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UCT adopts Israel academic boycott, questions antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town's (UCT's) highest decision-making body has officially adopted resolutions to boycott Israeli academia and ensure that anti-Zionism cannot be described as antisemitism.

This has caused consternation, especially with Jewish students having already been exposed to much anti-Israel antisemitism on campus this year.

"This is a sad day for UCT," says Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT. "That an educational institution that purports to be the best in Africa promotes such an ill-informed and misguided position reflects poorly on its leadership."

The decision "fosters a hostile environment for Jewish students and staff, increasing the likelihood of antisemitic incidents on campus," says David Cohen, the chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Cape Council. "Singling out Israeli institutions implicitly targets the Jewish community, contradicting the values of inclusivity and safety that any academic institution should uphold."

The resolutions were passed by the university's council at a vote on Saturday, 22 June. It was the last sitting of its current council, which includes several extremist members.

Cohen maintains the resolutions "infringe upon the constitutional right of UCT staff and students to freely associate and collaborate with their peers worldwide."

"The decisions to endorse motions calling for the boycott of Israeli institutions mark a troubling turn in the university's commitment to academic freedom and global collaboration. This poses significant risks to the university's academic and financial well-being, as well as to the principles of intellectual freedom and diversity," he said.

In its resolutions, the council decided that UCT academics would be forbidden from having any relations with any person or group affiliated in any way with the Israel Defense Forces, or the broader

Israeli military establishment. As Israel has conscription, this effectively means boycotting Israeli society.

It went on to oppose "any attempts to curtail academic freedom by labelling criticism of Israel or Zionist policies as antisemitism", and it rejected "the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's conflation of critique of Zionism and Israel's policies as antisemitism".

The council vowed it would maintain solidarity with academic colleagues "victimized" for their willingness to speak out against what it described as the "educaracide in Gaza".

Emeritus professor of philosophy at UCT, Professor David Benatar, agreed that the council's decision "marks another sad day for UCT."

"In endorsing the resolution which requires UCT academics to boycott wide swathes of Israeli society, the council has both demonstrated its ignorance and exceeded its authority," he said.

"Apparently, UCT's governing body doesn't understand or doesn't care that its decision is in violation of a constitutional right to academic freedom. We can only hope that council's decision will be legally challenged, and that the courts will adjudicate the matter impartially."

Four well-placed sources, who aren't members of council, spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* on condition of anonymity for their own safety. "Those voting only just made up a quorum, so half of the council wasn't there to vote," says the first source. The second says the vote wasn't surprising as it was the "last hurrah" of council members who hate Israel. "Unfortunately, the chair and several outgoing members are major BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition] supporters. My impression is they don't have the support of the general staff or student body but have managed to get themselves over-represented in the decision-making fora."

The third source says it was "the most compromised

council in history, which repeatedly made terrible decisions that cost UCT a fortune, never with UCT interests at heart, just the desire to appear progressive". A new council, with four new members that are much more moderate, will be sworn in on 6 July.

"It was disappointing and surprising that the outgoing UCT council supported a wrongheaded, substantively false, and poorly formulated set of senate resolutions," says the fourth source. "The university continues to face severe leadership and governance issues. With this decision, the outgoing council has demonstrated its failure to fulfil its fiduciary mandate, and the chair of council has shamelessly put international issues above the council's core responsibilities. Hopefully, the incoming council will apply its mind carefully and rescind this aberrant decision."

The university officially announced the adoption of the two resolutions only on 24 June. The two motions had been adopted by a lower body, the senate, on 19 April, and were then passed to the council for official consideration. A separate motion calling for an academic boycott of Israeli institutions and research entities failed on 13 March, after being voted down at the senate by a narrow margin. In March 2019, the council rejected a similar resolution.

"The UCT council has usually rejected the senate's often divisive political resolutions. This time, it passed the two resolutions," says the Institute of Race Relations' Sara Gon, who has written extensively about the academic-boycott stance of UCT.

"This is unwise in light of recent American experience with regards to the pro-Palestinian, and even pro-Hamas and pro-Hezbollah encampments," says Gon. "But now, Harvard has decided not to pronounce on positions on issues that don't directly affect the administration of the university. The reasons would include reputational damage and the consequent withdrawal of funding, particularly that of private funding." Meanwhile, "UCT has in recent years suffered reputational damage because

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On a good wicket

South African cricketer Michael Levitt opens batting for the Netherlands in the T20 Cricket World Cup

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Orthodox Jews must be drafted, Israeli court rules

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Israel must draft haredi Orthodox Jews into its army, the country's Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous decision on Tuesday, 25 June. The ruling could trigger a political earthquake in Israel at a time when it's already embroiled in a war in Gaza and has experienced social unrest at home. The requirement to begin drafting more than 60 000 fervently Orthodox men into the army could lead to a sea change in military procedure, mass haredi street protests, and the breakup of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, which includes haredi parties that are irrevocably opposed to mandating haredi conscription. For decades, Israel has offered a blanket exemption from the army for young men enrolled in full-time learning in yeshivas, an accommodation first instituted in the country's early years when relatively few people fell into that category. As the haredi Orthodox population has ballooned, debate over continued exemptions from a draft that many Israelis see as a national duty has become increasingly heated and led to the rise and fall of multiple governments.

Photo: Amir Levy / Getty Images



Haredi Orthodox men protesting against being drafted into the Israeli army

Previous attempts to conscript haredim have fallen flat in spite of majority support from the public. Proponents argue that the exemptions create inequity in Israeli society, and deprive the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of needed manpower. Haredi leaders contend that Torah study has inherent value and serves to protect the state, and that accommodating the religious needs of

haredi men would itself be a burden for the army. Haredi leaders supported Netanyahu's effort last year to sap the power of the Supreme Court in large part so they could avoid a ruling such as the one handed down on Tuesday.

Since 7 October, concerns about manpower and inequality have been exacerbated by the war against Hamas, which spurred the largest military mobilisation in Israel's history, with many soldiers spending months in the reserves. When the latest blanket exemption law expired last year, Israel's right-wing government decided to continue not conscripting yeshiva students, but that decision has since drawn criticism from some of Netanyahu's allies as well as his critics.

Now, nine judges on Israel's High Court have ruled that the government must begin conscripting haredi men, and also cannot continue funding yeshivas that enrol haredi men in lieu of army service. They cited the war as a reason for their decision.

"In these days, in the midst of a severe war, the burden of inequality is more acute than ever and requires the promotion of a sustainable solution to this issue," the judges wrote.

Exactly when and how the ruling will be carried out isn't immediately clear. The judges referred to "gradual conscription of yeshiva students". It could also be possible for the government to pass new legislation carving out an

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Heads-up on the way we see things

Torah Thought



Rabbi Yossy Goldman
Life rabbi emeritus
Sydenham Shul

Perspective. What a difference it makes. How we look, where we look, and the way we look at things always colours our impressions.

In this week's parsha, the word "Ur'eeem" (And you shall see) occurs twice. The first is at the beginning in the story of the spies sent by Moses to investigate the Promised Land, and the second is at the very end, in the chapter of Tzitzit.

In the first verse, Moses instructs the spies, "And you shall see the land, what is it ... are the people strong or weak ... is the land fertile or lean ... are the cities open or fortified?" In the second verse, we're commanded concerning the fringes on our tallit and told, "And you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of G-d and fulfil them."

The same words, "And you shall see", is used both times, yet look at the stark contrast between these two chapters. The first time, with the spies, it turned tragic. Their negative report of the Promised Land caused the people to cry for no good reason, and G-d said that day would become a day of "weeping for generations". Indeed, it was Tisha B'Av, and the resulting 40-year delay in entering Israel was to be the first of many national calamities to befall our people on that same day. The second time, however, it's a good thing. Looking at the tzitzit fringes is a way to remember all G-d's commandments and to observe a G-dly life.

It all depends on how we look at things, and where we go looking. To see the land is to see earthiness, a materialistic perspective. To see tzitzit is to gaze at a mitzvah of G-d, a heavenly perspective.

I remember one of my esteemed teachers in

yeshiva once waxing lyrical on the difference between a human being and an animal. The animal was created in a horizontal line. The cow, naturally, looks downward at the grass. Munching grass is its full-time occupation. Ever see a cow looking up at the sky and pondering the meaning of life? Human beings, however, were created in a vertical line. It's much easier for humans to look upward, to be pensive, thoughtful, and to contemplate things higher and meaningful.

To be people of vision we must look upward. There's a higher purpose to life. There's a deeper meaning to what

meets the eye. The whole concept of Kabbalah and mysticism is based on the principle of the metaphysical that there's not only the self-evident body but also the invisible soul; not only the universe but also a cosmic plan and a profound reason for every experience in life, whether it be obvious to us or not.

If we only look at the land, at the earthly and material, the world is crass and careless. But when we lift our heads heavenward, we see so much more and can discern the wood from the trees, the lofty from the low.

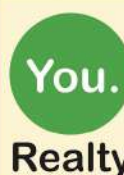
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Editor Peta Krost - editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz
Intern Lee Tankle • Editorial co-ordinator Dylan Berger - editorial@sajewishreport.co.za
Proofreader Kim Hatchuel/A-Proofed - kim@a-proofed.co.za • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver



Community's hopes rest on coalition cabinet

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a week since Cyril Ramaphosa's presidential inauguration followed by days of high drama as the nation waits for him to reveal his Cabinet for the country's seventh administration.

At the time of going to press, negotiations were continuing with parties in the Government of National Unity (GNU) about ministerial and other important positions.

This intense historic moment has delayed any announcement in a complex process involving multiple parties. There are now 10 parties that make up the GNU out of 18 parties in the National Assembly. They are the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party, Patriotic Alliance, Good, the Pan Africanist Congress, Freedom Front Plus, the United Democratic Movement, Rise Mzansi, and Al Jama-ah. The total number of National Assembly seats that the GNU can command is 287 out of 400, a solid majority.

Following a week of enthusiasm over the future possibilities of the GNU, a new reality has set which indicates that sustaining this coalition will demand continuous negotiation and strategic compromise. Though it doesn't mean the coalition cannot remain intact, insiders predict it will undoubtedly be a difficult task. This is the first time the ANC has been forced to share power at national level, and it remains to be seen if it can.

"There are a lot of parties running around flaunting their peacock feathers and flirting with the president for positions. All this is stalling the process," said one political insider who wishes to remain anonymous.

"There were many parties who showed no intention of joining the coalition, and now all of a sudden have signed the document of intent to become part of the GNU," he said.

Fears of an impasse surfaced earlier this week as the ANC and the DA jostled over positions.

The DA says it wants the position of deputy president and Cabinet posts that include energy, mining, public works, transport, and international affairs. It also wants to appoint directors general in the departments it runs to ensure merit-based appointments and prevent ANC cadres from blocking

DA policies.

This is the crux, according to experts. The DA cannot be expected to take fewer Cabinet posts than its share of the total vote received by coalition parties, say insiders. Yet pulling out of the coalition in protest might force the ANC to rely on uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Economic Freedom Fighters.

Presidency Spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said Ramaphosa wanted to ensure that he had sufficiently consulted all political parties before revealing his new Cabinet. The process should be concluded soon, he said. In the meantime it's anyone's guess.

"It's easier to drive a bus than a ship," said Darren Bergman, DA former Shadow Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition. "The bigger it gets, the more steering it takes, the more consultations and consensus."

Jewish leaders have expressed cautious optimism



Photo: Facebook

Democratic Alliance Member of Parliament and labour spokesperson, Michael Bagraim at his office in Parliament

this week, still basking in the glow of possibility as the GNU promises hope and rejuvenation.

"There has been an absolute about-turn in South African politics," said Michael Bagraim, the DA's labour spokesperson. "Already positivity is in the air, the stock exchange and the rand have reacted positively. The business community is looking to invest, and small businesses are gearing up for growth."

"The forthcoming Cabinet will be made up of half a dozen political parties. This bodes well for political stability and a much better future for all of us.

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"Changes will be introduced throughout the civil service, making life easier for all citizens. It will be a long haul, but the end goal will create a better life for all. It won't come easy, as we need to fix the education system and much of the broken infrastructure. It's urgent."

Bergman said he was "cautiously optimistic".

"Helen Zille is an experienced negotiator. She has been down this road before as mayor of the Western Cape, where she held together a 13-party coalition. It's still unpredictable, but hopefully the ANC will play fair, and the country will choose the right path towards stability and growth."

Former Member of Parliament (MP), Madeleine Hicklin who is now a member of the provincial legislature said, "I loved my work in Parliament and I'm going to miss it dramatically, but I believe we need strong people across all three tiers of government – municipal, provincial, and national. So I'm viewing my move to Gauteng in a positive light. It's not going to change my work ethic – I always give 150% – and nothing is going to change on that score at all. I just have to find my feet in the legislature before I can tell you whether it's going to be a substantially good move for me.

"South Africa needs stability and a path that encourages job opportunities and economic growth," she said.

DA Ward Councillor Daniel Schay said there was a general feeling of hope and opportunity.

"I'm tempering my expectations until we get the final composition of Cabinet, but I'm certain if that deal is positive, then we'll see similar movements at a local-government level which would result in the elimination of the destructive governments at that level.

"A positive GNU result remains infinitely better for the sustainability and longevity of our special community than any of the other possibilities," he said.

Meanwhile, the first judge to be removed in democratic South Africa, John Hlophe, is now the official leader of the opposition, and has expressed interest in amending the Constitution to end private land ownership. He was sworn in along with other MK party MPs, leading a caucus of 58 that included Jacob Zuma's daughter, Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla; Des van Rooyen; Black First Land First leader, Andile Mngxitama; and David Skosana, the husband of disgraced former public protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane.

UCT adopts Israel academic boycott, questions antisemitism

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of the illiberal period of the Rhodes/FeesMustFall [movement], and deeply divisive governance of former Vice Chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng."

Gon, who is also the director of the Free Speech Union of South Africa, says, "The contestation of ideas should happen in the academic space, as it's crucial for the development of critical thought that all views be expressed. Everyone must feel free to express their opinions, however they may be perceived by the opposite opinion holders.

"This is the foremost purpose of a university – creativity and contestation of ideas. The council must make sure that the administration performs as well as possible for academia to flourish, and with it, UCT's reputation."

SAZF's Cohen said that the international academic community could now see UCT's actions as "evidence of politically biased leadership, which can have far-reaching consequences", including possibly diminishing the university's ability to attract international funding and participate in research initiatives.

"Israeli universities are globally recognised leaders in fields such as water management, medical research, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and artificial intelligence," says Cohen. "Excluding UCT from collaboration with Israeli scholars severely hampers its potential to remain at the forefront of these critical areas."

Cohen says the boycott could also have an impact on the prospects of students, "particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds who rely on international bursaries and funding for their education. By isolating itself from Israeli academic institutions, UCT is choosing to forgo invaluable opportunities for its students and researchers."

The SAZF called on UCT's council to reconsider the motions. "Upholding academic freedom, fostering an inclusive environment, and maintaining global partnerships are essential for the university's mission," says Cohen. "It's imperative that UCT remains a space where knowledge and ideas can flow freely, unimpeded by political biases and discriminatory practices."

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Vale of tears: Hostage Square brings crisis home



PETA KROST

OPINION

Walking towards the place in Tel Aviv that has become known as Hostage Square on Saturday night, 22 June, I had a sinking feeling. Throngs of people holding signs and carrying Israeli flags were walking in the other direction. I thought I was too late for the weekly protest.



However, when I arrived at the huge square outside the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, I clearly wasn't too late. Others had just had enough. Israelis in general have had enough of this devastation. Two hundred and fifty nine days (on Saturday night) after 7 October is just too long.

Nevertheless, I found more than 10 000 Israelis squeezed onto the square, so many with tears in their eyes as they listened to the family and friends of those still being held hostage in Gaza eight and a half months after being violently kidnapped and abducted across the border by marauding Hamas terrorists.

Witnessing the hollow eyes of their loved ones, their pain so evident, isn't easy, but it's a whole lot easier than what they are experiencing. The pain of the wait they speak about, not knowing what's happening to their mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, grandchild, or best friends, is evident. They speak of not being able to sleep for eight months. They speak of their desperation and determination not to let the country forget about their loved ones.

They also speak of the hope that keeps them going from day to day, the hope that their loved ones will be rescued or somehow be brought home alive.

Former hostage Shani Goren from kibbutz Nir Oz, who had been abducted on 7 October and freed last November, spoke about her best friend, Arbel Yehud, whose 29th birthday was on 21 June.

"People ask me how I'm doing and if I'm managing to process what I've been through," she told the thousands of

people watching her. "The answer is I'm not.

"Every day I wake up I'm still being held hostage. Because until Arbel and everyone else returns home, we can't begin to discuss rehabilitation and moving forward. I know. I was there.

"Bring her home! Bring them all home now!"

It was also Naama Levy's 20th birthday on 22 June. Naama has also been held captive since 7 October. Few can forget the devastating video of a Hamas terrorist pulling her by her hair at gunpoint from the boot of a vehicle and throwing her into the back seat. Her hands were tied, her ankles appeared to be cut, and the back of her pants were soaked in blood.

Her parents, Dr Ayelet Levy Shachar and Yoni Levi, spoke to the crowds.

Her father wished Naama could see how many people had showed up at Hostage Square to celebrate her birthday.

Her distraught mother said, "I don't want to make a speech, I just want to wish Naama a happy birthday, to speak to her. I hope she might hear. I hope these words reach her.

"I wish for you the most basic right that you deserve as a human, your freedom that was taken eight and half months ago."

Her father said he remembered her laughter, could hear her voice, and described what they would have been doing if she had been with them that day. "We would have prepared a table full of sweets, balloons, and presents. Like always."

It would have been such a happy day, he said. "Instead, you are there in darkness for 260 days. And we stand here."

Yoni went on to say that 120 hostages couldn't be

returned through military action, only through a deal. He called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to recognise that "victory in war isn't just winning military battles and preserving the coalition at all costs". It's about "preserving the values of this nation" and "the ability to continue being faithful to our values as Jews and Israelis".

The crowd was mostly wearing different "Bring them home" t-shirts, some with specific people they knew on them, with appropriate placards, some as straightforward as "Get them out of hell now!" There was hardly a dry eye in the crowd. It's hard not to try and imagine the pain of those incapable of doing anything other than waiting for their loved ones to come home, and the horror those still in Gaza are experiencing.

After the formal event ended, people milled around Hostage Square. Some conducted havdalah, singing and holding each aloft other with their spirit. One havdalah circle introduced a father of a hostage who told of his son, Matan Angrest, 21, and his desperate need to hold onto hope that he's alive. He described his brave young man and called for all hostages to be returned.

Edan Alexander, 19, an American Israeli who moved to a kibbutz in Israel and to serve in the army, was a Golani, said his proud but devastated grandmother in the circle. She spoke of how he had been stationed on the Gaza border until 7 October.

Alongside this group was a tent dedicated to Shlomi Ziv, 41, who had been a security guard at the Nova festival and was taken hostage on that fateful Saturday. Ziv was rescued along with Noa Argamani, Almog Meir Jan, and Andrey Kozlov on 6 June, eight months after being kidnapped.

In the tent, called "Don't close your eyes", visitors are able to get a slight sense of what the hostages are experiencing. With 3D glasses and headphones, I was 'transported' to a dark room in Gaza where I could hear the explosions going

off all the time outside and sense the fear of the two hostages in the room.

One was a woman with a tiny baby and the other a man who had been badly injured. They were watched over by a skittish Hamas guard, who was ready to stab the woman and baby to death every time the baby cried. Despite his injuries, the wounded man tried to calm him down and prevent more violence. They were on the floor, and you could sense the hopelessness of their situation but how they were holding on to life.

As the third person in the room, the guard spent time just glaring at me – the camera that videoed the scene – giving me a sense of the hatred he felt towards us.

The person volunteering for the family in the tent, who didn't want to be named, asked that those who accessed their 3D experience go on to tell others about it. She asked that we made sure the world knew what the hostages were still experiencing and that they needed to be brought home. "This is what Shlomi and his family want. The world must know our people in Gaza aren't being treated as humans," she said.

The families of the hostages have been given an open refuge at the Beit Ariela Sha'ar Zion Library that overlooks the square. There, they can gather among themselves at any time of day, protected from the media, onlookers, and the world.

There are numerous heartbreaking reminders of the hostages at the square, including a makeshift Gaza tunnel so people can have insight into what being in there is like. There are photographs and artworks to keep the hostages front of mind for all who come to the square.

Saturday night's gathering was just one of many protests around Israel, where tens of thousands were mostly calling for the end of the Netanyahu government, the return of the hostages, and demanding elections. In fact, there was a massive gathering at the nearby Kaplan Street, even bigger than Hostage Square, at the same time in Tel Aviv. Three people were arrested there in violent clashes with police. There were also other protests all around the country.

There were protests in Israel most nights last week, and there have been weekly anti-government protests since the war began on 7 October.

• Peta Krost is the editor of the SA Jewish Report.



'Hezbollah like Hamas on steroids' warns former colonel

STEVEN GRUZD

On 5 October 2023, retired Israeli Colonel Miri Eisin appeared on the i24 TV channel reflecting on 50 years since the Yom Kippur War. When asked whether the spectacular intelligence failure of 1973 could happen again, she replied, "Absolutely. It could happen tomorrow morning." She was out by one day. And she believes a war with Hezbollah could be much worse than the one with Hamas in Gaza.

Eisin was speaking in a webinar hosted by the SA Jewish Report and the Jewish National Fund on 23 June. She spent 20 years in the Israel Defense Forces, and served as spokesperson for former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

On 7 October 2023, when they heard the sirens, Eisin and her family first thought that terror group Hezbollah in Lebanon had started a war with Israel. They soon learned it was a murderous attack by Hamas in the south. She said there were two factors that led to Israel missing the impending onslaught. "There was blindness, like the United States on 9/11. We had all the information. We'd seen it, but we didn't put it all together. There was also unthinkability – we simply couldn't imagine, predict, prevent, or foretell the genocidal atrocities of 7 October.

They were unthinkable. They won't be anymore."

Eisin said Hamas terrorists planned to attack more than 40 Israeli communities, cause mayhem, murder, and rape Israelis, and take hostages.

Hamas is using the hundreds of kilometres of subterranean tunnels in Gaza built over the past 15 years to move fighters around the strip. This includes returning terrorists into areas Israel had already ostensibly cleared, like Khan Younis or Gaza City. Eisin noted that smuggling weapons into Gaza was a stream of income for some destitute Bedouins in the barren Sinai desert.

"Israel can destroy the tunnels only 100m at a time – there's no easy way to do this," Eisin said. "The ground war has taken nine months and will still take a long time. This is a systematic, slow, ugly war. We have to destroy Hamas's capability to launch an attack like 7 October ever again."

Eisin believes that timing of the Hamas attack was to scupper rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, with the tacit agreement of Tehran.

"The Islamic regime of Iran," she said, "has put as its main objective the annihilation of 'the Zionist entity', 'the cancer of the world' that is Israel. It has anniversaries and holidays to enact it. It has supplied the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza with money, weapons, and training." Iran also supplies weapons to Russia for its war on Ukraine.

Iran wants to spread its version of Shi'a Islam and destabilise Sunni governments in the region. "The events of the past nine

months have been 25 years in the planning as they seek to delegitimise and destroy Israel," said Eisin.

One of Iran's proxies, Hezbollah, isn't made up of Palestinians, but Lebanese Shi'ites, established in 1982 after Israel invaded Lebanon to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut. "Hezbollah is like Hamas on steroids. It has ten times the amount of weapons that Hamas can only dream of, supplied directly by Iran," Eisin said. "It has the eighth largest stockpile of missiles and rockets in the world, numbering more than 150 000 projectiles. In the past three years, it has massively increased its arsenal of drones and unmanned aerial vehicles, often suicide weapons with enormous payloads. It has attacked Israel every single day since 7 October, except for the two days of Hajj."

So is war with Hezbollah inevitable? "Nothing is inevitable except death and taxes," Eisin said. She described how Israel has had to evacuate 80 000 people from towns, villages, and farms on the Lebanese border, as well as 100 000 people in the south. Diplomacy must be tried, she said, but there's a lack of trust. If diplomacy fails, war becomes more likely. "Israel needs safe borders. It will be a harsh war," Eisin said. Without military confrontation, Hezbollah will

feel stronger and continue to attack.

What that war looks like is "a very heavy one to two weeks, as Hezbollah fires many rockets from Lebanon and Syria into Israel". Currently, 95% of the rockets and mortars fired by Hezbollah and Hamas are intercepted and destroyed by Israel's defence systems like the Iron Dome, Arrow, and David's Sling. But with large barrages, the defences will intercept only 80% of the projectiles, and infrastructure and civilian targets will be hit. "This will be all-out war, and Israel will commit ground troops to invade Lebanon, including Beirut. Iran will get the Houthis to attack, but most likely stay out itself."

She said Iran had all benefits of being a threatening power without actually having nuclear weapons.

Commenting on relations between the United States and Israel, Eisin said, "The prime minister of Israel [Benjamin Netanyahu] has a very challenging relationship with the United States. He himself has become very partisan – he talks to the Republicans and some of the Democrats don't like him. There's a younger generation of Democrats that see Israel as a white, colonial, oppressive usurper of Palestinian land."

In spite of all of this, Eisin remains optimistic, saying, "If we work together, we can make it better."



Miri Eisin

International film festival – a one-sided encounter

TALI FEINBERG

The prestigious Encounters International Documentary Film Festival (Encounters), which runs from 20 to 30 June across the country, claims to believe in the power of documentary film to contribute to mutual understanding and dialogue.

However, it failed its mission this year by presenting a one-sided “Palestine focus”, including the screening of three anti-Israel films. It also held panel discussions about Israel that didn’t include any Jews who believed in the Jewish state or Israelis. At no point in the programming were 7 October and Hamas’s atrocities even mentioned.

This was especially pertinent given the fact that new documentaries about the atrocities of 7 October have recently been released.

“We’re extremely disappointed that Encounters chose to feature only one side of the debate on Israel and Palestine,” said South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks. “True democracy and honest media require a range of viewpoints to be aired.

“We’re shocked that a film festival sponsored by many European governments, including Germany and the Netherlands, would be so biased against Israel and choose to have only pro-Palestinian documentaries and discussions.

“This would have been a perfect opportunity to screen *Screams Before Silence*, a documentary detailing the mass rape of Israeli women and girls produced by American businesswomen and tech executive Sheryl Sandberg. Another film that could have been aired was the documentary *Nova*, which features details of the horrific massacre of 360 young music festival attendees on 7 October,” Marks said.

“By screening films like *Screams Before Silence*, Encounters could have fostered discussion about gender-based violence in a country with one of the highest rates of abuse. Instead, in choosing to ignore Israeli suffering, the festival presented a one-dimensional picture of a complex conflict.”

Ari Ingel, the executive director of Creative Community for Peace, a non-profit organisation in the entertainment industry, said, “Documentaries and film festivals have an ability to build bridges between diverse communities. However, when the goal of a festival is to demonise and alienate the vast majority of Jews in South Africa because they are supporters of Israel, this tool of unity and change is easily turned into a forum for hate.

“Excluding the majority voice of the Jewish community from the festival is tokenism and racism, full stop,” he said. “The overwhelming majority of Jews in South Africa support Israel, or are Zionists, and as Dr Martin Luther King Jr

famously once said, ‘When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You’re talking antisemitism.’”

The festival’s organisers said, “This year, we’re highlighting the Palestinian focus to support marginalised voices and show solidarity with the Palestinian people” during the “ongoing Gaza genocide”, a libel that has been disproved multiple times. “We have selected three diverse films, including one made by Israeli and Palestinian directors working together. Our goal is to provide varied perspectives and human experiences for audiences to reflect on.”

However, the programming forced one narrative on audiences – that Israel is evil and the Israeli and Jewish experience doesn’t matter unless it’s anti-Zionist. Meanwhile, Palestinian stories that reflect “memory, archive, and belonging, memories of displacement, loss, and resilience” that “illuminate the enduring quest for stability, resolution, and belonging” were screened.

Ironically, the organisers highlighted the role of Encounters in publicising the “struggles and resilience of marginalised communities”. However, Jews who are Zionist – a tiny minority – were erased from their programming.

“We believe film festivals can foster understanding and critical thinking during times of crisis,” they said, while ensuring that no critical thinking was fostered.

The films shown included *No Other Land* by Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham, which documents Adra’s account of living in the Palestinian village of Masafer Yatta in the West Bank. *Bye Bye Tiberias*, directed by Lina Soualem, is an intimate film that chronicles the life and family history of Palestinian actress Hiam Abbass. Kamal Aljafari’s, *A Fidai Film*, “shows how the plundering of memory is central to the broader violence of imperialism”.

A film titled *The Return*, directed by Mark Kaplan and featuring Heidi Grunebaum, explores the Holocaust, but with a strong anti-Israel slant, and implies that Israel’s actions echo those of the Nazis. The pair are opposed to Zionism, and also made the anti-Israel film *The Village Under The Forest* in 2013.

Panelists at this year’s events included extremist Roshan Dadoo of the South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition; Maya Schkolne, who has been an organiser for South African Jews for a Free Palestine (SAJFP) since 2018; and Jaamia Galant, an active member of the Palestine Solidarity

Campaign for the past 20 years.

One event scheduled for Durban on 29 June, which includes screenings, poetry reading, and a panel discussion, was advertised with a fist in the colours of the Palestinian flag, displaying the festival’s partisanship.

The festival has been supported by the Jewish community over its 26-year history, from funding to collaborative screenings to filling audience seats. In 2021, *I Am Ella*, a documentary directed by Jordy Sank about Holocaust survivor Ella Blumenthal, was screened by the festival in conjunction with the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre. But instead of asking Jewish supporters how to make this year’s festival more balanced, organisers

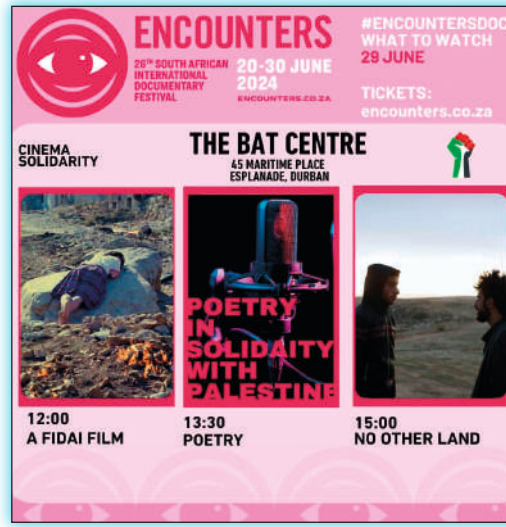
completely ignored their Jewish constituents.

“What’s disheartening about the exclusion of all Zionist films and filmmakers is that the Israeli film industry is the epitome of coexistence,” said Ingel. “Whether it be Palestinian and Jewish Israeli filmmakers coming together to tackle painful stories such as they did in the award winning mini-series *Our Boys*; Israel’s largest LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning] film festival, TLVFest, regularly featuring Palestinian films and filmmakers; or documentaries such as *Dead Sea Guardians* that brought together Palestinian and Jewish Israeli environmentalists.

“Ultimately, boycotts [of Zionist Israeli films] are an affront to Palestinian and Israeli moderates alike who are seeking to reach peace through compromise, exchange, and mutual recognition,” he said.

“Festivals like this one could play a small yet crucial role in helping to achieve that peace – that is, if its organisers truly believed in doing what’s best for Palestinians.”

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to festival director Mandisa Zitha asking her why no films depicting Hamas’s crimes were shown at the festival. Zitha was also asked why there were no mainstream Jewish, Israeli, or Zionist representatives in programming or panel discussions; and why the Jewish community should continue to support the festival. She chose not to respond.



A poster for the Encounters Film Festival event

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The war within

Walking through the streets of Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, you can be lulled into a false belief that Israel is going on as normal. It's easy at arms-length to believe that this isn't a country at war.

The streets are full of people apparently getting on with their lives. Machaneh Yehuda pumps at night, with bars and restaurants brimful. Walking through the Mamilla Mall and down the Ben Yehuda *midrachov*, people are in shops, buying, eating out, having fun. Perhaps most of those shopping are tourists, but not all. And lots of Israelis are out there living life to the full.

Tel Aviv is still the city that doesn't sleep. The beaches are packed with people enjoying the weather and finding "kef" (a common Arabic term used in Israel for fun) wherever they can.

Traffic is as hectic as ever at any time of day. Tel Aviv markets are full and happening. Coffee shops and bars rock.

The images look unchanged from before the war, only there's a massive difference just under the surface. There's a huge chasm in most people's lives and, since 7 October, these lives haven't returned to "normal" and for many, perhaps they never will.

It takes talking to people to better understand what's really going on for Israelis. Only then do you get a real sense of what living with this war is like. It's only then that the true anguish this war has inflicted on Israelis becomes evident.

There's a well-hidden fear and devastation that I have never experienced before among Israelis. People who in the past wouldn't think twice about getting in a car and driving through the disputed territories are today steering clear of those areas if possible. And if they live in settlements in those areas, they don't necessarily feel happy to stray too far into other settlement areas.

I have long since become comfortable with soldiers, in and out of uniform, carrying military rifles, but these days, you see many men carrying handguns, even in Jerusalem. The difference, as I understand it, is that soldiers are obliged to keep their weapons on them, whereas the handguns are for personal protection.

The need to have handguns within Israel's border is, for me, something new. It shows an insecurity I'm not used to here. Having said that, since 7 October, there's a sense that anything can happen at any time, but let's get on with living anyway.

Israelis I spoke to said they were still reeling from the wholesale slaughter and rape that happened on 7 October. The loss of around 1 200 people that day has shattered Israelis, not least of all their sense of security. Many have instilled burglar bars on their windows and serious locks on their doors, which they never felt were necessary before.

I have yet to meet someone who hadn't lost at least one person they cared about on that one day. Many have been to too many *shiva* homes and funerals. In truth, Israel is suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, but Israelis are so good at looking strong. It's that incredible *sabra* (prickly pear) exterior.

There are extremes, of course, and the images of the haunted faces I saw at Hostage Square last Saturday night will stick with me forever. There cannot be a worse pain and despair than not knowing what's happening to your child, husband, or wife, at the hands of monsters. For eight and a half months, they have had absolutely no way of knowing what's happening to their beloved people. From happy, secure, joyful people, they are being treated like animals in Gaza, where they are the enemy.

It's not a situation of prisoners of war in which soldiers are held. These are mostly civilians – young, old, sick, injured, and their loved ones know nothing of their treatment. They have nothing but hope that they are still alive. Even that they cannot know for sure.

In Tel Aviv, in hotels usually frequented by happy tourists on holiday, there's a totally different atmosphere. Though there are tourists, most of the people staying in the hotels I visited were refugees from the south and north of Israel.

Some of them have lost their homes, and others cannot go home because their towns, kibbutzim, and moshavim are being shelled or set on fire from either Lebanon or Gaza.

Little children who normally run free in their towns are stuck in small hotel rooms, not able to do what they do as children. Their parents are mostly unable to work, and have no income or potential income.

I met a plumber and a shopkeeper who were sitting watching the sea from the balcony of the hotel. Both cannot earn a living to put food on the table for their families. They have always been their family breadwinners and are proud of that. Not now. Both don't know when they will be able to go home – or if they have homes to go back to.

Granted, the government has put them up, and they are getting meals and have a comfortable place to sleep. This is something they recognise with relief, but it's not the lives they choose to live.

While the world blames Israel for this war and doesn't recognise the pain it has caused for Israelis, spending time in Israel is a wakeup call. Israelis aren't at war because they want to fight. They are at war to save their country.

Most Israelis I spoke to believe that the government needs to urgently find a way to bring home the hostages and end the war, hence the many protests around the country that are frequented by thousands and thousands of people.

I appreciate that when visitors come to Israel, the first thing they say is, "Can you believe this is a country at war?" I certainly had to keep pinching myself about this. But the truth is that this is a country at war, and this war is hurting way too many people.

Israelis are tired of this war, and have had enough pain and anguish. Too much pain! Too much heartache!

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Compromise – key ingredient for a political marriage



OPINION

RABBI YEHUDA STERN

As anyone who has travelled to Israel will know, one of the iconic features of Ben Gurion International Airport is the world's largest kosher mezuzah affixed to an interior entranceway of the airport.

The *sofer* (ritual scribe) Rabbi Yitzchak Karichali spent three years handwriting the mezuzah that's more than a metre in length. "Ben Gurion Airport is the gateway to Israel, so it's a suitable place for this special mezuzah," said airport official Kobi Mor.

This large and unique mezuzah reminds millions of travellers that pass through Ben Gurion Airport of the divine protection that rests over the land of Israel, a country celebrated and revered by all the Abrahamic faiths and religions. It reminds them that although Israel may be under attack from Hamas, Hezbollah, and countries from around the world, it's nevertheless G-d's country, and He will ultimately protect her, her people, and her supporters. However, there's another lesson the mezuzah teaches us, especially at the entrance to the country.

In Jewish law, we're instructed to put the mezuzah up at an angle, leaning slightly inwards towards the direction of the room one is entering. This detail isn't random or meaningless. There's actually a debate between the two Talmudic giants, Rashi and Tosafot, with regards to the correct position of a mezuzah, with Rashi saying it should be placed vertically on the door post and Tosafot saying horizontally. The conclusion of halachic authorities is that we put the mezuzah up at an angle to accommodate both opinions.

This is a unique halachic ruling, as most debates in Jewish law conclude with one side of the debate being chosen by the later sages as the right one to follow. The reason why this debate ends differently and the mezuzah is placed at an angle to incorporate the two opinions is because the mezuzah is placed at the front of the home. It welcomes us by the front doorway with an important trait critical for the smooth-running of the home: compromise. Knowing how to listen to each other and compromise a way forward that will please everyone is the first key ingredient of a healthy marriage and a peaceful home.

We're living at a time when the rate of divorce and broken homes has increased. When preparing couples for marriage, I often raise this concern and discuss ways to ensure a strong and everlasting relationship. It's easier to respect and listen to one's significant other during the romantic dating and engagement period than it is once the couple is married and life moves on with its day-to-day challenges. It takes two people to form a relationship, and both need to feel that their voice is heard and valued in order for the relationship to be sustainable.

That, to me, is the lesson of the mezuzah at the entrance to Israel. It's a lesson for the society of Israel – that the way the country will survive animosity from around the world and the way the economy and social development of the country will thrive is by

working together. Members of the Knesset need to respect one another and learn how to compromise if they want to govern the country successfully. Members of the public need to acknowledge the different and diverse people that make up the society of Israel if they want to live peacefully in the land.

Like Israel, in South Africa, we now have a multiparty government called the Government of National Unity (GNU). These are exciting and hopeful times for the country and its future, as our government now has a diverse representation of the population. This new reality could be the beginning of something very exciting which can bring the change we so desperately need. However, this new partnership of political parties will require a great deal of effort and hard work from all involved. It will require compromise from all sides – a lot. Perhaps a mezuzah on the front entrance to Parliament or the Union Buildings would be worthwhile to serve as a daily reminder of this to the parties and politicians involved. If they need a rabbi to officiate the blessings, I would be happy to volunteer my services.

Torah has such important guidance for the GNU. First, we must remember that

unity doesn't mean conformity. Each party must hold onto its own identity with its own values and policies, just like the unique flag that each tribe of Israel carried through the desert; the 12 different pathways the tribes used to cross the Red Sea on the way out of Egypt; and the 12 different stones the high priest wore on his breastplate to remember the 12 tribes. According to Jewish thought, individuality and independence is important and in no way a contradiction to compromise or unity. The greatest sign of unity – and its true definition – is when diverse people can find a way to work together.

There's one condition, that all parties agree to a central goal and focus-point that will benefit all of them equally. This will ensure that everyone is aiming to accomplish the

same thing in spite of differences of strategy or style. For the Jewish people in the desert, the central theme was the Tabernacle – the House of G-d – around which the tribes of Israel camped. For the people of South Africa, the positive future of our country and its people must remain the central theme of all government discussions and policies. Fraud, theft, and corruption together with biased and prejudiced foreign policy will disrupt the unity government and only lead to further strife and inner conflict between the various parties.

At the end of the Jewish prayer called the *Amidah*, we say, "Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light of your countenance." When we're all one – diverse in our unique ways but united in our goal and willing to compromise for the sake of peace – then our country South Africa will merit divine blessings from on high.

I know we can do it!
• Rabbi Yehuda Stern is the rabbi at Sydenham Shul.



Photo: Yossi Zeilige

The mezuzah at Ben Gurion Airport is a symbol of compromise

Northern war near certain, but timing is key

OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



“No war is inevitable until it breaks out,” wrote British historian and journalist, AJP Taylor. It can be argued that Israel has been at war with Hezbollah since at least 7 October 2023.

An immutable concept of war is that a keen strategist will endeavour to choose the time and place to conduct a battle. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) may not be able to choose the place where the final battle will be fought against Hezbollah, but it may be able to choose the timing of an all-out attack.

Amidst an increasing sense of insecurity, a major war on Israel's northern border with Lebanon seems inevitable. Although, as a military historian, I use the word “inevitable” with caution.

Since 7 October 2023, the tension along the northern border, which initially appeared to have waned, has once again escalated to unbearable levels.

More than 4 000 rocket, missile, and other attacks have resulted in 80 000 Israeli citizens having had to abandon their homes temporarily. Hezbollah units have infiltrated the demilitarised zone between the Litani River and the Blue Line in contravention of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

Israel's apparent reluctance to neutralise Hezbollah's military stems from several sources. The IDF was hesitant to conduct a two-front war against Hamas and Hezbollah simultaneously. Israel occupies a central geographic position surrounded by potential foes, and has historically used the advantages offered by internal lines of communication.

The IDF prefers to deal with its enemies in sequence rather than simultaneously, allowing for a concentration of forces against a single foe at a time. This all makes perfect strategic and operational sense and favours the IDF, which has successfully adopted manoeuvre-style warfare in past battles with Arab armies.

At least one of the barriers to attacking Hezbollah has fallen

away with the demise of Hamas's fighting power, which has been whittled away with the relentless attacks in Gaza since October.

Together with United States concerns, Israel has also been reluctant to provoke a wider war involving the direct commitment of Iranian forces in support of its proxies in Lebanon. The capriciousness of the United States's support during a protracted war on Israel's northern front must be considered.

However, the likelihood of an all-out Iranian attack has receded in the wake of Operation True Promise's dismal performance on 13 to 14 April 2024. Israeli Iron Dome and missile defence systems were able to render harmless close to 99% of the more than 300 Iranian missile and drone munitions sent over.

More worrying for Iran was the military co-operation between the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, together with several Arab nations in bringing down Iranian missiles overflying their territory on their way to Israel.

The attack, which was the largest drone strike in history, was an abject failure, leaving Iran bereft of a credible threat to Israeli security. Therefore, an Israeli attack on Hezbollah may draw little in the way of tangible Iranian support as its threat of massive missile intervention proved much more of a deterrent to Israel than the actual reality of its ill-conceived attack on 13 April.

The prospect of engaging with Hezbollah, which by many accounts is far more formidable than Hamas, seems daunting at first glance. Hezbollah fields more than 50 000 well-trained fighters, many of whom are veterans of the conflict in Syria. There they honed crucial skills in supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime in some of the fiercest combat.

Combat experience in Syria gave Hezbollah valuable exposure to conventional-style combat, the use of artillery in support of infantry, and the deployment of larger conventional formations. Historically, Hezbollah earned a fearsome reputation in the wake of the Israeli-Lebanon War of 2006, where it acquitted itself beyond the IDF's expectations, inflicting several serious losses on the ill-prepared and mismanaged Israeli forces.

In that war, Israel encountered Hezbollah's mission-command

style, which allowed small groupings that the IDF managed to isolate to continue the fight and act on their own initiative. It also deployed a hybrid force made up of conventional-type soldiers as well as guerilla fighters, and these successfully acted in concert on several occasions during the battle.

The IDF, which entered the war having discarded many of the combined arm's principles learned in the Yom Kippur War in favour of new-fangled technology, left the battlefield much chastened. Little wonder at signs of reluctance to embroil itself with an enemy that boasts a missile capability of more than 120 000.

The terrain that the IDF will traverse in south Lebanon is formidable and favours the defenders. Hezbollah has enjoyed years of unlimited funding to construct field fortifications and an extensive tunnel network that aids logistics, conceals weapons and missiles, and allows for the rapid movement of troops from one location to another as the situation demands.

Hezbollah knows the lie of the land, and can withdraw a portion of its forces into the numerous urban areas, thereby increasing defensive multipliers. An invading force faces a formidable task, and hopes for a quick victory remain remote.

A school of thought is that Israel cannot avoid the problem of Hezbollah, and will either have to fight now or sometime in the future. Time offers no guarantee that conditions will be more favourable.

The IDF is also made up of veterans, and has gained enormous experience during operations in Gaza. Unlike in 2006, it has built its urban offensive around an all-arms combined force team, which includes all the components of air power, artillery, armour and infantry, together with engineering units using bulldozers to pave the way.

Hezbollah, in contrast, can field only a light infantry force, which, no matter how well-trained or equipped, won't be able to muster anywhere near the firepower at the disposal of the IDF. Israel has few good choices in the current scenario, and decisions may boil down to the least bad choice.

• Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.



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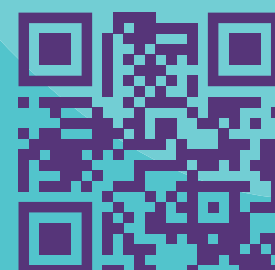
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Breaking the chain of gett refusals

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

She wants her freedom; he wants his power, so he withholds a gett (a Jewish divorce) making her an *agunah* (chained woman). Dedicated to addressing this crisis around the world, Rebbetzin Kayla Goldstein is in South Africa to share her expertise.

The Israeli-born, United States-based rebbetzin says she has always questioned things that don't make sense. "I grew up in a religious community and went to school in an intense environment," she says. "I wasn't allowed to ask questions in school, and when I did, I was often kicked out." Although she could ask questions at home – her father, a rabbi, was always open and willing to learn – it just wasn't something that was done culturally.

That's why Goldstein ultimately founded the organisation, Questioning the Answers, which aims to create a safe space for people to ask and answer questions on Judaism.

On her organisation's Instagram page, many began questioning how Hashem could allow an *agunah*. A woman becomes an *agunah* when her husband refuses to give her a gett, effectively keeping her chained to him as she's considered married and is unable to move on with her life.

"You can't force a man to write it, he has to do so of his own free will," Goldstein says. "So, men that are abusive can get drunk with power and use the gett as a means of exerting control." Conversely, a woman can refuse to accept a gett from her husband, leaving him stuck in the sense that he has to continue to provide for her.

"This issue lit something in me because the way we were doing it was so different from the way that the Torah told us to do it," Goldstein says. "I started talking to rabbis and others about what we should do. It ballooned, and thank G-d, we've been able to help people."

Goldstein has, nonetheless, had to be tenacious in the fight against an often-taboo subject. "I spent a whole year being hung up on and told I was never going to change the system. I'm most proud of changing the conversation and bringing rabbis to the table."

Though Goldstein had never been exposed to the issue of gett refusals, once she became involved, she learned that her late grandmother had been an *agunah*. At a massive *asifa* (gathering) she organised, her father shared his story. "His mother was an *agunah*, and he was tasked at the age of 14 with getting my grandfather to give her a gett. It was a stressful time, and he emphasised that it was abusive to the children as well."

Once Goldstein began working in this area, many came forward with stories of their friends, relatives, or even themselves. "More people than we realise are going through this," she says.

"Even if they're not an *agunah*, they're going through a divorce where they're very much headed towards it, and they feel a big loss of control and don't know how

As Goldstein delved into the world of *agunot*, she was approached by esteemed Australian rabbi and halachic advisor Rabbi Yehoram Ulman.



Rebbetzin Kayla Goldstein

Together, they co-founded the Va'ad, dedicated to championing the rights and dignity of those suffering from *igun* around the world. *Igun* refers to cases either in which a husband refuses to grant a gett to his wife or the wife refuses to accept a gett from her husband. Goldstein runs the Va'ad under Ulman's halachic guidance.

"The Va'ad is an ever-growing

to help themselves. We can help them before it gets to a case of an *agunah*, at which point it becomes a lot harder."

committee of leading rabbis from around the world as well as lawyers, mental-health experts, and *betei din* [rabbinical courts

of Judaism]," she says. "The goal is to have this everywhere in the world. There should be nowhere for somebody to run and hide if they're holding another person hostage."

Goldstein manages each case, assigning an applicable professional and following up. She regularly consults with Ulman and leading rabbis around the world, especially in regard to particularly problematic cases.

"The goal of the Va'ad is that we should get to a place of complete intolerance of *igun*," she says.

"When you get divorced, you give a gett. It shouldn't become something people use as leverage."

Once the Beth Din has done everything it can for you, and the husband still won't comply, you become an *agunah* who relies on the community "to pressure him, his family not to support him, and so on", says Goldstein. "The community shouldn't become judge and jury; it needs to listen to the Beth Din's decision."

This sometimes includes an order to excommunicate the man in question. Yet this isn't always heeded, with some communities protecting men with whom they share an allegiance. "That doesn't

mean we should allow abuse. The community needs to create a no-tolerance zone," Goldstein says.

In South Africa, civil marriage is recognised by the state, and religious marriage is recognised by the Beth Din. "When you divorce, you need both a civil and a religious divorce," says Michelle Blumenau, the co-founder of Go Getters – the South African Gett Network.

She advises couples to get a gett before a civil divorce. "If you don't have a gett by the time you get to a civil court, you must highlight this for the judge and insist that there is a clause in your divorce agreement that mentions that the gett needs to be given within a certain time," she says. The Divorce [Amendment] Act of 1996, in fact, allows South African courts to prevent a Jewish husband from obtaining a secular divorce without giving a gett.

Though South African cases of prolonged gett refusal are rare, Go Getters has helped to free more than 20 people since its inception in 2016. "We have three cases that we're actively working on," Blumenau says. "One case is too many as a great deal of suffering is involved."

Time to confront the elephant in the community

OPINION

REBBETZIN WENDY HENDLER



Do we have gett refusers in our community? You may think not, but unfortunately we do.

Rebbetzin Kayla Goldstein from New Jersey, the founder of the international rabbinic *vaad* (council) against gett refusal, spoke last week about how gett refusal is a form of abuse which can thrive only when a community fails to sanction gett refusers. She believes the only way to eliminate this and all other forms of abuse is for the entire community, from the top down, to have a zero-tolerance policy, to be a community that simply doesn't tolerate abuse. This sounds easy, but what does no tolerance look like?

The truth is that we all fall foul of this in some way. There are emotional reasons why we fail to take action. We may not want to lose favour with the accused or be seen as impolite. We may not want to believe bad things about this person. We're unwilling to confront the unpleasant elephant in the community. We pride ourselves on being people who give others the benefit of the doubt, who are kind and caring, and who believe in the power of repentance.

The danger of this is that we push things away, pretending that they don't exist and ignoring the red flags. This is especially true when the alleged abuser is a friend or a colleague of ours. The real hard truth is that we just want to avoid being part of something unpleasant. We famously say, "I don't want to get involved", or "Let the professionals or police or anyone else deal with it." Another argument often used to justify failure to take action is to ask, "If this was true, surely the rabbis or

community leaders would have dealt with it?"

This lack of support for the victim is agonising, and paves the way for the abuse to continue. By being polite, not saying anything, allowing the alleged abuser into our communal places, we're subliminally communicating that their behaviour is acceptable and they can continue as normal. Simultaneously, we're saying to victims that we don't stand behind them, don't believe them, and don't care. We have failed to stand up for those who need it most, and this endangers our community.

So what does standing up for victims look like?

First, we need to challenge our mental block of "I'm not getting involved." With this block, no intervention can take place;

Second, we need to dig deep and find the courage to get involved by speaking out and reporting;



Gett refusal is a form of abuse

Third, once people are ready to act, they may be unsure about what to do to help. In these situations, one should turn to a relevant authority who can take action; and

Fourth, if an instruction is given to the community about an alleged offender, it needs to be strictly upheld.

Rebbetzin Goldstein shed light on how important it is for people to understand the Beth Din process when dealing with abuse. In order to

manage a case which has been brought to its attention, the Beth Din should have a clearly specified process which the community is made aware of – in any case of abuse. This needs to include a specially trained body of rabbis, and professionals such as psychologists, social workers, lawyers, and child-protection specialists where necessary. The process should comprise a full investigation of the matter; an assessment by a panel of professionals; deliberations; and finally a decision as to the way forward. That may take the form of a directive given about the offender either to community rabbis alone, or to the wider community. This directive must be upheld by every rabbi, communal leader, shul member, and community member. If a single rabbi refuses to follow the Beth Din's directive, its power to sanction the offender is weakened and the message sent to offenders is that they are safe in our community. They won't be held to account. To the contrary, they will be sheltered and protected, even at times honoured.

Once a directive has been issued, for example that the person is not allowed entry into any of the shuls, members of the community or friends of the individual could then approach this person and pressurise them to conform to this ruling on the basis that as a member of our community who receives the benefits of that community, they are duty bound to adhere to its internal rules and practices. For example, there could be social consequences, telling them that unless they conform with what they are being instructed to do, they will no longer form part of our social circle. This sends a clear message that abuse of any kind brings about strong action in our community.

We're one nation, one community, one body, and with that comes the duty and privilege of being uncomfortable when it's called for.

• Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler is the co-founder and director of *Koleinu SA*, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community. The helpline number is 011 264 0341, operating Sunday to Thursday, from 09:00 to 22:00, and after Shabbat until midnight.

War in Middle East sparks battle in workplace

ELKA COHEN

It's normal for sociopolitical issues to spill into our environment, but the tension caused by strongly held opposing beliefs over the war between Israel and Hamas is fracturing once cohesive teams.

Though some organisations are trying to figure out how to address "the elephant in the boardroom", others are unsure whether they should. But a healthy and productive workforce depends on willingness to invite a free exchange of ideas and engage opposing perspectives. Ignoring it won't make it disappear.

Jodi (43), a name used to protect her anonymity, is a therapist who has worked at a children's hospital in Cape Town for 18 years.

shared work environment. There just seems to be no real understanding – or any consideration – of how their symbols of support could be received by someone like me."

Her non-Jewish colleagues, mostly neutral in their views, have commented that the bumper stickers and decorative flags are nothing more than a "silly trend".

"While they remain unaffected, I feel extremely triggered," says Jodi.

During a recent discussion with a senior staff member at the hospital, Jodi was asked to give specific examples of anything she may have personally experienced that could be considered antisemitic.

"I couldn't give specific examples. No-one has spat at me or uttered any sort of Jew-hating slander, so I had to explain my sensitivity to what feels like a passive-aggressive attack."

Jodi has always worn her Magen David to work. She recently felt brave enough to wear her yellow "Bring Them Home" badge in support of the hostages.

"It's the country's tone at large that makes me think I'd better not be too overt," she says.

Though her family have encouraged her to consider quitting her job, Jodi has decided she's unwilling to leave the job she loves simply because she's Jewish.

"I've had to ask myself if it's better just to keep my head down, or whether my silence is part of the growing problem."

For many Jewish South Africans, the country's political stance has left them feeling isolated and often terrified to speak up. But silence is unsustainable, and ignorance is unacceptable at this particularly personal and deeply divisive time in history.

Mark Oppenheimer, an advocate on the Johannesburg Bar with a special interest in the boundary between freedom of expression and genuine hate speech, says, "It's undoubtedly the case that since 7 October we've had a huge escalation in antisemitism in South Africa."

He says the onus is on businesses and organisations to establish a constructive framework in which to engage employees in courageous conversation.

"It's often the case that a small vocal minority hold a strong anti-Israel view, but most reasonable South Africans have a pro-Israel view because they recognise that terrorism is wrong, that deliberately killing women and children is wrong, that rape is wrong, and the war against Hamas is justified," Oppenheimer says.

If you can agree that rape is wrong, it's a good starting point from which to engage two opposing standpoints. But, he advises, "Being a good listener is key to having a productive conversation, especially over an emotionally charged subject. Listening empowers you to ask the right questions.

Simply waiting for your turn to put your views across will probably result in an emotional eruption.

"It's hard to persuade someone about a different set of values to the ones they hold, so eliciting the other person's values is key," says Oppenheimer. "People like to be heard, so ask questions and offer understanding. This will probably serve you well in opening a constructive dialogue."

"You won't always get a reasonable person," he warns, "but in finding out what the conversation climate looks like, you'll soon know whether you're in for a reasonable discussion."

Oppenheimer says it's important for isolated individuals in the workspace who find it challenging to speak up to recognise civil society organisations who have taken a pro-Israel stance and to support them in having their voices recognised and heard.

Are we at a change-point in South Africa due to the recent election results?

"The African National Congress seems to have less practical reasons to maintain its strong position of the past, so we may find a wholesale abandonment of the Palestinian cause. This doesn't mean it's not a threat that can re-emerge," Oppenheimer warns.



Showing support for Israel and Jewish identity in the workplace since 7 October has become increasingly difficult

"Since 7 October it's been hard to be at work. Although no-one is allowed to discuss their personal views, simply being there is enough to make you feel as though you're at a Palestinian support rally," she says.

"My days spent at work are full of a subtle yet widespread pro-Palestinian undertone. Cars parked in staff bays with 'Free Palestine' bumper stickers is one thing, but colleagues who carry hospital card lanyards and cellphone covers and computers embellished in Palestinian colours in our shared therapy space just feels too much. There's a lack of sensitivity."

When the department head arrived daily wearing a badge on his shirt reflecting his personal alliance, Jodi's gnawing discomfort grew. "My colleagues came to work wearing watermelon earrings, which initially struck me as fun. When it dawned on me that the watermelon was a symbol of support of Hamas terrorists, I felt physically ill."

Jodi has no problem with people expressing their personal views in a private capacity.

"Everyone is free to have their say. At home, in social settings, at protests, and support rallies, but it feels grossly inappropriate to bring it into our small,

Sexual violence on 7 October – a clear Hamas strategy

LEE TANKLE

Warning: Graphic content

"The sexual abuse that occurred on 7 October wasn't made up of isolated incidents or sporadic cases but was rather a clear operational strategy carried out by Hamas."

So said advocate Carmit Klar-Chalamish, the head of the research department at the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (ARCCI) at a webinar hosted by the Women's Action Campaign South Africa on 25 June.

Similarly, the head of communications in the Israeli Police, Chief Superintendent Advocate Mirit Ben Mayor described her experience as a police officer on 7 October, and how the police had reacted to the events that day and in the months since while investigating everything that occurred that day.

"We have more than 5 000 visuals to show that every terrorist who took part in the 7 October attacks knew exactly where they were going and what they were doing," said Ben Mayor.

Ben Mayor said it was the police officers who sprang into action, fighting with whatever they could to save those around them and combat terrorists.

"Israeli police understood very quickly that we had a massive attack on our hands. At first, we thought we had tens of people murdered, then the numbers were just going up and up as the day progressed," Ben Mayor said. "Families were losing touch with their loved ones. They had no idea where they were, if they were alive, if they were hiding, if they had been kidnapped. We had no idea what was going on. Therefore, that night, we opened a family centre."

This centre was a way for family members and friends to find information and give DNA evidence to police officers so they could try and find their loved ones.

Said Chalamish, "One of the survivors of the Nova festival described how from her hiding place she saw a large group of Hamas terrorists passing injured women between them. She saw a young woman being pulled by one terrorist by her hair while another terrorist was penetrating her. Each time the woman resisted, the terrorist stomped on her neck."

"In some cases, the sexual abuse took place in front of family members or friends, who were forced to watch it under threat to their life or that of the victim."

Chalamish said that a witness at the Nova festival described cases in which the terrorists shot victims in the head during the rape or immediately afterwards.

Research detailing the sexual violence committed on 7 October by ARCCI shows evidence of binding and tying of bodies, mutilation and destruction of genital organs, insertion of weapons in intimate areas, and the destruction and mutilation of bodies like beheadings of victims of the Hamas terrorists, according to Chalamish.

"These tactics were used to intensify the degradation and terror of sexual assault physically and symbolically," said Chalamish.



Chief Superintendent Advocate Mirit Ben Mayor

"A lot of the bodies that were collected and brought to an identification centre were shot in the head, and/or their genitals," said Ben Mayor. "First responders found men and women shot in their genitals, they found burned bodies. Some bodies were mutilated

beyond recognition." "It's difficult to get evidence from that day, especially regarding sexual violence," said Ben Mayor. "Hardly any of the victims of this violence are alive, so we're relying on eyewitnesses to these atrocities."

Both Chalamish and Ben Mayor say that their organisations don't try to push victims to come forward if they aren't comfortable doing so.

Ben Mayor has been part of the investigation team trying to bring justice to the victims of these crimes.

"The terrorists don't regret what they did on 7 October. They are quite proud of what they did, including the sexual acts."

"The terrorists explained in our interrogations that they were told to maim, kill, and rape as many people as



The scene of the Nova festival where Hamas carried out sexual violence attacks

they could," said Ben Mayor.

To those who say that these atrocities didn't happen, both Ben Mayor and Chalamish



Carmit Klar-Chalamish

say that they wish it was fake. "You can choose to believe us or not, but there's no logic in making this kind of stuff up," Ben Mayor said.

Wikipedia rebuffs outrage over declaration ADL is untrustworthy

ASAF ELIA-SHALEV – JTA

The charitable foundation that owns Wikipedia appears to have fobbed off a letter from a broad coalition of Jewish groups calling on the foundation to override a move by voluntary editors to declare the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) an untrustworthy source on Israel and Zionism.

More than 40 Jewish groups signed a letter addressed to the board of the Wikimedia Foundation, saying the decision served to make the Jewish community more vulnerable to antisemitism.

"Fundamentally, Wikipedia is stripping the Jewish community of the right to defend itself from the hatred that targets our community," the groups wrote on Monday, 24 June, under the letterhead of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella group of which the ADL is a member. "We urge you to launch an investigation into this decision immediately and the motivations behind it, and to start the process for administrative reconsideration."

In a response to an inquiry from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), the foundation didn't address the content of the letter but appeared to reject its very premise.

"Unfortunately, this letter represents a misunderstanding of the situation and how Wikipedia works," Maggie Dennis, the vice-president of community resilience and sustainability at the Wikimedia Foundation, said in an email. "First, it's important to note that the letter was addressed to the Wikimedia Foundation board of trustees. Neither the board or the foundation make content decisions on Wikipedia. A community of volunteers makes these decisions subject to Wikipedia's terms of use."

After publication, the foundation told JTA it was still considering how it would reply to the letter, and it wanted to educate its senders about how Wikipedia worked.

"We're in the process now of considering our response to the signatories, including learning more about their needs before we reply," the foundation said. "We hope to raise more understanding with these groups about how Wikipedia works."

With a track record dating back more than a century and a \$100 million (R181.6 million) budget, the ADL is widely regarded as the world's leading source of research and information on antisemitism, particularly in the United States, and as a prominent advocate for Jewish causes. But it has also been under intensifying scrutiny by critics who decry

the organisation's pro-Israel advocacy and equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, particularly after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October.

The move by Wikipedia, one of the world's most visited websites and most popular sources of information, to declare that the ADL couldn't be trusted on some topics represents a staggering blow to the organisation.

If the Wikimedia Foundation were to order a reversal of the ADL's downgrading, it would be equally staggering. The foundation doesn't intervene in editorial decisions by its community of editors, opting to trust the elaborate processes it has developed to seek consensus and resolve disputes. A reversal would in all likelihood garner a backlash from among the thousands of veteran editors who are accustomed to autonomy and have volunteered countless hours of their lives to run the online encyclopaedia.

Defenders of the ADL, however, say that in this case, the decision is tainted by alleged irregularities in the process and that some of the editors involved in the debate appear to harbour bias against Israel.

One group that has come to ADL's defence is WhiteHatWiki, a company that offers Wikipedia-related crisis-response services. WhiteHatWiki isn't being paid by the ADL, according to both parties.

"It's understandable that during this time of highly inflamed passions that people are drawn to ideological debates," someone from WhiteHatWiki wrote in a Wikipedia discussion thread. "But unfortunately, too much of this has carried over to this Wikipedia discussion, with many editors relying on inflammatory, misleading rhetoric posted by other editors."

In its own response to the decision,

the ADL initially blamed a "campaign to delegitimise the ADL."

On Friday, ADL Chief Executive Jonathan Greenblatt spoke at length about the controversy, saying in a television interview that Wikipedia was "an organisation that we deeply respect" but that it was "flat-out wrong" in this case.

"We should listen to black people when they tell us what racism is, and listen to LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning] groups when they tell us what homophobia is, and we should listen to Jewish people when they tell us what antisemitism is," Greenblatt said.

A months long debate among Wikipedia editors over the ADL's reliability went unnoticed in the media until JTA reported last week that the debate was concluding and that Wikipedia had labelled the ADL "generally unreliable" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Editors had also debated whether the ADL was reliable on antisemitism, and the vast majority said the group couldn't be trusted because of how it conflated criticism of Israel with antisemitism. An uninvolved editor tasked with evaluating the community's will ultimately opted for a nuanced decision, declaring that the ADL "can roughly be taken as reliable on the topic of antisemitism when Israel and Zionism are not concerned".

Among the matters unsettled in the debate among Wikipedia editors was the validity of the ADL's definition of antisemitism, which comes from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). More than 1 000 government bodies and institutions have adopted the IHRA definition, but critics say that its clauses concerning criticism of Israel can be used to silence pro-Palestinian voices.

The letter from Jewish groups to the Wikimedia Foundation also defended the IHRA definition. "We're firmly united in the belief that an attack on ADL's reliability over its use of the IHRA definition and advocacy on behalf of the Jewish people weakens us all," the letter said.

• The story has been revised following additional comment from the Wikimedia Foundation.



Photo: Getty Images via JTA

Anti-Defamation League chief executive Jonathan Greenblatt

Orthodox Jews must be drafted, Israeli court rules

>>Continued from page 2

exemption, though it's unlikely that such a law could gain majority support in any coalition.

The ruling drew immediate criticism from the leaders of religious parties, who vowed to fight it. "There has never been a ruling by the Supreme Court in favour of the members of the yeshiva and in the interest of the haredi public," tweeted Moshe Gafni of United Torah Judaism. "There is not a single judge there who understands the value of learning the Torah and its contribution to the people of Israel in all generations."

One haredi leader said the ruling could lead to "two states", split not between Israelis and Palestinians but between haredi and non-haredi Jews.

It also drew applause from long-time critics of the exemptions, several of whom used the phrase "There are judges in Jerusalem," a likely apocryphal quote

from former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin frequently cited by Israelis praising legal rulings, in their statements.

"Today, a new page was written in the history of the state of Israel," the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a non-profit organisation that has spearheaded public advocacy on the issue for decades and filed the petition in the latest case, said in its statement.

"In a year in which we lost an entire brigade of soldiers who fell in battle or were seriously injured, in a year in which reservists served more than 200 days, there's no more justified proof that the IDF needs more personnel," tweeted Avigdor Liberman, who heads the right-wing secularist Israel Beytenu party. He added, "I congratulate the Supreme Court on this decision. It's a significant step on the way to historical change."

EL AL's closure forces employees into new pastures

ELKA COHEN

The last direct flight between Johannesburg and Tel Aviv left the runway on 29 March 2024, surrounded by an emotional team of EL AL employees, some of them bidding farewell to the job they had held for years.

Terry Dedeu (41), the managing supervisor of security, has worked at EL AL for 13 years. She's a born and bred South African mother of two.

"Since closing our South African station, all security staff faced the choice either to leave our jobs at the airline or travel fulltime in order to retain our positions," she says from Athens, Greece, where she has been stationed for the past month.

"Although my family were used to me travelling for work to sister stations in Seychelles, Zanzibar, and Kilimanjaro, I'm now travelling fulltime. The fact that I hold visas for both Europe and the United States helps a lot. For some of my colleagues with young families and visa issues, it has been a lot harder to make the same decision."

closure coming for EL AL in South Africa."

The choice given to all security employees was a decision Sabah made easily. "It's all a matter of perspective," he said. "I chose to see the advantages of travelling for work. Now, when I return home to South Africa, I'm officially off-duty and can spend that quality time with my family."

In South Africa, EL AL is unique in that its employees are often breadwinners who have held dedicated positions in the company for upwards of seven years. It's not just a job, but a career for many of them. Worldwide stations have a much greater turnover of mostly young Israeli, part-time employees.

Only 10% to 12% of local security employees made the choice to leave the company. Many of them doubted their employability elsewhere.

"I had no choice but to seek work elsewhere," said Tracy Levy (49). "EL AL has been my life for 29 years. The team I worked with was like family bonded by the same intrinsic values held by the company. That's not something you can replace easily. Neither was the lifestyle that the salary afforded me. The hunt for a new job was daunting, and with my niche skillset, as well as

business," Levy said, pointing out that "We were down to one flight a week pre-7 October, so the timing of EL AL's announcement of closure coinciding with South Africa's stance against Israel in the International Court of Justice was purely coincidental."

According to Levy, EL AL is shifting its focus to the Far East, where it's more commercially viable.

"I tried to remain hopeful, but I knew closure was imminent and when it did happen, I had no choice. It came down to personal preference, depending on family dynamics, priorities, and responsibilities," she said.

"I had to consider my husband and three children. It wasn't an option to travel fulltime. Also considering the fact that I'm observant, keeping Shabbat and kosher can also be tricky with travel. Although it was a horrible decision to have to make, it wasn't a hard one for me."

After a series of interviews at various companies, Levy realised the salary she was accustomed to wouldn't be easily matched. But it was just as important to her to find the right job.

Today, Levy is employed by the Community Security Organisation. "Its mission, 'Protecting Jewish life and Jewish way of life' really spoke to me the same way my work at EL AL had," Levy said.

"There's a level of self-assurance in what I'm doing because of why I'm doing it. It's the closest I could ever wish to get in terms of fulfilment. Although the change has been a pretty scary challenge, with a few lifestyle changes and some schedule adjustments, I'm ready to embrace this new chapter."

Benjamin Schaimberg (31), a newly employed member of the security team, has been working for EL AL for only 18 months. "I'm taking the opportunity to travel and see the world," he said. "Being newly married has made it a little tougher, but at this stage of my life with no big family obligations, the pros outweigh the cons."

Security is a high-pressure position with no room for error. It requires intense and rigorous training which EL AL South Africa provided, Schaimberg said. "My job has taken me to Germany, Poland, Rome, New York, and Greece, and working overseas has proven that South African standards are unmatched compared to our sister stations worldwide, which stands me in good stead internationally."

Past and present employees are feeling the loss of their EL AL family, apart from the loss of stability, comfort, and routine. The airline's closure certainly marks the end of an era for all of us.



Photo: Flickr

Former security personnel at EL AL have had to divert their careers since the airline closed operations in South Africa this year

In 2005, Gliad Sabah (40), an Israeli citizen, arrived in South Africa to work at EL AL. When he left the company to explore the private sector for a brief period, he was unhappy and returned to EL AL to slowly begin working his way up the ranks to the position of deputy manager of security.

"EL AL just felt like home, and having been in the Israeli army, the safety of my people is what's in my heart," Sabah said.

"The steady decline of flights started during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we never quite recovered. You had to be blind not to see

being older, it made leaving the job I loved even harder."

Levy recalls a time when EL AL was filling three 747 aircrafts a week. "It wasn't only local Jewish passengers visiting family in Israel, we were boarding big Christian prayer groups making their annual pilgrimages to the holy land. I think the massive increase in airfares, our dwindling local community, as well as a big shift in disposal income all contributed to the lack of commercial viability for the business."

"Toronto closed two years ago for the same reason. It's not personal or political. It's just

Victims of 7 October massacre sue UNRWA

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

More than 100 victims of Hamas's massacres in Israel on 7 October are suing United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the main relief agency for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, saying it effectively laundered money for the terrorist group, the latest in a spate of lawsuits launched in United States courts since the Israel-Hamas war started.

The lawsuit filed on Monday, 24 June, in federal court in the Southern District of New York alleges that the UNRWA assisted Hamas in, among other ways, building the infrastructure it required to launch the war; in subsidising Hamas by paying its activists as employees; and in relaying Hamas propaganda through its schools.

"The terrorist who held me hostage for 53 days worked as a school teacher for UNRWA," Ditzza Heiman, one of the hostages, said. "The fact that Hamas controlled Gaza wasn't an excuse for UNRWA to hire and fund terrorists, but instead should have ensured that UNRWA took extra precautions."

UNRWA didn't respond to requests for comment. Its spokespeople have previously accused Israel's government and its allies of seeking to dismantle the agency.

Notably, however, the litigants in this case include families who have been critical of how Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has handled the war and the negotiations for hostages.

"There's no pain in the world that compares to burying your children and grandchildren who were murdered and suffocated in their own home," said Gadi and Reuma Kadem, whose children and grandchildren were killed in the 7 October attacks. "All funders of Hamas – UNRWA and its directors are major players – are fully complicit in the murder of my children and family."

The plaintiffs are represented by MM-Law, an outfit that has for years sued, often successfully, institutions accused of profiting from terrorism, torture, genocide, and other human-rights abuses.

There have been multiple lawsuits filed by 7 October victims against US and international organisations alleged to have been profited from the attacks or to have colluded with banned terrorist groups.

In January, 67 people including some former hostages and people injured on 7 October filed a federal lawsuit accusing Iran of masterminding the attack on Israel.

A federal lawsuit filed in Florida in February accuses Associated Press of paying for photos by photographers who knew of the planning of the attacks.

Also last month, 7 October victims filed a federal lawsuit in Delaware against UNRWA-USA, an independent non-profit organisation that raises money for UNRWA.

In the 2000s, victims of Palestinian terrorism during the second intifada seized on the strategy of suing institutions based in the US or that have US ties, with mixed success. In one case, a jury ruled that the Arab Bank must pay damages to hundreds of victims of terrorism in Israel. The verdict was later overturned, although some payments were disbursed.

In another case, a US court ruled in 2017 that Iran and Syria must pay nearly \$180 million (R3.2 billion) to the family of an American-Israeli infant killed in a Hamas attack in 2014 in Jerusalem.

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, an attorney who heads the Shurat HaDin Israeli Law Center, was instrumental in that case and others. In December, she said she was working on a possible lawsuit in response to 7 October, against North Korea, for allegedly indirectly supplying weapons to Hamas.

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Israel Cricket bats prejudice to triumph in Italy

LEE TANKLE

After seven weeks of practice, the Israel national cricket team set off for Rome on 7 June to participate in the ICC (International Cricket Council) Men's T20 Sub-Regional Europe World Cup Qualifier, ultimately landing in seventh place.

It was a massive triumph for the team, which has been vastly affected by the war in Gaza, with many of the players reservists in the Israel Defense Forces and having gone to the Gaza Strip.

"The war has certainly affected the players," said the team manager, South African Joanne Tankle. "Some of the light has gone out of their eyes."

"Five of these players have been to Gaza. One of them found a teddy bear laced with explosives," said Tankle. "These kids, because they are the younger guys of the team, have seen things in Gaza that we can never imagine."

However, there was mounting excitement to play in an international tournament, a feat that they feared could be impossible after 7 October 2023.

The team faced financial constraints as it was unable to get sponsorships because of the situation in Israel. The coach, who lives in South Africa, was also unable to train with the team because it became problematic for him to travel to Israel during the war.

"We were supposed to start training in November last year, however it was impossible at that stage," said Tankle.

"We went into the tournament as the underdogs. These boys had only seven weeks of training, and in those seven weeks, there was hardly – if ever – a full team at training," she said. "Some of the guys are serving in the army. They're not paid cricketers, so they've got to make a living to feed their families. Cricket is just a passion."

"One player cuts trees for a living; one is a security guard at a factory; one cleans tables in a canteen; and one is a bus driver. They were just ordinary human beings going to an international cricket tournament to bring pride and joy to Israel, and I think they did just that," she said.

Tankle said the team was warmly welcomed by the Italian cricket federation and ICC officials when they arrived in Italy. "But there was no real warmth from any of the other teams."

"The other teams were shocked that we were quite good. Had we had more practice time, I think we would have done a whole lot better," she said.

In previous years, the ICC never had security at tournaments of this level, however, this year, it brought in a security detail specifically because of Israel's participation and all teams were under strict instruction not to make it a political battlefield.

Tankle said the team was followed by security guards, both

from the Israeli government and the ICC, and they weren't allowed to travel anywhere without being escorted.

"On the morning of our first match against Austria, walking out of the dining hall, I spotted a bat with a 'Freedom for Palestine' sticker on it," she said.

Tankle immediately alerted ICC officials and security teams about the bat.

"The bat was left there for more than an hour in full view," said Tankle, "One of the players was visibly distraught when he saw the bat," she said. "The others managed to contain it, but this player couldn't. He lost six friends on 7 October and has been serving in Gaza."

The incident was quickly dealt with by the ICC because "had we not nipped it in the bud, I'm sure that there could have been other incidents", Tankle said. It has also been taken up with the Sports Knesset in Israel.

That wasn't the only time the team met hostility. "On the bus to the match, we had to share a bus with the Austrian team which was mainly of Indian descent. They were speaking in Hindi, and a lot

of our players understand Hindi. They were saying bad things about us, like 'the pussy Israelis'."

The Israeli team unfortunately lost that match, and at the end of the match, the Austrian team refused to shake Israeli team members' hands.

"At the outset of this tour, I knew that the responsibilities

of the actual tournament would be greater than anything I'd ever faced before, having previously managed only teams of young boys, but I thought managing the players would be a breeze," Tankle said. "In retrospect, it was the hardest tour I've ever done, because I had to be on my guard all the time."

The one highlight of the tournament for Tankle was Israel's win against Portugal on 13 June.

"That match coincided with a memorial cricket game for the late Captain Daniel Perez in Modi'in. The team decided to dedicate that win to Perez and his family. The players knew Perez, and had played with him. If he were alive today, there would have been a big chance that he would have been a part of the team," she said.

When the team wasn't playing, they were travelling around Rome. However, due to the rise in antisemitism, the team was instructed to not wear any items of clothing showing that they were Israeli. This was made even more difficult by the fact that they weren't allowed to speak Hebrew when they were out on the streets.

"We couldn't enjoy Rome because we were always on our guard," said Tankle. "Even though we weren't wearing anything to show we were Israelis, we weren't allowed to speak Hebrew. We were always on our guard, counting everybody, making sure everybody was within the barrier of our security, our bodyguards. We weren't free."

"The players were nervous. And every time we got on the bus, they all checked the baggage counters inside the bus to make sure that everything was okay. And since all the teams stayed in the same hotel, they were on guard all the time, especially after the incidents around the game against Austria."

Tankle said she's taking everything that she has learned at this tournament into the future. But, regardless, what this tournament and these players have shown her is that the resilience of the Israeli and Jewish people is amazing.



Israel team batsman Yair Nagavkar after Israel beat Portugal

Palmer matches tennis victory with off-court grit

SAUL KAMIONSKY

It took grit and sacrifice for 12-year-old Herzlia student Rafael Palmer to rise through the tennis ranks to the point that he was finally selected for Western Province.

His tennis enthusiast dad, Gary, says these traits are some of the secrets behind his son's progression to making the province's under-13 tennis team and winning all his recent matches in George in the Western Cape.

"Tennis isn't a team sport and can be hard and lonely on the court, especially when things aren't going well," says Gary. "Rafa's friends all play soccer, so it was tough for him without his school friends at the tournaments. He also found it lonely because most of the kids at the tournaments speak Afrikaans as their first language. But over time, Rafa has made good friends from different cultures and backgrounds."

Palmer played in quite a few tournaments to make the Western Province team, eventually playing against other top players in the Western Cape and being selected to play for the province.

"I'm the only kid from Herzlia," Palmer says. "There are a lot of Afrikaans kids, so it was hard to understand them in the beginning, but now they just speak English to me."

Gary, who played tennis growing up in Port Elizabeth, got his son into tennis when he was about five. "I loved it, and have been playing ever since," Palmer says.

They were living across the road from a tennis club, so Gary used to take him there most days after work. "When he was small, he would run around and pick up the balls while his older sister was playing," Gary reminisces. "He started tennis lessons from a young age, and was encouraged to play matches and participate in tournaments."

Palmer has won many Wilson tennis tournaments. "I played for my squad academy last month against a visiting team from

Plettenberg Bay, and we beat them. I played in the MTG All Africa tournament, and won my age group and the under-14 age group as well. My biggest achievement so far is making Western Province."

Palmer spends five hours a week playing squad tennis and attends his own tennis lessons for two hours a week. "Close to tournaments, I play extra matches against my dad or other kids I know through tennis."

He plays tennis for his school and at the Fresnaye and Pinelands tennis clubs. "I like the thrill of the game, the fun I have on court, and the competitiveness," he says.

He aspires to represent South Africa at the Maccabi Games, to keep winning tournaments, and to go to a tennis academy overseas one day.

The sport has given Palmer and his father a great opportunity to bond. Gary says it's fun to travel with his son to different venues around the Western and Southern Cape for tournaments. "We also watch tennis together, especially when Roger Federer was playing. Now, we watch a lot of Carlos Alcaraz."

"I've learned a lot about myself in motivating and bringing out the best in Rafa. It wasn't always smooth sailing between the two of us on the court. Every child is motivated differently, and there's definitely not a one-size-fits-all approach to assisting your kids in achieving their best. I had to find a balance between encouragement and pushing a little too hard."

When the Palmers play against each other, the games sometimes get a little tense. "The matches are becoming a lot more competitive, and the sets are getting closer," Gary says. "I think he's getting close to beating me."

Gary, who coached tennis when he was at university and played premier league tennis in London and Cape Town, says keeping tennis fun and having the right coach has helped his son perform well on the court.

"There were times when Rafa put a lot of pressure on himself, but his coach stressed that at his age, he needs to have fun playing tennis and not take it too seriously. A good coach explains that while losing is hard,



Rafael Palmer

winning isn't everything. How you play the game is just as important as the result. We try to emphasise the importance of good sportsmanship on and off the court."

Palmer can be seen congratulating an opponent who hits a great shot, and taking his cap off when walking to the net to shake hands.

Cape cricketer's cup runneth over for Netherlands

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African Michael Levitt opened the batting for the Netherlands in its four T20 Cricket World Cup games in June, and set social media abuzz with the spectacular shot he played against Sri Lanka.

Levitt, a South African College High School alumnus who attended Herzlia Constantia until Grade 4, describes the World Cup in the United States and West Indies as "a great experience".

"When you grow up watching the World Cup, you get a taste of what it is and how special it is," Levitt told the SA Jewish Report. "To be part of the World Cup experience that you used to watch as a youngster on TV is pretty surreal and something that you can kind of get addicted to."

Levitt qualified for a Dutch passport as his grandfather on his mother's side was born in Harderwijk, Holland. He moved to Holland in March 2023 after joining Voorburg Cricket Club in Den Haag, where he's currently staying. He made his international debut in February this year, scoring a half-century against Nepal to become the second Dutchman to achieve such a milestone on debut. In the following game, he scored a sensational 135 against Namibia to record the highest score by a Dutchman in T20s.

Levitt decided to take up the opportunity to play for the Netherlands as opposed to waiting to see if he would get a chance to play for South Africa. "As a youngster, my goal was always to play cricket at the highest level I

could, and when this opportunity came about, I wanted to jump on it. I didn't want to look back at my career and say, 'I really wanted to, or I really should have taken an opportunity.'"

Levitt went into his first World Cup without putting massive expectations on himself. "As a youngster, I just wanted to take every learning opportunity and hopefully build a learning base for the next World Cups to come," he said.

He scored 50 runs from his four World Cup



Michael Levitt in the match against South Africa at the T20 World Cup

matches, his top score being 31 against Sri Lanka. He admits a few more runs would have been nice, "but the amount of experience I gained being around senior players and playing against guys who I used to look up to is enough for me. I learnt a lot that I could take into future international fixtures."

The Dutch team shared a hotel with the Proteas ahead of its match in New York. Although the Netherlands and the Proteas

have quite a good rivalry, the Netherlands winning its encounters in the 2022 T20 World Cup and 2023 ODI World Cup, Levitt found everyone friendly off the field. "Having so many South Africans, you can chat with them a lot easier," he said.

Levitt, who felt extra excitement playing against South Africa, liked the high quality of cricket at the World Cup because "it forced you to be at the top of your game. One mistake as a batter, and you were in the sheds already."

He got cricket fans talking on social media with the spectacular shot he played off the bowling of Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana. "There was a strong wind blowing towards the cover boundary and the ball was coming in quite quick, so I tried to play it like a medium pacer," Levitt said. "I just tried to watch the ball as close as I could, give myself room, and a free swing to access the cover boundary."

The shot, which some fans said had shades of AB de Villiers, goes back to the pre-season camp he had at the Gary Kirsten Cricket Academy in Cape Town in January. "We were working on giving myself room against spinners and trying to open up the offside, being able to free the arms where I feel quite strong."

Levitt, who counts multiple Western Province cricketer of the year awards and playing for his high school's first team at the age of 14 among his many cricketing achievements, says transitioning from the academy to playing at the World Cup in a matter of months was easy as it had prepared him well.

Reflecting on the lessons from the World

Cup, he said, "Don't be too hard on yourself. Just know that your time will come when it's right. Look at the opportunity that's been given to you, and take it with both hands."

His mom and grandfather live in Harderwijk, about 90-minutes' drive from Den Haag. "My mom was keen when I was trying to get the Dutch passport because she saw it as a good option to explore later on," he said. "She still has a strong connection with the Dutch, and my grandpa still tells us stories about when he was younger."

Levitt is seeking to stay in the Netherlands long-term, but will visit his family in South Africa, especially to escape "the full cold and snow" of the Netherland winters.

The Dutch team found out about Levitt's Dutch passport after his good friend's dad told Ryan Cook, the Netherlands head coach, about it. Levitt was working as a physical education teacher in England, where he had shone in the Middlesex Premier Cricket League, when he received a message from Cook asking if he was keen to play cricket in the Netherlands.

"It didn't take me too long to decide. I met Ryan when I was back in South Africa. He put me in touch with the Voorburg Cricket Club, where I'm playing. I went back to England, handed in my notice, and moved to Holland."

"If I had to stay in South Africa, with the talent in the country, it would probably take another 10 years before I maybe was selected unless I had some blinder of a season," he said.

But Levitt isn't writing off playing for the Proteas one day. Numerous cricketers have played for two countries, such as Levitt's fellow South African-born Dutch-capped cricketer Roelof van der Merwe, who previously played for the Proteas.

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Prolonged trauma – Holocaust survivors under the spotlight

Dr Tracey Farber, a psychologist specialises in working with trauma, was involved in the creation of the book *Catastrophic Grief, Trauma, and Resilience in Child Concentration Camp Survivors*. The SA Jewish Report spoke to her.

What drew you to writing the book?

After I completed my research, I felt that the testimony/data that I was able to get from Holocaust survivors was so important, I wanted to share stories of survival. Most of the children interned in concentration camps didn't survive, therefore their stories form a unique and important fabric in the Jewish story of survival.

What research did you do and how did you do it?

The book is an adaption of my PhD research awarded in 2019 in the department of psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). My coauthors are the two professors who supervised the research, Professor Emeritus Gillian Eagle and Professor Cora Smith. I wrote some chapters alone, we wrote some together, and they each added unique chapters that underscored the relevance of the research.

I interviewed nine aging survivors who were interned in concentration camps during their childhoods or adolescence. This book tells the story of each survivor.

What was your process in interviewing survivors?

First, the questionnaires had to be approved by the Wits ethics committee, each survivor signed written consent, and the research was anonymous. Holocaust survivor Don Krausz assisted me by helping with the questionnaire, and suggested that I contact survivors who were under the age of 18 at the end of the Holocaust.

I did all the interviewing, and 74 hours of testimony was recorded from the nine survivors interviewed. We looked at early attachment to parents and siblings before the *Shoah*, including their lives in their communities in Europe. Each participant then described their experience of being in the concentration camps, including the loss of parents and siblings. Liberation was different for each child survivor, and each of them described how they arrived in South Africa and their period of adjustment after the *Shoah*. The participants were all aged when they participated in the research, and were able to offer a retrospective view of loss and trauma, including resilience and capacity for meaning making.

I used the results of the PhD to approach Johannesburg Jewish Community Services to set up a psychosocial service for aging Holocaust survivors. This service at the Chevrah Kadisha was supported by Jeff Shankman, who funded it, and it continues today.

How did the children's ages during internment impact on their resilience and ability to carry trauma, if at all?

The younger the age of separation from parents, the more the impact of loss and developmental disruption, however, every developmental stage carries its own



level of vulnerability to trauma. Resilience is established in the quality of secure parental attachment before the Holocaust.

What would you say, looking back, were the biggest insights you got working with survivors?

After several decades, survivors still felt catastrophic grief for the parents that they had lost during the *Shoah*. All survivors had trauma symptoms, and they still wanted their stories to be heard.

What were the most concerning things you learned?

Decades later, Holocaust survivors were still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD symptoms, even resilient, "high functioning" survivors. In addition, some also suffered from depression. Our research coined the term "trauma trilogy", which described the catastrophic grief, anger, and survivor guilt that they carried as a result of their parental and family losses. This stayed with them, and often lead to a sense of despair and existential loneliness.

How does the trauma you witnessed in working with Holocaust survivors differ from that you have seen with others?

For Holocaust survivors, the loss and trauma were sustained over a five-year period, and it was prolonged and intense.

Looking at 7 October, how can people recover from what happened?

It's difficult to talk about recovery when the war is ongoing and victims of 7 October have been subjected to continuous traumatic stress. At best, resilient survivors are able to reach a point after significant amount of therapy where they are able to live productive lives in parallel to their trauma. We know that social support and a sense of hope and meaning helps people to recover.



Dr Tracey Farber

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Farewell to a mensch

This week at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), we bid farewell to a consummate mensch and 30-year veteran, David Saks. David has been a mentor, teacher, and aid to many professional staff members who have come through the Board's doors, predating most of our lay leadership. An expert in antisemitism and a walking archive, David has been at the core of the Board's efforts and legal cases to combat Jew-hatred in our community. Chairperson Wendy Kahn refers to him as the "brain at the centre of the operation".

David's passion for history and for archiving the events that have shaped the South African Jewish community is unparalleled. His contributions are felt not only at the Board but also in numerous community organisations that have benefited from his outstanding research, thinking, and beautiful writing. In fact, many of the prayers given on the community's behalf in public forums were authored by him. As the editor

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

of *Jewish Affairs* magazine, David has collated and produced a beloved cultural forum cherished by many of us.

We remember with admiration how, while we sought beachside holidays, David, with his passion for the Anglo-Boer War, would use his vacation periods to enjoy the battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal.

We'll miss David's institutional knowledge, archival memory, exceptional writing, and his general presence around the Board. On behalf of the SAJBD and the community as a whole, I would like to wish him every success in his next chapter in Israel. We'll miss him sorely here in South Africa.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.



Looking at the child survivors of the 7 October massacre, how would you be able to help them and those around them?

It's critical that child survivors receive social support from their families, friends, and communities. Social support lessens their sense of aloneness in the world. Mental-health services, psychotherapy, and group therapy are critical in helping them to process the trauma that they experienced on an extreme scale. In addition, psycho-education has an important role helping survivors understand their trauma and build coping skills.

Looking at the world's reaction to 7 October and the war against Hamas, what insight can you give us?

The massacre of 7 October was indeed horrifying – the worst massacre of Jews since the *Shoah*. As Jews were facing the death and atrocities committed by Hamas, they were hit by antisemitism by the international community which defended Hamas. This was a deep betrayal, as there was no empathy for the suffering and brutality we endured. The rise in antisemitism has rekindled many old historical fears of persecution and fear of annihilation.

What have you learned about resilience? How would it impact the way Jews around the world and in Israel have dealt with 7 October?

Resilience is the capacity to walk forward in the face of trauma, and to hold onto a sense of hope and goodness

in the world. This is extremely difficult in the midst of ongoing trauma. We know that Jews are capable of inordinate strength and creativity, and the capacity to build and rebuild. The Hebrew word "beyachad" (together) is important. In many communities, solidarity and social support has given people a sense of hope and meaning.

Have your ideas about resilience changed over this time? If so, how and why?

What the research underscored is the profound role secure attachment – between parent and child – plays in developing resilience.

Will the survivors' trauma have an impact over generations?

This book focuses on Holocaust survivors and not the second generation. However, we know that the second generation is easily triggered by the current war, and the damage will be felt over generations.

What impact has it had on the Jewish world since 7 October?

Since 10 October, Israel and the Jewish world are in a state of "prolonged traumatic stress". This describes a sense of ongoing trauma from the past and present with no definite end in sight. We have 122 hostages that are still in captivity, and we have lost many lives in the brutal attack on 7 October as well as many soldiers. Jews feel deeply upset about the attack on their spiritual homeland and their existential right to exist. In addition, many Jews living in the diaspora feel hurt and betrayed by the antisemitism that has emerged in their communities. Many feel a sense of conflict – empathy for the losses on the other side and the same time, a sense of anger and fear of further attack. From my research, I learned that empathy heals, and it's an important Jewish value. In the midst of our trauma, we have to fight for our empathy as the ongoing cycle of anger and revenge is dangerous and leads to further damage.

Who would you most like to read this book?

Psychologists, social workers, and mental-health workers interested in trauma should read it. Also, anyone interested in the Holocaust.

• Clinical psychologist Dr Tracey Farber lives in Tel Aviv. She works at Tel Aviv University Psychological Services and in private practice.

King David in SA's top 10 in AI competition

A team consisting of Grade 7 and 8 pupils at King David Linksfield placed in the top 10 in the country in the recent National AI (artificial intelligence) Hackathon competition.

The hackathon, which encourages problem solving and understanding of AI, is a joint effort between the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and educational resource TechWays, and encourages students to "use AI for good".

Students from Grades 7 to 11 spent the month of May exploring AI topics and the design thinking process. They investigated how AI works through large language

models, computer vision, and data sequencing as well as reviewing the potential dangers of AI when it comes to cyber security and ethics. In the end, they had to use these principles to identify and develop a problem statement and its solution employing AI. Four King David teams entered the competition.

Team Clear View: Benjamin Levin; Gabriella Romberg; Jayden Sacker; and Jesse Silber (Grade 11);

Team Green Pulse: Grey Kerem and Samuel Gewer (Grade 11);

Team Tutor Tech: Zac Lurie; Benjamin Zar; and Adam Jellin (Grade 7); and

Team UroScan: Mathew Mallach and Benjamin Gulan (Grade 8 and Grade 7).

These solutions were then presented to a panel of judges who in turn sent the submissions to the IEB. Mallach and Gulan's achievement with team UroScan is remarkable for a first-time event. Each team presented a unique solution to some vastly complex issues, and King David is proud of each one of them. They extended themselves through this process, and developed their understanding of AI through practical application.



Benjamin Gulan and Matthew Mallach

Masada Run a golden opportunity for Durban community

More than 200 participants from Durban and Johannesburg took part in the community's annual Masada Run/Walkathon along the scenic Golden Mile beach promenade on 17 June.

The event, which raises funds for Masada, an organisation dedicated to providing sheltered employment in the city, included 10km, 5km, and 3km options. It was attended by honorary guest Tete Dijana, the winner of the 2022 and 2023 Comrades Marathon. The weather was glorious, adding to the festive atmosphere.

This year's run has set a high bar, and the community is looking forward to the next Jewish

marathon in Durban. Events like these not only raise essential funds for Masada, but strengthen bonds and promote a healthy lifestyle.



Rabbi Pinchas Zekry and Tete Dijana running in the annual Masada Run/Walkathon

Innovations in tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis and vaccination

Discovered: a potential vaccine to prevent tuberculosis in people of all ages

In a critical global public health breakthrough, a candidate vaccine for tuberculosis (TB) has been created using a gene-editing approach.

While the BCG vaccine used to prevent TB is widely available for infants, no vaccine has shown lasting protection.

Professor Bavesh Kana, Head of the School of Pathology at Wits University, co-authored the groundbreaking study for the candidate vaccine for TB.

Kana's research in molecular diagnostics focuses on TB diagnostics, vaccines and the discovery of new TB drug targets.



Professor Bavesh Kana, Head of the School of Pathology and former director of the Centre of Excellence for Biomedical TB Research at Wits University

Molecular diagnostics are lab methods used to help identify a disease or the risk of it by sequencing DNA for markers of potential disease.

Amongst Kana's innovations in molecular diagnostics is biomimicry for TB diagnosis. Biomimicry is the imitation of models in nature to solve complex human problems. This research was used to verify the accuracy of diagnostic tests for Covid-19.

A world war against words

It must be one of the more perplexing aspects of the 7 October war: how is it possible that the “woke” left and Hamas terrorists have found themselves on the same side of the political divide? How is it that people who are concerned about micro aggressions and misgendering have become defenders of rapists, kidnappers, and murderers, even finding ways to stand alongside human-rights abuser Iran as it attacks Israel.

Some suggest it’s a war against “Western” democratic values. Others maintain that it’s simply antisemitism. And where these might both be true, I believe there’s something more fundamental at play.

It’s a war of words. Consider the following. For Jews, words matter greatly. We believe that when G-d created the world, he did so with words. He said, “Let there be light,” and there was. Soon after creation, it was Adam who was given the task of naming things around him. We believe that when he did this, the names he gave animals captured their essence so that the distance between the signifier (the name) and the object (the animal) were close to substance of that beast.

Jews don’t say the name of G-d out loud.

Because the name is Him, and He is the name. We have laws relating to how we speak, when to speak, and what we’re allowed to speak about.

Words matter as they are the link between man and G-d. And they have the power to build and to destroy.

If we look at the “woke” world, it’s impossible not to notice a dilution of meaning. This has occurred to the extent that much of what we accepted as “given” is no longer the case. Men are men only if they decide they are, and they can just as easily be a woman, a man, a child, or none of the above. He can be a man on Monday and a woman on Tuesday and in spite of biological proof to the contrary, can insist that others see him for what he chooses to be.

We now live in a world where men not only “chestfeed”, they can compete against women in sports simply because they identify as female.

The woke world can no longer define hate

speech and incitement, and when arguably the smartest minds on the planet, the presidents of Ivy League universities, are unable to answer a question that a six-year-old would be able to, we know that words have lost their meaning.

The anti-Israel crowd know this well. For them, “apartheid” is what they determine it to be, history and definitions having no meaning.

“Genocide”, “starvation”, and “ethnic cleansing” are terms that are used without basis. On 6 October, Gaza is an “open-air concentration camp” and a few months later, it’s nostalgically reinvented to lament what has been lost. The acceptance of this non-reality relies on the suspension of authenticity.

Which, once suspended, results in situations, events, and history being readjusted to suit this agenda.

Their tactics aren’t dissimilar. Both use intimidation. Both cover their faces – with keffiyehs or COVID-19 pandemic face masks, both speak of “liberation” and “freedom” while working to deprive others of the very essence of what freedom is. Both rely on the notion of



INNER VOICE



Howard Feldman
victimhood as a cornerstone of their approach, while at the same time using violence to achieve their purpose. Anyone who doesn’t accept their version of the truth is intimidated, isolated, and bullied until they do.

As distant as they appear to be from each other in theory, the closer they are.

The shift away from a fact-based paradigm is the very crux of the war currently being fought. It might appear to be about Israel and Gaza and oppression and freedom, but in essence, it’s a fight to move the world further and further from the truth, from G-d, and from His word.

It’s a fight of “emet” (truth) and “sheker” (lies).

It’s a war on words. Which also explains why Jews stand on the frontline of this battle. Who better to target than the group of people which understands that just as the world was created with words, so with words it’s being destroyed. Sticks and stones might break our bones, but it’s words that will harm us.

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