes became associated with Shabbat meals, festivals, and family gatherings. These foods were shaped by the ingredients available in Eastern Europe, where cold winters made potatoes, root vegetables, and preserved foods important parts of daily life.

For families who later emigrated, recipes offered a comforting connection to the places they'd left behind. A pot of chicken soup or a family kugel recipe could carry memories across generations, allowing children and grandchildren who had never visited Lithuania to experience something of their ancestors' world.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, growing economic difficulties, restrictions on Jewish life, and antisemitism encouraged many Lithuanian Jews to seek opportunities elsewhere. South Africa became one of their destinations, and successive waves of immigration helped shape the Jewish community that exists here today.

These immigrants brought far more than their belongings with them. They carried religious customs, Yiddish expressions, family recipes, communal values, and a strong commitment to Jewish

education. As they established themselves in South African towns and cities, they helped build synagogues, schools, welfare organisations, and businesses, creating institutions that would serve future generations.

The vibrant Lithuanian Jewish world from which many of these immigrants came was almost entirely destroyed during the Holocaust. Following the German invasion of Lithuania in 1941, Nazi forces and local collaborators carried out mass shootings and deportations that devastated Jewish communities. Historic centres of Jewish life, including Vilna and Kovno, suffered catastrophic losses. The destruction brought centuries of flourishing Jewish culture to a devastating end, although survivors and their descendants continued to preserve its memory and traditions.

Today, the influence of Lithuanian Jewry is still evident in South African Jewish homes, classrooms, synagogues, and communal organisations. It lives in the emphasis placed on education, in the traditions passed between generations, and in the determination to maintain a strong Jewish identity while contributing to wider society.

This legacy also reflects the spirit of the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, which celebrates individuals whose leadership, achievements, innovation, and service have made an impact on South Africa. The story of Lithuanian Jewry shows how cultural traditions can survive migration and change while continuing to inspire new generations.

As "Le Festival des Juifs – a tapestry of culture" celebrates the diverse histories that make up Jewish life, Lithuania's contribution holds particular significance. From the scholarly streets of Vilna to the Jewish communities of Johannesburg and Cape Town, the Litvak story remains woven into the fabric of South African Jewish identity.



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Cape Town keeps the light of 7 October heroes alive

CLAUDIA GROSS

Stories of Israelis who risked their lives to defend their kibbutz communities shaped Cape Town's commemoration of 7 October.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Cape Council hosted the event on Wednesday 7 October, marking three years since Hamas-led terrorists attacked southern Israel, killing about 1 200 people and abducting 251 hostages into Gaza.

The evening, titled *Heroes Among Us*, featured Israeli leadership mentor Doron Libshtein, who lost his brother, Ofir, in the attack. Through stories from 7 October, he explored how ordinary people can respond to extraordinary circumstances.

The event was presented in partnership with the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD), The Wilfred and Fay Back Charitable Trust, The Base, and the Jewish National Fund of South Africa (JNF SA).

SAZF Cape Council chairperson David Cohen told the gathering it was the first commemoration since all the hostages had

returned home, albeit some to be buried.

He thanked the community for attending, describing it as a declaration of solidarity. "You cannot stop being a people," he said. "Whether you live in Cape Town, Cleveland, or Kfar Saba, we are one people."

Cohen said the 2023 attack had shattered the assumption that antisemitism could be relegated to the past. He highlighted the displacement of Israeli communities and the mobilisation of Jewish and Christian Zionist communities around the world in the aftermath.

A message from Hen Feder, deputy chief of mission at the Israeli Embassy in South Africa, acknowledged the South African Jewish community's solidarity.

The message remembered the victims, their families, the residents of communities near Gaza, and the survivors of captivity. It also emphasised the importance of preserving Jewish life, identity, and the connection between South African Jews and Israel.

The commemoration's central address came from Libshtein, whose brother Ofir, 50, and his 19-year-old nephew, Nitzan, were



Doron Libshtein speaking at the Cape Town 7 October event

killed at Kibbutz Kfar Aza on 7 October.

"He was my best friend in the world," Libshtein said of his brother, a prominent community leader who died defending the kibbutz.

He also spoke about Inbal Rabin-Lieberman, 25, who was responsible for security at her community near the Gaza border. On the morning of the attack, she distributed weapons to the security team and contacted the army for assistance.

Her actions helped prevent terrorists from entering the community.

Another story concerned Amit Mann, a 22-year-old paramedic who went to assist wounded people at a clinic in Be'eri. Terrorists entered the clinic and killed her. Libshtein also remembered Ben Shimoni, who had attended the Nova festival. After initially rescuing people fleeing the attack,

Shimoni returned to the area to save others. He was killed on his third rescue attempt.

Libshtein said the question "How can I help?" could make anyone a hero. It wasn't limited to soldiers, emergency responders, or people trained to confront danger.

He described his sister-in-law, Vered, as another example. She lost her husband, Ofir, her son Nitzan, her mother, Bila, and a nephew in one day. After surviving the assault with her other children, Vered committed herself to rebuilding their lives. She helped relocate members of the Kfar Aza community and had since taken on a leadership role within the kibbutz, helping communities displaced by the attack. For him, these acts of rebuilding represented a continuation of Ofir's legacy.

Following his brother's death, Libshtein began using his experience in leadership and personal development to help people affected by trauma. He worked with residents of communities near Gaza and later supported wounded soldiers and former hostages.

Libshtein thanked the Cape Town community for its support since the attack. He said he had witnessed a community in which Jews from different religious movements and backgrounds worked together. "I think that what you do here is *shlichut*," he said, referring to a sense of responsibility to serve others. "We need you here as people of light."

He urged attendees to consider who in their own communities might need support. "Who needs a hug? Who needs support? Who needs a connection? Who needs help?"

During the gathering, candles were lit to honour victims of 7 October. Each candle represented a life, a family, and a future cut short. Among those remembered were Amit, who had hoped to study music production; 18-year-old soldier Shahar, who dreamed of studying fashion design; and Shoham Turgeman, who loved travelling and spending time with friends.

The ceremony also honoured police officer Yulia Vakser, who was providing security at the Nova festival; peace activist Vivian Silver; Thai agricultural worker Somkuan Pansa-ard, and Staff Sergeant Itai Marziano, who died protecting others.

As the community marked the third anniversary of the attack, Libshtein's message was that remembrance must extend beyond an annual ceremony. He called on people in Israel and the diaspora to turn their concern for others into practical action, strengthening the relationships that sustain communities through crisis. "Only together will we learn from the experiences of 7 October," he said.

United in grief and Zionism

ANGIE SEGAL

Three years after 7 October, the community still needs opportunities to come together. To remember those lost, to be with people who understand, and to acknowledge how deeply that day and everything that followed have changed our lives.

At the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) commemoration in Johannesburg on 7 October, the community came together for a moving evening of remembrance, unity, and solidarity with Israel. The shul was filled to the rafters, a powerful reminder of the community's strength and the importance of showing up.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and Hen Feder, deputy chief of mission at the Israeli Embassy in South Africa, addressed the gathering, while moving performances by Shmuli Brill, Moshe Lichtenstein, and Jayden Fittinghoff gave expression to the grief, hope, and love for Israel that brought people together.

They gathered to honour those murdered, the hostages who did not survive, and the soldiers who fell defending Israel and her citizens. They held in their thoughts the survivors and bereaved families whose lives remain profoundly changed.

Keynote speaker Chaya Hexter shared the life of her son, Yakir, who fell in battle in Gaza in January 2024. Hearing about his creativity, his promise, and the future he should have had was a reminder of how a name alone cannot tell so much.

That opportunity to know him continued

through the Yakir's Light exhibition, bringing together Chaya's photography and Yakir's art and architectural work. Every exhibition slot was fully booked.

At the entrance, an artwork told another part of the community's story. When all the hostages were finally home, people were invited to drop off the items worn in solidarity with them. These were brought together into a beautiful artwork, each piece carrying the hope and commitment of the person who had worn it. Together, they formed a lasting record of a community that refused to forget.

SAZF national chairperson Craig Pantanowitz's address brought home the responsibility we share: remembrance must continue beyond the anniversary. Returning home does not end a survivor's recovery. A funeral does not end a family's grief. The community must remain present when attention moves elsewhere.

Pantanowitz spoke about the closeness many have felt to Israel, the comfort found in community, and the painful distance some have experienced from people they once trusted. He also acknowledged the friends, neighbours, and fellow South Africans who stood beside us. Their solidarity mattered and still does.

Within our community, some returned to shul, began learning about their history, or sought people

who understood their feelings without explanation. Those who describe themselves as "October 8th Jews" have brought renewed energy to Jewish life. Whether that connection has guided someone since childhood or deepened more recently, everyone belongs equally.

Pantanowitz's affirmation of Zionist pride was unequivocal. Zionism expresses the Jewish people's right to self-determination in our ancestral homeland. Attempts to turn that word into a slur will not weaken Jews' connection to Israel. They want their children to say, "I am a Zionist" as openly as "I am a South African", with the knowledge to understand their identity and the confidence to express it.

Nurturing that confidence is an ongoing responsibility. It means creating opportunities to learn, strengthening relationships with Israel, and supporting those who face hostility because of their Jewish or Zionist identity.

The evening reminded attendees of the resilience of the community and the Jewish nation, and of what they can sustain when they stand together. Together, we honour those lost, cherish the Jewish life we share, and give the next generation the confidence to shape a strong Jewish future.





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Saving the best for what?

When we were young, we had “the good lounge”. It was furnished with a dark brown velour three-seater set, which I think came from Geen & Richards, and accessorised with a few crocheted cushions. The windows wore off-gold taffeta curtains with voile underneath. We called those “sun curtains”, although they seemed to function more as a petticoat than anything else.

There was a dark brown coffee table that purported to be antique, which might simply have been good marketing, and a sad reddish-brown Persian carpet that did little to detract from the serious nature of the room.

A brass-to-copper light fitting centred the room, circled by a lonely fly that never seemed to find the way to freedom. It was a room without air. A room that took itself very seriously. It was the good lounge and it knew it.

We were never allowed inside without express permission. The doors remained closed to keep out us children or the dogs, or both. Being part of the family gave us access to most of the house, but there were limits to what could be achieved through birth.

I don’t remember who qualified for admission. I do remember that we didn’t.

There’s something wonderfully peculiar about having a room in your home that you preserve by not living in it. Someone had chosen the furniture, paid for it, arranged the cushions, and then shut the door. Elsewhere, the family carried on being a family, with upholstery that had less to lose.

I’m fond of that memory. There was care in it, and pride. The good lounge was ready. Should an appropriate visitor arrive, we wouldn’t have to apologise for the state of the velour.

The good lounge might have disappeared from many homes, but its principles remain safely folded in the linen cupboard. The good towels, for example. Thick, soft, and reserved for people who don’t pay the water bill. The household uses towels that have gradually

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



become exfoliating equipment, while visitors get to dry themselves in something approaching a small cloud.

Then there’s the crockery. We buy plates because we love them, which apparently means we must eat from something else. The beautiful dishes wait for an occasion. An ordinary supper, even with everyone home and getting along, somehow fails to meet the requirements.

I understand saving things for Shabbat or a celebration. Bringing out something special can help make the occasion feel special. But there’s also the candle that never gets lit because it will burn down. The lovely soap nobody uses because it will stop being lovely soap. We can become so successful at preserving something that we remove every opportunity to enjoy it.

What makes me uncomfortable is wondering whether we do this with ourselves as well.

Visitors get our attention. We ask questions and listen to the answers. The people closest to us can find themselves competing with a phone while we insist we’re listening. We are. More or less. They can always tell us again.

I’d like to think I’m too sensible to save all my best things for other people. Although I’m less confident about my patience. It’s uncomfortable to consider that someone visiting for an hour might get more of it than someone who lives with me.

The towels are easy enough to take out. Paying attention requires putting something down.

I’m still fond of the good lounge. But I wouldn’t want the people I love to remember me in quite the same way: ready for visitors, with the doors closed to everyone already home.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Democracy on Board



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

heartfelt thanks go to the outgoing Council, which did a tremendous job.

The conference also honoured Reeva Forman and Bernard Shull with life vice-presidencies in recognition of the decades of service they have given to the SAJBD and to the Jewish community more broadly. They are both incredible examples of dedication to our community, and we are eternally grateful.

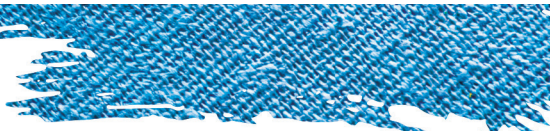
Then came the debate. We were joined by an impressive array of parties and their mayoral candidates for Johannesburg, all ably managed by Mandy Wiener. We are fortunate to have people of her stature in our community, and even more fortunate that they are willing to give their time and skill to us. Her questions were probing, and she came back again and again to coalitions. Anyone who’s followed Johannesburg politics over the past few years will understand why. The contestation was rigorous, at times robust, but respectful throughout. That cannot be taken for granted in our politics at the moment, and it was a pleasure to watch.

What I take from Sunday is that democracy is not only something we observe from the outside. In a single day, under one roof, we queued to vote for our own leadership and then heard candidates for the city’s highest office questioned hard. Both matter. The demands we place on our democracy for free and fair elections are the same principles we hold our own institutions to.

Finally, the municipal elections are coming soon. We have chosen our communal leadership, and now we must help choose our city’s government. Sunday’s debate gave us a clearer view of who wants to run our city and how they plan to govern it. Now it is up to us. I encourage everyone to make sure they are registered and to go out and vote.



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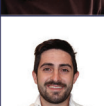
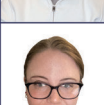
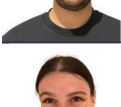
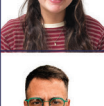


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This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Kaplan blowing the whistle on life abroad

LUKE ALFRED

Jonathan Kaplan, the much-loved former rugby referee, is “exploring the idea of returning to South Africa as soon as possible”. Kaplan was unable to be specific about the details of his likely return, but when he finally comes home it will be with his three children, Kaleb, 10, and twin seven-year-old daughters, Jamyma and Jozafeen. He’s spent the past seven years in Toronto.

Without getting into the nuts and bolts, Kaplan intimated that one of the reasons for his return is his feeling for home and the sense of community it brings. Living in Canada has been an enriching experience, but nothing quite beats hearing someone *vloek* (swear) in Afrikaans or the splendour of an African sunset made richer by the cry of a nearby fish eagle.

As befits a man who seems to have been born with a whistle between his lips, Kaplan continues to blow rugby matches at first XV club, university, and school levels. “In addition, I get the odd invite to tournaments if and when I can get away. It’s my 43rd season as a rugby referee,” he says proudly.

As well as keeping up with play on the field itself, Kaplan keeps fit by running, having recently completed his 179th marathon. He started as a marathoner in Benoni on Joburg’s East Rand in 1986 and recently completed running a marathon in each of the 50 states

of America with one in Charlevoix, Michigan in June.

So important have marathons – and travel – become to him that he’s toying with the idea of putting all he’s experienced as a runner down in a book. “The book would be a travelogue of marathon running,” he says. “It would tell the story of all the places I’ve run in and all the things that I’ve learned.”

For all of Kaplan’s desire to get out and see the country in which he lives, and its neighbour, you also sense that he’s itching to contribute to the game he loves by doing more than simply awarding scrum penalties. He thinks rugby is in desperate need of an on-field ambassador, for instance, and is off to officiate the Bermuda Classic in the Caribbean shortly, his first tournament as a 60-year-old. Unsurprisingly for a man who refereed 13 matches across four World Cups – 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 – rugby remains in his blood. His love of the game is tangible; his eye remains as keen as ever.

“It was always my intention to contribute to the transfer of information before I left,” he says. “In respect



of experience and culture. If there isn’t a linear transfer of culture, it dissipates. It’s very noticeable that in the past 15 years we haven’t produced any international-standard referees bar, say, Craig Joubert and Jaco Peyper. Our rugby is incredibly strong but we just aren’t producing referees of international quality. We’re producing referees, yes, but that’s different. Something important has been lost.”

As a rugby referee, Kaplan was part of a dynamic cohort. “It was an era in which we stepped forward and shone on the international stage.” To be more specific, it was the age of Karl Spannenberg, Mark Lawrence, Tappe Henning, and André Watson, all of whom were overseen by boss Freek Burger. Some of them might have had eccentric flourishes, and some were, at times, derided by the public and in the press, but the times were vital and energetic. These were undoubtedly South African refereeing’s halcyon days.

“We learned the ropes in a tournament like the Currie Cup, which is brutal but stunning – I still believe there’s a place for it,” he says. “It was a difficult period in my development, particularly with some of the

established senior players who were always pushing the envelope. [Former Springbok lock turned media pundit] Kobus Wiese wasn’t occasionally shy to do a bit of ‘mountaineering’ over opposition players on the ground and he always used to give me a rough time. [Former Free State and Bok centre] Helgard Muller was pretty combustible, although we made up afterwards. As I went through the system, I slowly developed relationships with everyone. That ultimately held me in good stead.”

Still, he’s concerned about the little things. He doesn’t like the way, for instance, that some of the opportunities for referees and coaches to formally get together pre-match have been closed by Joël Jutge, World Rugby’s High-Performance Match Official Manager. He understands why this is so – Jutge is protecting his employees, the referees – but argues that engagement has its advantages. “It’s a great opportunity to learn,” he says. “In order to learn, you need to show some humility. For a referee that can never be a bad thing.

“Let’s be clear, World Rugby has got many things right over the past few years: it’s refined the laws, made the game a better spectacle, and tightened the specific laws around player safety, to name just three areas of improvement. Having said this, there are gains to be made in a pre-match context by bringing referees and coaches together. It gives both sides an opportunity to express themselves and their concerns. Both sides can only be better off for it.”

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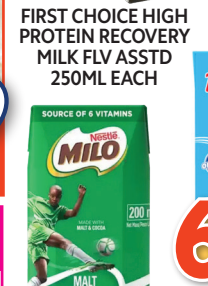
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