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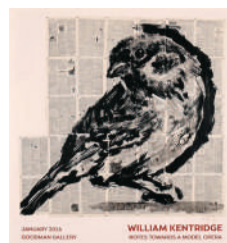
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Home 'so close but so far' after ceasefire

TALI FEINBERG

Walking into her home on the Israeli border with Lebanon on 2 December, after 14 months of being a refugee in her own country, South African *olah* Adrienne Chonowitz felt "overwhelmed by emotion."

With her kibbutz, Ma'ayan Baruch, being just 400m from the border, she was allowed to visit for only a short time, and says it will be a longer process for residents of the north to return home in full safety and security.

"After the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon was declared on 27 November, I got so many messages celebrating the fact that we could now go home," says Chonowitz. "But we're still feeling insecure, and since there's a lack of clarity on the security situation, we prefer to remain in our hotel for a while longer and see what happens in coming weeks. So, despite our longing to go home, we aren't rushing to return."

She says many other evacuees feel the same way. "We're not rejoicing about the ceasefire, although we're grateful that it will mean less loss of life," she says. "People are dubious. We didn't sign a peace agreement. It's a truce for 60 days, and people are doubtful that it will last, although we hope and pray that it will."

Telfed Chairperson Maish Isaacson says that even with a ceasefire, the situation in northern Israel remains dynamic. "The government is committed to ensuring the safe return of residents, and many have started to return home," he says. "Restrictions have been lifted by the Home Front Command, but residents will need to pay attention to updates from

authorities. Their safety is paramount.

"Telfed staff and volunteers have been in regular contact with South Africans from the north over the past year, providing care packages and financial assistance where necessary," he says. "They have spoken to us about the immense strain they have been living under, and we pray for them to return home safely without fear of another escalation. We will continue to provide support and assistance to our *olim* living in the north when they return home."

Chonowitz and her husband, Hilton, thought that they were leaving their kibbutz for only a few days when they voluntarily chose to go on 8 October 2023, fearing an attack similar to

Hamas's massacre in the south. The rest of their kibbutz was soon evacuated.

Fourteen months later, after moving four times and living in hotel rooms, they went to the kibbutz to change clothes for the winter season and start the long process of reviving their small home and garden. "Every minute felt precious," says Chonowitz. "When we left on 8 October, I had a spotless Sukkot house. It doesn't look the same today."

She says the government has extended their hotel stay until 1 February 2025, which covers the 60-day truce period and gives evacuees time to decide what to do next. "We definitely will return home. We can't look for a new home at this point

in our lives. We just don't feel ready and secure yet."

Driving through the gates of their kibbutz, "I felt very emotional. All around, you can see burnt trees and nature, and destroyed homes. It's bleak, but nature has a way of healing. Our beautiful Galil will turn green again."

She's deeply grateful to the soldiers who have "paid a very high price" fighting in Lebanon to defend her home. She says her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren went overseas while the war raged. Now, she cannot wait to see them back in their home on Ma'ayan Baruch that they built just three years ago.

South African *oleh* Craig Sher, who lives with his family on Moshav Hazorim in the lower Galilee, didn't evacuate, living through endless sirens and rocket attacks. "For more than a year, we have attached ourselves to the app on our phones, waiting expectantly for the next siren - what area is going to be hit; how large an area will it affect; and will we see the interception from our house?" he says.

"Now that the ceasefire is in effect, the question has shifted to, 'Will it last; will the same come to the south; and will the hostages be released?' And then the unspoken question about addressing the real threat - Iran. For now, there's quiet, but everyone knows that until the root cause is addressed, the conflict cannot end. Will this ceasefire hold? Maybe, but nobody I know is holding their breath."

South African *olah* Shelley Liss Barkan decided to remain in the ghost town of Shlomi, voluntarily running a kitchen feeding soldiers hot

Continued on page 3 >>



Rabbis from around the world gather in New York for the International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries

See story on page 11

Photo: Shimulie Grossbaum/Chabad.org

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Loved ones memorialise American-Israeli soldier, Omer Neutra

JACKIE HAJDENBERG – JTA

Omer Neutra was killed more than a year ago, more than 5 000 miles (8 046km) from the United States, but at his memorial service on Tuesday, 3 December, on Long Island, the sanctuary overflowed with relatives, friends, Jewish leaders, and at least one other hostage family.

Coursing through the crowd was the pain of learning, after nearly 14 months of hope and activism, that Neutra had been killed in battle alongside his fellow Israeli soldiers on 7 October 2023, the day Hamas terrorists abducted his body to Gaza. It's still being held there.

"I pled for a sign of life; I didn't get any," said Orna Neutra, Omer's mother, during the service at the Midway Jewish Center, a Conservative synagogue in Syosset,

New York. "Instead, we received, on a daily basis for more than 423 days, signs of hope and love: notes in our mailbox; flowers; meals; prayers

for Omer; and good deeds from all over the world."

She recalled the feeling of her son's bear hugs. "For more than a year, we've been breathing life into your



The Neutra family addresses mourners at a memorial service for Omer Neutra

being, my beautiful boy, with no physical sign back from you, but with hope and love of so many, we kept going, keeping you alive, speaking your name from every outlet and every stage, pushing away any hint of despair, not stopping to breathe or take in the deep pain of your absence."

Orna and Ronen Neutra, Omer's father, have been among the most prominent activists in the movement to free the hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, of whom roughly 100, living and dead, remain captive. They traversed continents, spoke to US President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump, and appeared at the Republican convention.

They were joined at the ceremony by Rachel Goldberg-Polin and Jon Polin, the parents of another American-Israeli hostage, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who have also been among the most visible advocates for the hostages' release. Goldberg-Polin and five other hostages were killed in captivity at the end of August. Hostage families have called on Israeli leaders to make a deal for their release so that the same fate doesn't befall those who are still alive.

Also in attendance were Anti-Defamation League Chief Executive Jonathan Greenblatt; Nassau County legislator Mazi Pilip, an Israeli-American who ran for Congress earlier this year; and New York Governor Kathy Hochul, who ordered all New York State flags to be flown at half-staff.

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Embracing life's Leah

Torah Thought



Rabbi Motti Hadar
Pine Street Shul

Is your life today the way you had dreamed it would be?

The Torah tells us that our forefather, Jacob, loved Rachel. Jacob was captivated by Rachel's beauty and character, and so he dedicated himself to seven years of arduous work to earn her hand in marriage. Yet, on his wedding night, through what seemed like a cruel twist of fate, he was given Leah instead. Leah wasn't who Jacob had chosen, and not the bride he had dreamed about or wished for. Jacob did subsequently marry Rachel too, but the story leaves us, his descendants, with a profound lesson about life, expectations, and divine purpose.

Jacob's experience is a reflection of our own journey. Like Jacob, we all have our "Rachel" – the dream future we envision for ourselves – a beautiful, perfect life aligned with everything we believe we deserve. We work hard, invest effort, and set our sights on this ideal. But often, life doesn't unfold as planned. Instead of the "Rachel" we worked for, we find ourselves with "Leah" – a life filled with challenges, imperfections, and struggles we never anticipated. Leah's very name means "exhaustion" and "anxiety".

At first, this can feel profoundly disheartening. We question why, after all our efforts, G-d has given us a reality so far from our dreams. Yet, as Jacob's story reveals, it's precisely in embracing

the "Leah" in our lives that we fulfil our greatest potential and achieve our true purpose.

Leah may not have been the wife Jacob initially wanted, yet she became the mother of six of the 12 tribes – half of the Jewish nation. It was through Leah that Jacob's ultimate mission, to become the father of the Jewish people, was most actualised. Leah's children, such as Levi and Yehudah, became central to the spiritual and royal leadership of the Jewish people. Without Leah, Jacob's vision of building the Jewish nation wouldn't have come to fruition.

While we may long for a "Rachel" life, it's often the "Leah" moments, those filled with challenge and imperfection, that push us to grow, to discover our strength, to contribute in ways we never imagined, and to become the people we are truly meant to be. Our mission in life

is rarely achieved through ease and perfection; the struggles, unexpected detours, and unplanned circumstances shape us and propel us toward our greatest achievements.

And yet, the story doesn't end with Leah. Jacob ultimately married Rachel as well, and she, too, became a mother of the Jewish people, contributing two central tribes to the nation. When we embrace the life Hashem has given us – our "Leah" life – and use it to fulfil our divine mission, we see that Hashem then grants us our "Rachel", our original hopes and dreams.

Jacob's life reminds us to trust Hashem's plan, even when it feels like our dreams are slipping away. By embracing the "Leah" which we are given and finding purpose in it, we discover that our "Rachel" was part of the plan all along. Ultimately, both are gifts, each essential to fulfilling our unique mission in life.

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Siegal family laments Keith's absence at mom's funeral

NICOLA MILTZ

Freed South African-born hostage Aviva Siegel ached at her mother-in-law's funeral this week, mourning not only the loss of the family matriarch but the prolonged absence of her husband, Keith, in captivity.

Keith, 64, an Israeli-American, remains in Hamas captivity in Gaza more than 425 days after being abducted with his wife from their home during the 7 October terrorist attack on Kfar Aza.

His mother, Gladys Siegel, 97, who had dementia, died peacefully on the weekend without knowing that Keith, her youngest of four, was a hostage.

"The family wanted to shield her from the pain of knowing," Aviva's twin sister, Fiona Wax, told the *SA Jewish Report*.

For more than a year, the Siegel family kept Gladys from the truth, fearing the knowledge of her son's abduction would shatter her. Now, Aviva and her daughter, Elan Tiv, 33, made the journey from Israel to the funeral, a poignant reminder of the brutal cost of captivity.

Aviva, who was freed from captivity after 51 days as part of a hostage deal, wept for the tragedy of their family's separation. Her sister said she was consumed by the haunting thought of her husband learning of his mother's death not from family, but from a Hamas terrorist, somewhere in the oppressive darkness of a tunnel. "It breaks my heart to think of him, alone and frightened, without anyone to console him," Aviva told her sister.

silver hostage tag necklace speaking volumes about her pain, resilience, and unwavering dedication to those still in captivity. Her words carried the weight of absence and longing as she shared that her husband would have wanted nothing more than to be there to bid his mother a final farewell.

She shared with mourners how during their time in captivity, her husband had quietly told her that he was thinking of his mother.

"He came up to me and whispered, 'The first thing that I want to do when I get out of here is to go to my mom to give her a hug,'" she shared. "So Gladys, I'm here telling you that from Keith, because he would have loved being here, and it's just unfair for him not to be here."

Keith's brother, Lee, who is also married to an ex-South African, Sheli Siegel, told mourners, "We're thankful that our mother didn't have to suffer the pain and suffering every day that Keith, her youngest child, her baby, has remained a hostage".

In a heartfelt post, Keith's daughter, Elan Tiv, shared her anguish, saying, "My grandmother passed away yesterday morning. My father's mother is gone,



Gladys Siegel

and he couldn't say goodbye to her because he's been in Hamas captivity for more than a year. Dad won't be able to stand with us at the cemetery or honour the woman who raised him with

love his entire life." At the time of publication, it had been 425 days since the start of the war and the horrifying events that tore the Siegel family apart. Keith and Aviva Siegel were abducted at gunpoint from their home in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz near the Gaza border, and driven into Gaza in their own car.

During that same attack, Hamas terrorists brutally killed 62 residents of the community and abducted 19 others.

Keith suffered severe injuries during the abduction, including a gunshot wound to his hand and broken ribs. The couple remained together in captivity until November 2023, when Aviva was released during a temporary ceasefire as part of a hostage exchange. A year later, Aviva never imagined she would still be waiting for her husband to return home.

Since her release, she has lived in anguish, becoming a fierce warrior for the hostages' release. Elan voiced her fury at the lack of progress in securing another hostage deal. "My father is in the scariest pit in the world, about an hour's drive from Tel Aviv, suffering from hunger and unimaginable abuse, and they're just letting him sit there. They're not bringing him home," she said.

Elan's outcry comes amid heightened tensions, with Hamas recently releasing a propaganda video featuring another American-Israeli hostage, Edan Alexander. Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces confirmed that American-Israeli hostage Omer Neutra, previously believed alive, had been killed during the 7 October attack.

United States President-elect Donald Trump has vowed "unprecedented firepower" if the hostages remain in captivity when he takes office on 20 January, adding international pressure to an already desperate situation.

in captivity. She testified before the Knesset, exposing the sexual violence Hamas inflicted on female hostages. She has also travelled extensively, addressing organisations like the Red Cross and the United Nations in Geneva, and meeting high-profile leaders, including US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"I told Keith I would stay strong for him and do everything in my power to bring him home," she said.

"I know the conditions they are living under – it's too terrible. Every day that passes puts them in greater danger."

Now staying with her daughter, Elan, at Kibbutz Gazit in northern Israel, Aviva has vowed not to return to Kfar Aza.

Gladys Siegel was a pillar of the Jewish community, performing many acts of charity and good deeds as well as being actively involved with Meals on Wheels for more than 50 years. She was the first woman president of both the Conservative Beth El Synagogue and the Jewish Federation of Durham-Chapel Hill, and headed the local chapter of Hadassah, the Jewish women's organisation. She's survived by four children, 10 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

Home 'so close but so far' after ceasefire

>>Continued from page 1

meals. "People in Shlomi haven't come back," she says. "It's nice to have quiet for a while, but most people are sceptical and are waiting to see what happens."

"No families with children have come back, and there are no buses coming in, so if families do come back, they don't have a way of getting to school, and nothing in Shlomi has opened up," she says. The ceasefire hasn't helped people decide what to do in the long term, Liss Barkan says. She continues to run the kitchen to feed soldiers, as many are still stationed on the northern border.

South African *oleh* Paul Mirbach lives on the northern Kibbutz Tuval. Though he didn't evacuate, he says, "Only now I realise that since the last Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah [when war with Hezbollah began], I have been holding my breath for three months, taking in air, but slowly suffocating. I've been living in a surreal semblance of routine punctuated by the incessant booms of anti-missile missiles and artillery, always on edge, waiting for the inevitable interruption of a rocket warning. We anxiously listen for a crash, and then, upon news of a hit, I think, 'Who do I know who could be there?' Twice, a rocket or shrapnel landed close to where my parents live."

Now that things are peaceful, he finds it hard to contemplate going back to living like that, and is celebrating the small things, like no longer having to look for the nearest shelter and sleeping through the night. He's heartbroken for those returning to their homes to find them destroyed.



Adrienne and Hilton Chonowitz outside their hotel room at Ein Gev

"At the same time, my thoughts are still dominated by the plight of the 101 hostages," says Mirbach. "I'm reminded that as I joyfully inhale this fresh, exhilarating air, they are breathing heavy, fetid air, struggling to fill their lungs. When was the last time that they saw sunlight or breathed clear oxygen? And I feel guilty celebrating my freedom."

Chonowitz says what she has missed most is the feeling of community, as her fellow kibbutz members have dispersed. "I look forward to gathering again with family, friends, and community, and to being in my own kitchen. I haven't cooked a meal or baked a cake in 14 months! I look forward to Shabbat in my home, surrounded by my children and grandchildren – life's little luxuries."



Keith Siegel with his family

"The family's fear is that word will reach Keith that his mother has passed, and there will be no-one there to comfort him," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Aviva's presence at the pulpit of Beth El Synagogue in Durham, North Carolina, on Tuesday, 3 December, was quietly powerful, her plain black shirt and

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Frank Chikane leads new organisation in isolating Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Struggle stalwart Reverend Frank Chikane has launched a new anti-apartheid movement that will target one country only: Israel.

"The movement against apartheid in Israel isn't against Jewish people, it's a movement against a supremacist regime," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The new organisation, called the South African Chapter of the Global Anti-Apartheid Movement, was launched at an event on 28 and 29 November at Freedom Park in Pretoria. It's a continuation of a conference held in Johannesburg in May 2024, when delegates from more than 24 countries came together for the "Global Anti-Apartheid Conference on Palestine", an anti-Israel hate-fest.



Reverend Frank Chikane at a protest outside the United States embassy in Pretoria

The organisation "aims to mobilise a broad coalition of societal forces to advocate for the total isolation of the Israeli state". Its launch was attended by civil society leaders, solidarity groups, members of the diplomatic corps, academics, faith leaders, and government members.

The organisers resolved to "confront Zionist propaganda and promote the Palestinian narrative" and "punish the Zionist project legally and diplomatically", among other points. One news outlet, PressTV, reported that the new chapter was "inspired by the Al-Aqsa flood operation", which is Hamas's name for its 7 October massacre.

Ronald Lamola, the minister of international relations and cooperation, was a keynote speaker at the event, giving the organisation his blessing and calling on South Africans to "unite" to support Palestinians. The organisers said their chapter was committed to "collaborating with the South African government in its attempts to hold the Israeli state accountable".

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said the new organisation was "yet another entity focused on demonising Israel and anyone associated with it. This initiative appears to recycle familiar figures who move from one group to another, perpetuating the same rhetoric without bringing tangible improvement to the lives of Palestinians."

At the event, Chikane, who is chairperson of the chapter's steering committee, stated, "Together, we demand accountability, justice, and freedom from apartheid from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea.

"I'm calling for those who are responsible for the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza to face legal responsibility for their crimes, and for an end to the apartheid regime that Israel is imposing in the region between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea," he said.

But South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks points out that "Israel remains the only liberal democracy in the Middle East, where the rights of Arab citizens are inclusively protected under the rule of law. Israel has every right to defend herself against murderous extremists complicit in acts of terror, and this movement won't change either of these facts."

Said Chikane, "You cannot envision the future of Israel without that of Palestinians, both within Israel and outside Israel – that is, in the West Bank, Gaza, and refugees. I therefore envision a future in which Israel recognises the inalienable right of Palestinians to self-determination, and where Israel abides by international law."

The organisation aims to engage with international

governments and organisations including the corporate sector, pension funds, universities, and other investors to "divest from and implement sanctions on Israel".

It hosted protests on 29 November at the United States (US) embassy in Pretoria, as well as the US consulates in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg to apply pressure on governments whose "actions support and fund the Israeli state's violent actions".

The organisation has divided its members into "thematic groups" to target Israel in various ways. These include "stop arming genocide; no trade with apartheid; don't play with apartheid; stopping the scholasticide; ending reproductive genocide; defending children's rights; ending the ecocide; supporting Palestinian prisoners and their families; and mobilising faith-based communities."

"Scholasticide", Chikane said, refers to the "systematic destruction of an education system", and "reproductive genocide" refers to "the systematic imposition of measures intended to prevent births within a group", which he believes Israel is implementing.

Milner notes that these "thematic groups" amount to little more than sloganeering, "designed to cast the widest possible net in the hope of resonating with a potential audience. The reduction of such a complex conflict into empty slogans is a further demonstration of the hollow nature of this latest construct."

The *SA Jewish Report* asked Chikane what the organisation meant by confronting Zionist propaganda, promoting the Palestinian narrative, and punishing the Zionist project legally and diplomatically.

"Promoting the Palestinian narrative entails telling the historical truth about the founding of the state of Israel, which included the ethnic cleansing of approximately 750 000 Palestinians from their homes; the settler-colonial nature of the state; and the oppression of the Palestinians who live under its rule," he said.

"Confronting Zionist propaganda entails exposing the real intentions of Zionists: of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and forcing them out of their homes and land, and then declaring them aggressors when they respond to the brutal violence unleashed against them by the Zionists," Chikane said.

As for "punishing the Zionist project legally and diplomatically", he said this involved raising awareness "about the reality that the Zionist project can be achieved only by enforcing an apartheid system from the river to the sea, or forcing Palestinians out of Palestine.

"Punishing the Zionist project entails challenging it at the International Court of Justice, and ensuring that the warrants of arrest of those who are committing these crimes are effected," Chikane said. "It entails advocating boycotts, divestment, and sanctions. We seek to isolate the apartheid regime in Israel, as was done to the apartheid regime in South Africa, and hold Israel accountable in international fora."

Milner believes that the "mask" of the organisation slips in its call to support Palestinian prisoners, many of whom have perpetrated acts of violence against Israeli civilians. "Endorsing such individuals undermines the credibility of any group championing their cause," she says.

"Equally glaring is the omission of any appeal for the release of the 101 hostages still held in Gaza, which could meaningfully contribute to easing the suffering of Palestinians and Israelis. If there was a sincere willingness to find a peaceful outcome to this painful conflict, efforts would be directed at developing an organisation devoted to dialogue," she said.

To the community, Chikane said, "It's saddening that members of the South African Jewish community feel unsafe because of anti-apartheid activism and advocacy for the human rights of Palestinians. I understand that it must be difficult for a person who has grown up in such a close-knit community that has had so much of its identity and sense of security constructed around a particular political ideology to see that ideology so directly and vociferously challenged. But our movement is guided by universalist values that in many cases found their first expression in Jewish texts and animate the Jewish ethical tradition."

When ceasefire becomes warfare

OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



Hybrid warfare requires more from the military than the demands of traditional conventional combat. Cyber warfare; irregular warfare; the control of information and disinformation; lawfare; and other non-military aspects should inhabit a military's toolkit. Modern warfare is a cocktail of traditional military and non-military measures.

The Israel Defense Force's (IDF's) conduct has been placed under a microscope and social media has given the world an unprecedented window into the conflict. Most of the reporting, whether mainstream or on social media, has painted a lopsided picture of the IDF's application of its urban warfare doctrine. Hamas controls the narrative, and reported casualties via Hamas fail to distinguish between combatant and civilian. No reliable evidence exists to back up reported statistics. The Israeli counter-propaganda machine has been a failure apart from the lone voices of Douglas Murray and Jonathan Conricus.

Since 7 October 2023, Israel has found itself in the invidious position of having to make choices between the lesser of two evils. The IDF, labelled as the perpetrator rather than the victim, has waged urban warfare in the most difficult circumstances. For instance, the recent Russian/Syrian bombardment of Aleppo on 1 December 2024, killing 300 civilians, hasn't even received a blip on the world's left-wing radar. The IDF hasn't been able to apply the best military decisions when attempting to dismantle Hamas's fighting power while at the same time minimising civilian casualties and trying to free the hostages. It has made difficult choices that have placed its soldiers in more danger than if it was operating with a free hand. Internal pressure from the families of the hostages combined with diminishing American support from the Biden administration have uniquely challenged the IDF. Several ceasefires necessitated by the desire to secure a release of hostages or because of international (and American) pressure have upset the IDF's operational momentum.

In a conflict bereft of optimal choices, Israel has often failed to please anyone any of the time. Steering a convoluted course of the least damage and destruction has had to suffice. Further exacerbating an already precarious situation has been the outright hostility of some European Union members such as Spain, France, and the United Kingdom. Instead of these Western nations regarding Israel as the bulwark against fanatical Islamists hell bent on the destruction of the West, they have sided with the 7 October perpetrators. More concerning is the capricious nature of Biden's Democrats, who have undermined the Israeli military effort from the beginning. They have threatened and cajoled Israel into truncating the IDF operationally, and have either slowed their supply of much needed ammunition on occasion or all but placed sanctions on other occasions. Israel has had to choose between risking the ire of its closest ally or making the correct military decision. The elimination of Yahya Sinwar in Rafah, a Hamas stronghold the US forbid Israel to enter on the pain of military sanctions, and the discouragement of the Israeli control of the Philadelphi

Corridor, essential to the resupply of Hamas, are prime examples of the restrictive conditions the IDF faces during a Biden administration.

The latest iteration of sub-optimum choices has been the 60-day ceasefire in south Lebanon that Israel has had to accept due to irresistible pressure from the US and France. Israel has conducted a highly effective campaign in Lebanon, tearing the heart out of Hezbollah's leadership and decisively degrading the Iranian proxy's fighting power. All this was achieved despite military pundits who overrated Hezbollah's fighting prowess and underestimated the devastating effectiveness of Israeli cyber technology and the efficacy of the IDF's urban warfare doctrine. France's Emmanuel Macron threatened to take the demand for a ceasefire to the United Nations (UN), and Biden threatened to abstain. Israel faced an enforced UN ceasefire, or could choose to accept Biden's proposal, which at least mitigated some of the damage to the IDF's operation. Again, Israel was faced with accepting the lesser of two evils.

The 60-day ceasefire in Lebanon coincides almost exactly with Trump's date to occupy the White House. The Israelis have conducted their operations in the past few months with an eye to the US's November election. Trump's overwhelming victory has garnered some hope that Israel will be given American support in dealing with any resurgence of Hezbollah. Dealing with Iran decisively may be back on the cards.

As Israel turns its full attention to Hamas and the release of the hostages, there's renewed hope. At the top of Trump's Middle East agenda is to kickstart the Abraham Accords and secure a lasting peace in the region, thereby creating space for catering to the political aspirations of the Palestinians. Certainly, the Iranians, whom the Israelis have humiliated militarily, may have to curtail support of their proxies drastically, and their nuclear programme, or face certain demise at the hands of the IDF fully backed-up by the US.

The demise of Hezbollah's military and political power has considerably weakened



US President-elect Donald Trump

Iran's and Russia's grip in Syria. This week, the forces of the Assad regime abandoned Aleppo and dissolved in full retreat in front of fanatical Islamist forces backed by Turkey. Again, the choice of crippling Hezbollah has unleashed a cataclysm in Syria, creating a new challenge for the IDF to deal with in the weeks and months ahead. Interesting times indeed!

• 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.

Keeping abuse secret protects offenders, community told

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Our community is notorious for keeping quiet about abuse, said speakers at a discussion hosted by the Chevrah Kadisha on 3 December, but keeping it secret only serves to empower abusers.

Marking the current 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, the discussion was hosted by Chevrah Kadisha Social Services at the David Lopatie Centre. Speaker Luke Lamprecht, a child protection and development specialist, said a recent Optimus study (The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa) had found that one in three boys and one in three girls would be sexually abused before they turn 18. While men are most often the perpetrators, this indicates that there's no gender difference when it comes to abused children.

"Yet, there's no real voice for the victimhood of men," he said. This creates a problem as boys who are exposed to things of a sexual nature tend to clam up and not talk about anything. "They then tackle temporary problems with permanent solutions such as suicide," warned Lamprecht, who is working with the parents of three boys who committed suicide after being sexually abused at prestigious schools. Constantly having conversations where men are the aggressors only serves to further this damaging cycle, keeping male victims silent.

There are four preconditions for sexual abuse of children to take place, Lamprecht said. First, abusers need a motive for the abuse, and this is always sexual, he stressed. Many abusers say that they were abused themselves, but this is problematic because by making an abuser a victim, you give up your right to your own victimhood.

Abusers are commonly career offenders, said Lamprecht, who choose jobs that give them access to children, often reaching hundreds of victims. These abusers have lowered internal inhibitors and don't listen to that voice that tells them not to do something to harm another person. They may argue that they're really caring for the children, but the fact that they keep the abuse a secret proves that they're lying. "The power of abuse is the secret," Lamprecht said. "If perpetrators didn't think something was wrong, there would be no secret."

Abusers must also overcome external inhibitors, he said. That's us parents, the community, the schools, the police, all the people who are supposed to have eyes on children. "We need to teach our kids that abuse ends with them," he said. "We need to say 'no' to other adults, so our children don't have to."

Finally, abusers have to overcome the resistance of the child, something they usually do through grooming, manipulating children to gain their trust. "The first warning sign of grooming is if someone pays more attention to your child than you as the parent do," cautioned Lamprecht. "No adult should be privately messaging your children for any reason whatsoever other than you as their parents."

Often parents are in denial. "We can't reconcile the fact that this person who we trust could possibly do this, and 'innocent until proven guilty' means that we assume that the child is lying until proven otherwise. We need to stop victim blaming."

Lamprecht argued against anonymous reporting, something that often happens in our community. "If you report something



anonymously, I can do nothing with it," he said. "We have a system where we have a right to confront our abusers. You are the external inhibitors who will keep your children safe. Parents as well as the greater community are the single greatest protective feature for children against any danger they face."

While the police are the first port of call, family lawyer Jenna Jacobs said there were further legal remedies. "In South African law, we have two acts which deal with protection orders, one addressing domestic violence and another addressing harassment."

Continued on page 7>>



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A time of miracles



Israel and Lebanon agreed to a ceasefire. It sounds like incredible news, but is it really?

How do we ensure that Hezbollah stops its war with Israel when it wasn't party to the agreement? Is it really a ceasefire or more like a pause? These are just a couple of the many questions being bandied around, and Israelis have yet to be able to move home to the north of Israel. There's no doubt they are champing at the bit to be able to go home, back to their real lives, lives they loved living but haven't been able to for more than a year because of the war. In this edition, two experts, Dr Dan Diker (on this page) and Dr David Brock Katz (on page 4), unpack what the ceasefire means. They give their opinion on how we can see this politically, whether it's a step towards ending the war, and what it means militarily.

My heart goes out to up to 80 000 people who were displaced from their homes in the north of Israel, who have for too long squeezed into rooms in places they don't want to be. Their lives have been on hold for more than a year, and now moving back home has placed like a delicious piece of cheesecake in front of them, but just out of reach, so they can't quite get their hands on it to take a bite and savour the taste. They can just stare at it, salivating and waiting until they are given the all clear. Who knows how long that will take.

They are displaced Israelis who have going home in their sights, but those taken from their homes down south near the Gaza border still have no end in sight. There were as many as 150 000 Israelis originally displaced down south, and many of those lost their homes on 7 October 2023 at the hands of marauding Hamas terrorists.

What I find fascinating is that we're constantly hearing and reading about the thousands and thousands of people in Gaza who have been displaced. Their situation is horrific and untenable. No innocent people should have to live through that. I totally get it. However, how come we hear about them all the time, but only read about the 200 000 to 250 000 Israelis displaced in this war in Israeli and Jewish media? Surely, their lives also matter, and being displaced in war matters whoever you are?

My main point here, though, isn't about discrepancies and bias, it's actually about miracles and things moving in the right direction.

I believe – despite all the doomsayers – that the ceasefire agreement is a wonderful sign. I believe it's an indication that the end of the war is in sight.

You may wonder how I can say that and what evidence I have. I leave that to the experts, but I choose to believe that this is the first good news, perhaps a little miracle, and others will follow.

You see, the fact that there's any agreement means that those involved in negotiations are finally *gatvol* of this war, and are determined to find solutions. The truth is that the war up north on the border with Lebanon has a slightly less complicated scenario because there are no hostages involved.

No matter what's included in the proposed agreements over Gaza, Israel cannot accept anything that doesn't include handing back every Israeli hostage. It's impossible to even consider anything without their inclusion. And while there are many who would like to ignore their plight, Israel cannot and will not. Israelis would never stand for that.

When Hamas released a video this week of Edan Alexander, the 20-year-old Israeli-American soldier who was captured on 7 October 2023, it brought the plight of the hostages back to centre stage. As horrific as it was to see the now gaunt and sickly-looking young man and hear his desperate pleas, it was proof of life. It means that he and other hostages can still be brought home alive. It means the fight to bring them home must continue relentlessly, and must draw to a close fast. As long we know that there's one hostage alive, there's the possibility there could be as many as 100 still alive.

Also, although the families and loved ones of hostages keep on protesting and putting out their message, the world forgets fast. So, although Hamas's intention was to terrorise Israelis and their families, it brought the hostages back into the limelight. And that's good.

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to Edan's family, he said that the time was ripe in the negotiations for cementing the agreement to end the war and bring home the hostages. He told the Alexanders that this is more possible now than it ever was before because of the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon.

Cynics might say that he said that just to placate Edan's devastated parents, but I hope that isn't true. I hope that before South Africa shuts down for the holidays, the hostages are brought home. I pray that the surviving hostages can celebrate Chanukah, the festival of light and miracles, with their families and loved ones. Here's hoping that, as we wind down towards our holidays, the negotiations intensify and solutions are found to end the war.

At this point, we're all tired and ready for the working year to close. We all need the break that's just a short stretch away from us.

This has been a long and tough year for Israel, the Jewish world, and the South African Jewish community. It's time for some lightness, love, and kindness. It's time for us to celebrate some miracles coming our way.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor

A case of 'buyer beware' in Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire



OPINION

DR DAN DIKER

The United States-brokered ceasefire between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and Israel can be summed up by a well-known Latin expression: *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware). Hezbollah commanders publicly called this ceasefire – "*hudna*" in Arabic – a G-dly intervention that gives the Iranian regime proxy an opportunity to recover, rearm, and reset before its next major assault. This isn't a "ceasefire" according to the Western understanding of the term.

In the West, ceasefires are generally understood as the first steps to permanent solutions. For example, the 1994 Washington Agreement signed by the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia was a ceasefire turned peace agreement, as was the 1998 Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement in Northern Ireland that ended the Troubles, a 30-year-old conflict.

Though "*hudna*" loosely translates to "truce" or "armistice", it's less formal and binding than a Western ceasefire. Another term used to approximate "ceasefire" in the Middle East is "*tahdiya*", a calming or quieting yet not a cessation of hostilities.

An indication of how these terms are used lies in the historical precedent of the 628 CE Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. The treaty was a pivotal event in Islamic history that affected Middle Eastern war and peace concepts. Hudaibiyyah stipulated a 10-year *hudna*, which was breached when militarily convenient. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat referenced Hudaibiyyah in a 1994 speech, referring to the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. He hinted that Oslo was a strategic move that would be breached when convenient.

Similarly, when Iranian regime proxies Hezbollah or Hamas call for a ceasefire, their objective is to rearm and resupply before attacking again. Their intention isn't an interim move towards a permanent peace. Most of the ceasefires in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, and again, relevant today, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), and the 1982 Lebanon War failed to bring lasting peace. Even many hard-won peace agreements that Israel has today with Arab countries are subject to this logic, in the strengthened presence of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated or Iran-proxy militias.

The Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire reflects the long shadow of the failed previous agreement in 2006, sanctioned by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which was unable to keep Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon south of the Litani River. Its lack of enforcement enabled Hezbollah to embed itself on the Israel-Lebanese border and nearly led to a Hezbollah land invasion like the October 2023 Hamas invasion from Gaza.

This cessation of hostilities is intended to correct the failures of 1701. It enables the Israel Defense Forces to remain in southern Lebanon for two months; mandates US

monitoring on the ground; requires the deployment of the Lebanese army in south Lebanon; the return of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), US forces, and international commission monitoring; and the dismantling of Hezbollah's military infrastructure. This seems more like a Chanukah wish list than a realistic regime correction.

The question remains: why agree to a ceasefire now when Israel has decimated the terrorist force serving the mullahs; eliminated Nasrallah and his officials; carried out legendary operations like the beeper explosions; and destroyed much of Hezbollah's positions and military-economic reserves? Hezbollah's aims are still genocidal attacks on Israel and obedience is to Iran.

There are still some advantages to a ceasefire. Domestically, it offers respite for Israel Defense Forces soldiers, particularly reservists, who have been fighting for more than a year from Gaza in the south to Lebanon in the north, with thousands wounded, and families and livelihoods suffering at home. Israel also wants to expedite American arms supplies and compel Hamas, now nearly decimated and isolated, to negotiate a hostage deal. Israel, however, hasn't eliminated Hezbollah, which would require occupying south Lebanon up to Beirut. The ceasefire also disconnects Hezbollah and Hamas, signalling to Hamas that its loss of

Hezbollah and Iran's backing will depreciate its leverage and bring its ultimate defeat.

The ceasefire also has strong diplomatic implications. It's a legacy gesture to US President Joe Biden in his last weeks in office to enable him to claim a foreign policy achievement after his largely unsuccessful Middle East intervention. Perhaps more significantly, it's meant to help avoid a repeat of Obama's parting shot across Israel's bow in 2016 in refusing to level a US veto of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 that falsely and incorrectly resolved that all Israeli building activity beyond 1967 lines was illegal.

The ceasefire also sends a message to the incoming Trump administration that Israel is doing everything it can to vindicate Trump's promises that he will end wars and prevent new ones from breaking out.

But there are also negative aspects. The ceasefire isn't a solution for 7 October-style Iranian-backed genocidal plots, and it probably will fuel Hezbollah's motivation to avenge Israel's targeting of its senior command structure and leader, Hassan Nasrallah. The ceasefire buys Hezbollah time to reset its tactics and replace its leadership. With Iranian assistance, it's expected to restore its military capability. It can be cogently argued that the fundamental strategic picture hasn't changed.

Lebanon is still dominated by an Iran-embedded "deep state" led by the remaining Hezbollah proxy army. Despite Israel's decapitation of its senior leadership, the army remains stronger than official Lebanese security and government organs. This Iran-controlled structure still bypasses the official state as it did when it launched its Hamas-support terror campaign on Israel on 8 October 2023. Jonathan Speyer notes that the Lebanese armed forces are heavily infiltrated by officers and soldiers with links to Hezbollah, and aren't willing or able to prevent Hezbollah from re-emerging and rearming.

Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs Arab affairs analyst Yoni Ben-Menachem has noted that



despite being weakened, Hezbollah's elite "Radwan" force is expected to rebuild and renew its terrorist infrastructure, posing a significant threat. One scenario under consideration by Israel's security forces is the possibility of Hezbollah resuming kidnappings, as it has done in the past. The recent 2 November IDF operation that captured senior Hezbollah naval officer Imad El-Hamaz in the Al-Batroun area on the northern Lebanon coast may provoke a retaliatory response.

What should be done now?

As Ben-Menachem suggests, Israel must abandon its containment

policy and adopt a more aggressive stance against Hezbollah. It must fully restore its deterrence with heightened vigilance and consistent military operations. It should continue targeted military operations, counter Iranian influence, establish an advanced intelligence system, and enforce a buffer zone near the border. Israel must also remain vigilant and uncompromising regarding violations of the ceasefire or of Resolution 1701 to avoid complacency.

While Israel had significant successes in the war against Hezbollah, the organisation remains militarily intact. Once Israeli military pressure eases, Hezbollah is expected to recover rapidly. In the short term, Israel can safely facilitate the return of tens of thousands of displaced residents along its northern border. However, maintaining long-term security will require heightened vigilance.

The ceasefire doesn't end the Iranian regime's 45-year war to destroy Israel, the United States, and its war on the West. Regime change remains the most viable lasting solution. Until the "head of the regime octopus" is "decapitated", partial solutions will only prolong and even deepen the conflict.

• Dr Dan Diker is president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs. He can be contacted at diker@jcfa.org

16 Days of Activism: what about the boys?

OPINION

ROZANNE SACK



He was a beautiful, brown eyed young boy born into a loving family. He was exceptionally bright with a talent for gymnastics, competing at national and international levels. His parents enrolled him at St John's College to give him the best opportunity for his destined academic success. Being small in stature and a late developer made him a target for bullying, and the school recommended that he have weekly counselling sessions with the head of pastoral care to help him cope.

These sessions gave the head of pastoral care an open mandate to meet Julio one-on-one and provided him with the perfect opportunity to isolate and groom Julio. He became a trusted figure for the boy and his concerned parents by appearing to show a real interest in Julio's well-being. He

introduced him to rock climbing, gave him special privileges which became their secret, and used these to build a bond ultimately to ensure this innocent child's silence as he groomed and sexually abused him.

Despite always being encouraged by his supportive parents to speak openly, Julio couldn't disclose the details of his abuse. For more than a decade, he buried his pain, believing that he was the only one who had been harmed. His family struggled to understand his deteriorating mental health as he became withdrawn, anxious, depressed, and unhappy at school. Following two years of counselling, his psychologist diagnosed complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and as she gently tried to get to the bottom of what had happened, he remained trapped by suppressed memories of sexual trauma.

On 15 November 2021, St John's College released a letter notifying the school community of allegations of sexual abuse by several past pupils at the hands of this former teacher and head of pastoral care. Could this be the piece of the puzzle missing in trying to understand their son's deteriorating mental health? Together with his psychologist, his parents read the letter to him. His body language was telling, as he dropped his head saying, "Oh so there were other boys. I thought I was the only one."

This beautiful young man was named Julio Mordoh, and he tragically took his own life by hanging himself with his belt on 5 November 2022 while in a secure, private, psychiatric

facility where he had been admitted as a high-risk patient. Just two weeks before his admission, Julio signed an affidavit at Norwood Police Station confirming his sexual abuse by the accused from the age of nine to 12.

The school commissioned an internal review into the matter, which remains confidential. Only a redacted summary of the report was shared with the school community. However, two independent complaints were taken by staff of St John's Preparatory School to their head during the tenure of the accused from 2002 to 2013, and these were alleged to have been "appropriately" dealt with by the prep head at the time. The report found no improper handling of complaints, but South African law states that when any

reasonable suspicions or actual reports of child sexual abuse are raised, institutions have a legal duty to report to it to the South African Police Service (SAPS) and submit a Form 22 to initiate an independent investigation.

The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa, published in 2018, confirms that sexual abuse is so widespread that overall, 35.4% – one in every three adolescents – report having experienced some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. Child protection activist Luke Lamprecht highlights that boys often lack the language to identify as victims and face significant barriers to speaking out, including shame, societal expectations of masculinity, homophobia, and myths that male victims become perpetrators. These factors contribute to male victims being two to five times more likely to attempt suicide, with many seeing it as the only way to escape their pain.

More than 10 victims have come forward with allegations against the former St John's Preparatory teacher, but the original criminal case stalled and remained dormant for 2.5 years in North West due to a lack of investigation. The accused remains at large, with no arrest or bail hearing held. Colonel Niemand, the head of special projects, managed to revive the case and on 18 November 2024, the National Department of Public Prosecutions agreed to centralise the case in the Johannesburg High Court. A trial date is still pending.

Attorney Ian Levitt, who is leading the case, explains the necessity of both criminal and civil action.

"While no civil claim can ever compensate for child sexual abuse and the loss of a child, holding institutions and individuals who ignored abuse accountable is crucial to effecting change and preventing future harm," Levitt says. "Punitive damages and civil action are necessary consequences to enforce the change that we need to see in civil society. Pursuing predators, both criminally and institutions civilly, is essential."

Sitting with Teresa Mordoh, one is struck by the immensity of her pain. This could be any of us, trying our best as parents, giving our children every possible opportunity. Yet all it takes to destroy an innocent life is one predator and a failing system that doesn't effectively protect our children's rights to safety, dignity, and innocence.

As parents trying to navigate the pain of losing their child to suicide, the Mordohs have registered a non-profit organisation called STOPS (Stop Trauma of Pupils in School) in honour of their son. Together with Lyra, a provider of digital mental-health-support services, their vision is to empower youth with access to a professional network of registered counsellors via a mobile app 24/7, 365 days of the year, and a confidential, tollfree STOPS safe reporting line for whistleblowing.

Instead of making grand statements about the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence and giving lip service to the need for stronger law enforcement and legal reform, our government needs to focus on accountability, and our schools need to focus on compliance and responsibility. It's time to stop talking and start acting.

Effective criminal action is critical to punish perpetrators, and civil action is required to hold institutions accountable for hiring them and turning a blind eye when suspicions surface. There should be no more "marking of their own homework". Anyone with a reasonable suspicion of sexually inappropriate behaviour must report it to the SAPS and submit to independent investigation any staff member or religious leaders or face the voracity of criminal and civil consequences.

After the tragic death of her son, Teresa Mordoh vowed that though he died in pain, it wouldn't be in vain. This ultimate sacrifice of a precious life must be a catalyst for real change. Let 16 Days of Activism become 365 days of accountability for those schools and institutions who fail our children. As Levitt states, "No war is won by fighting half a war. Either this is your fight to your very core, or it's not your fight at all."

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

Photo: Generic image from pexels.com



Children who are victims of sexual abuse need to be guided and fully supported

Keeping abuse secret protects offenders, community told

>>Continued from page 5

A domestic violence protection order is an immediate legal remedy to protect oneself from domestic abuse. "It's an order from a court that has authority, which tells the abuser what they can and cannot do," Jacobs said. "Protection orders are flexible and can cater to your specific needs. They address physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal, and economic abuse as well as intimidation, harassment, stalking, and damage to property.

"Anybody who believes they're being abused or has suffered harm can get a protection order – it's not gender specific, but

rather circumstance specific," said Jacobs. An adult can also bring an application on a minor's behalf.

"A final protection order comes along with a warrant of arrest, so it's more than just a piece of paper," Jacobs said. "If the accused contravenes the court order, they will be charged with contempt of court which is a crime. If you believe you're being abused, reach out to the police, the courts, an attorney, or a friend."

Nikki Fichardt, a volunteer at the Community Security Organisation who serves on the executive committee of the Sandringham Community

Policing Forum, stressed that safety was both a collaborative effort and a personal responsibility.

"Yet, if you're not going to report, you're not going to get a result," she said. In fact, when Fichardt asked her station commander for statistics about the Jewish community, she was told that the community doesn't report and keeps everything private. "We've been aligned with having a reporting culture similar to some of the most underprivileged and under resourced communities in South Africa," Fichardt said.

"Even though we're largely privileged and well educated,

when something goes wrong in our community related to gender-based violence, instead of going to the police, we close ranks and keep it a secret." Whether it's our religious beliefs, our community resources, or our lack of trust in the police system that keep us from reporting, this has to change, she said. "If we don't report incidents of gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual abuse of a minor child or of ourselves to the police, we cannot expect that that perpetrator will ever be brought to justice. And justice is a key ingredient in a victim's recovery."

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Surf, tisch, ruach: students count down to machaneh

LEE TANKLE

Every December, many South African Jewish children and teenagers head for the Cape where they spend the best three weeks of their year on machaneh with their favourite Jewish youth movement.

For many, returning to the campsite is the highlight of their year, with some even counting down the days until they can be free of their parents and get to have good old-fashioned fun with their friends.

Meir Levy, a 13-year-old from Yeshiva College, can't wait for Bnei Akiva machaneh every year. "It's the best way to spend your December because you're always with your friends and always have something to do. You're not just sitting on your phone like you would if you weren't at camp."

Similarly, Darryl Herman, a Grade 10 pupil at Redhill says that she chooses to go to Habonim camp year after year because all her friends are



Kaela Nowitz and Darryl Herman dropping off their trommels for Habonim Dror machaneh

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Sandton.

"What Habonim does so well is that it shows that you can have a party without any substances or anything like that. Everyone's there, they're having fun, they're dancing, it's just music. Nothing is needed for it to be more fun," he says.

For Shalva Sifris, a 15-year-old from Yeshiva College, the best part of going to Bnei Akiva camp is the *ruach* (spirit) singing sessions. "It's a beautiful time where you can sing or scream your heart out, connect with Hashem and the people around you, and be a part of something bigger than yourself," she says.

Josh Woolf, 16, from Yeshiva College also says the spirited sessions are the highlight of the experience because of the "feeling of connection and spirituality you get when just sitting with your friends and your madrichim [leaders] singing songs about peace, hope, and unity. It's an amazing feeling."

there. "It's a great place where I can learn leadership, life skills, about world problems, and a place where I can express my Jewish identity without fear or judgement," she says.

For those children who don't attend Jewish schools, machaneh is often the only place where they can connect with their Jewish heritage

and make and maintain a network of Jewish friends.

"Not going to a Jewish school, Habonim is my connection to Judaism. It's where I can express my Jewish identity and learn about myself and my Judaism and what that means to me," says Ben Gorton, a Grade 10 pupil from Crawford

is the only time all year that he gets to see them.

Similarly, a Grade 9 pupil from King David Victory Park has been looking forward to returning to Habonim camp for months. "There's no better feeling than chilling on the campsite watching the sunset. My favourite part is Shabbat when we eat all together on kikar [the main field]. I've been planning my *ruach* chants for ages. My friends and I are bringing cool *ruach* clothes. We'll paint the machaneh red."

Yeshiva College student Yonatan Bricker, 15, is particularly excited about spending Shabbat at Bnei Akiva camp this year because of the Kabbalat Shabbat dancing; Friday night *tisch*; Shabbat day activities; Havdalah; and amazing post-Havdalah *ruach*.

Bricker says he keeps going back to Bnei Akiva because "you cannot get the feeling anywhere else of sitting next to your friends and madrichim together with a thousand people that are all holding candles and all singing the same song".

Says Woolf, "Bnei Akiva is special because I get the feeling of being connected to my people and community. It's just a feeling that, please G-d, won't end within me. I feel like Bnei Akiva, as a whole, encourages that feeling – the idea of being together and experiencing things together. It's working together to bond to become different better people, which is why I keep going back."

Says Herman, "Camp is a nice time where I can get away from Joburg and have a teenage dream in December while meeting new people, learning new skills, and being taught how to think critically."

Similarly, Da'el Basserabie ,17, a frequent attendee of Bnei Akiva says machaneh is the best place to spend his December holidays because, "it's three weeks of unbelievable fun, staying up late with your friends, playing sport, and learning. There's an atmosphere in which everyone is getting along, everyone is friendly, and everyone is having an amazing time doing their own thing."

However, there are some teens and tweens who could think of nothing worse than staying in a tent away from their parents for three weeks.

One child who wants to stay anonymous says being in a tent in the dirt for three weeks isn't their

Lifeguards – the only safeguard in SA seas

LEE TANKLE

Jarrod Garber pleaded with family and friends to swim only on beaches where there are lifeguards in a video made in the car directly after being involved with a failed sea-rescue mission off the coast of Durban.

Garber, a software architect and volunteer with the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI), sent out the message on Tuesday, 26 November, after they were unable to save a 23-year-old man from drowning.

Garber said that after that incident, he wanted to share what he saw with everyone he knew to ensure that people were safe at the beach during the December holidays.

"I saw it with my own eyes. This family's life has been changed forever while standing on that beach," said Garber. "Most of us go on holiday and think that nothing is going to happen because we are strong swimmers, but anything can happen."

On that Monday afternoon, Garber was alerted to an incident in the surf zone at Eastmoor Crescent Beach in Umhlanga. He was told that a young man from Limpopo was on the beach with his brother when he went for a swim with no lifeguards around.

Garber and other NSRI volunteers immediately went in search of the man, who went missing after being caught in a rip tide. Despite an extensive sea and shoreline search that ended only the following day, they couldn't find him. His body was located and recovered by police only on Friday on Clarkes Beach in Ballito.

"Drownings happen extremely quickly," said Garber. "You literally have minutes to save a person. Sadly, on this day, we were unable to save him."

David Rosenberg, a volunteer with the NSRI in Cape Town, said, "Drowning is silent. Parents and caregivers should always watch children when they are near water, and should be an arm's length away from the child when they are in the water."

Garber agrees. "Most people look at the ocean and have no idea what they're looking at. But someone who has spent a lot of their life in the ocean like surfers, divers, and lifeguards, looks out and sees things that no-one else will see."

"Rip currents are the biggest danger," said NSRI Marketing Manager Andrew Ingram, and visiting a beach where lifeguards are on duty is the safest option.

"Some people just see calm water and think it's nice because there are no waves, but someone who knows the ocean knows that there are no waves because there's a deep channel that has a rip tide pulling out, which is the most dangerous place to be swimming," he said.

Garber said that the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal had the most districts with high numbers of drownings between January 2016 and March 2023, but that didn't mean other places were safe. Swimming where there are lifeguards is the only safeguard.

Garber said it was important to swim between the two flags set up by the lifeguards because they know it's the safest area to swim.

Said Ingram, "It's wiser to go into the water where lifeguards are on duty. Rips are present at many of South Africa's beaches. They are formed depending on wave height, frequency, and beach structure. They are dangerous because most people find them difficult to identify."

Rip currents are the leading cause of rescues by lifeguards at beaches, Ingram said. They don't pull individuals under the water but can quickly drag them away from the shore. Panic often leads swimmers to swim against the current, which can result in exhaustion and drowning.

However, Garber said, rip tides aren't the only danger. On some beaches, the water becomes deep very quickly. "These beaches are especially dangerous because of their violent shore break, and can catch people off-guard," he said.

There are also numerous drownings when people go swimming when they are drunk, Garber said.

The golden rule is to swim only when lifeguards are on duty



Jarrod Garber

Garber and the NSRI urge people caught in a rip current not to try to swim against the current because it's a fight that even the strongest swimmers can't win. It's crucial to stay calm in the situation, conserve energy by floating, and swim parallel to the shore. Instead of swimming directly back to land, swim at a 90-degree angle to escape the current's grip. Signal for help: Raise your arm and shout for assistance if needed.

It's also inadvisable for someone without training to try and save someone who appears to be drowning because they can get caught in the rip current and be dragged down and drown as well. This is what happened on 14 December 2022, when father of five Dovi Hochstadter (39) rushed into the ocean in KwaZulu-Natal to help his son, Daniel, ultimately saving his child but sacrificing his own life.

Dovi jumped into the ocean after 11-year-old Daniel went for a swim on Glenmore Sands Beach without lifeguards and was taken by a current.

Lifeguards were able to get to the pair, but were ultimately able to save only one. Dovi was caught in a whirlpool and when the next swimmer reached him, it was already too late.



Habonim Dror machaneh

A Grade 11 student from Herzlia says she's excited to get to Habonim machaneh this year, which will be the last time as a *channichah*. "Being almost a *maddie* and seeing so many women in Habo leadership makes me excited to grow up in the space and continue Habo's legacy in our precious community," she says. "I found myself on Habo, and I can't wait to give that same experience to future *channichim*. Habo will always inspire me to be a better person and care about the world around me. There's nowhere else I'd rather be in December."

Sifris chooses to go to Bnei Akiva machaneh each year because it's an environment where you can have fun but grow and learn at the same time. "It's such a powerful time to grow as a proud Jew with people similar and different to you," she says.

For these teens, going on machaneh allows them to connect with their friends and make new friends that they may well have for life.

Gabriel Spira, a Grade 10 pupil at Redhill, says he's excited to see his friends from Cape Town because this

idea of a holiday or fun. Another says that she chooses not to go on camp because she knows that she won't be able to function being far away from her family for that amount of time.

As the saying goes, horses for courses.



Bnei Akiva machaneh

Nova survivor's suicide spotlights mental health crisis

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

Eyal Golan sat at a table flanked by two citrus trees in his parents' garden in the pastoral community of Porat, a makeshift office that has become, reluctantly, his command centre. Here, he has conducted dozens of media interviews about his sister, Shirel, who died by suicide at the family home on her 22nd birthday.

Shirel and her boyfriend, Adi Gilad, were among the thousands of festival goers who fled the Nova festival as Hamas terrorists began massacring revellers on 7 October 2023. Of about 4 000 attendees, 364 were killed and several dozen taken hostage to Gaza. Those who survived witnessed extreme violence, including rape and mutilation, and experienced intense trauma after waiting hours in many cases for rescue. The Golan family blames the government for not doing enough to prevent his sister's death, which came after a battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"I will do everything to be her voice and the voice of her friends who are still living," Golan said.

Those friends, by all accounts, are still struggling more than a year after Israel's deadliest day. While viral reports of dozens of suicides among Nova survivors are unsubstantiated, survivors, their families, and mental health advocates all say that Israel is facing a crisis when it comes to the mental health of those who made it out of Nova's killing fields.

"There are so many who are technically still alive but who basically died on 7 October," said a Nova survivor who asked to be referred only by his initials "GN".

The government initially offered 12 therapy sessions for Nova survivors, later increasing it to 48 after SafeHeart, a group formed by volunteer therapists after the 7 October attack that has treated more than 3 000 survivors, lobbied, and said that even 48 sessions "falls short of what's truly needed".

In a statement issued after Shirel's death, SafeHeart called for Israeli authorities to do more.

Shirel was hospitalised twice because of her

knew of "only a few cases of suicide". The ministry also told the *Haaretz* newspaper that based on its records, Shirel's death was the only confirmed case of suicide among Nova survivors to date.

"It's in the government's interest to keep the number of suicides quiet, it doesn't want it to spread," said Daniel Sharabi, a Nova survivor who saved dozens of lives at the rave by administering first aid and firing at terrorists from an abandoned tank, and has since launched a nonprofit organisation to support his fellow survivors. Sharabi said a member of a parents' group for Nova survivors had told him there had been "tens of cases" of suicide, but said he wasn't personally aware of any.

Efrat Atun, the chief executive of SafeHeart, said she didn't know of more suicides apart from Shirel's. At a hearing at the Knesset earlier this month, she censured one legislator for saying that there were more than 10 suicides in the Nova community, calling it "irresponsible".

At the same hearing, the health and social welfare ministries warned that there were at least 30 Nova survivors deemed very high risk for suicide. More than a hundred were hospitalised in mental health institutions, the ministries said, but Atun said the number was closer to 150.

Mark Weiser, the director of the psychiatric division at Sheba Medical Center, who has researched Nova survivors, said that with about 4 000 people who attended the Nova party, it was reasonable to expect that several hundred would be significantly affected by trauma. Of those, about 5% – or roughly 200 individuals – might struggle the most, a figure that aligns with what's typically seen in trauma survivors.

"If several of that 5% are suicidal and are doing too much alcohol and drugs because they're having difficulty dealing with these issues, those are numbers that make sense," he said.

Defining PTSD numbers in the general population is challenging. One study estimated that more than half a million Israelis are at risk of developing PTSD, while another put the number at 30 000.

While Weiser didn't downplay the tremendous strain of trauma on the healthcare system, he stressed that most Israelis, including survivors themselves, overcome the trauma.

Atun rejected comparisons to 9/11, because the events in Israel were ongoing. But she said she disagreed with the idea that PTSD was decreasing over time, noting that in recent months, SafeHeart had experienced a "huge surge" in referrals, starting with the execution of six hostages – five of whom were Nova survivors – and continuing through

a two-month period of 7 October-related anniversaries, yahrzeits, and memorial days.

Sharabi, whose best friend, Yosef Haim Ohana, was kidnapped at the festival and is still a hostage in Gaza, said he was inspired to set up the nonprofit called A Future for the Survivors and the Wounded, after another close friend attempted suicide.

The nonprofit, which is staffed by 70 volunteers, has supported the mental recovery of more than 700 Nova survivors with a range of mental health, economic, and social services, including trauma counselling, financial aid, community-building activities, and aiding re-entry into the workforce.

Sharabi described how many survivors' lives had unravelled, leaving them without structure, hope, or the ability to cope with constant triggers and uncertainty about the future, a struggle which in many cases is compounded by drug use, intensifying the feelings of



Photo: Yonatan Sindel – Flash90

dissociation and despair.

"Drugs – especially psychedelics – can create a huge mess in the recovery process," he said. "You need to be a stable and healthy person to do them." The exception, Sharabi noted, is in a controlled clinical setting. Sharabi hopes to partner with trauma specialists to offer ketamine-assisted therapy to add to the other trauma therapies including the EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) his group already offers.

Hundreds of survivors of the 7 October attacks, including Nova survivors, are also slated to participate in a clinical trial using MDMA (Ecstasy)-assisted psychotherapy in Weiser's division at Sheba Medical Center.

Some survivors have chosen to shun conventional psychological treatments. Tribe of Nova, for example, has a dedicated sports department offering everything from horseback

riding to basketball and ping pong.

Others prefer to seek support and grounding through spiritual avenues. At a recent retreat organised by the haredi Orthodox outreach group Keshet Yehudi, held over Simchat Torah, Osher Daniel said she gathered the most strength from her connection to G-d.

Keshet Yehudi's founder and chief executive, Tzili Schneider, emphasises, however, that the group's mission isn't therapeutic. "We empathise – the whole country is traumatised on some level – we offer compassion, love, and togetherness. Nova survivors tell us often that it helps with their healing process, which is wonderful."

Osher Daniel, too, has started her own project pairing Nova survivors with one another to commit to weekly phone calls for mutual support. "Who knows if just by simply checking in, we might prevent someone from, G-d forbid, taking their own life?"



Photo: Courtesy Golan family

Nova survivor Shirel Golan (left) died by suicide in October 2024

PTSD symptoms. But two months before her death, she stopped leaving the house, refused to seek treatment and, in the days before, "clammed up completely", her brother said.

Golan warned that without additional and timely mental health support, those affected by the 7 October attack risk becoming another "lost generation". He said many family members of Nova survivors have expressed a fear of leaving their children unattended, worried they may attempt suicide.

Golan estimated that his sister's suicide had been the 53rd in the Nova community. In a Knesset hearing in April, Nova survivor Guy Ben Shimon made similar allegations, saying that as of February, there were "almost 50 suicides among the Nova survivors".

But the number was fiercely contested by health ministry officials at the same hearing, with Gilad Bodenheimer, the director of the ministry's mental health division, saying they

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Adoption not easy, but parents have no regrets

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

From trying circumstances, to infertility, to the desire to give a child a home, there are different motivations for adoption. In the wake of National Adoption Month, we chat to Chevrah Kadisha Social Services as well as to adoptive parents and children.

Every July, Kevin and Mandy Harris*, the latter now 13, celebrate "adoption day", the day they say they adopted each other. "Mandy started living with me when she was two years old," Kevin recalls. "I'd known her mom, Dana*, for a number of years. She had fallen on hard times, contacted me out of the blue, and I offered her and her daughter a place to stay."

A few months later, Kevin and Dana began a relationship which lasted for just less than two years. "During that time, Dana was troubled and often absent, and I spoke to her about possibly adopting Mandy," Kevin recalls. "I spent a large amount of time taking care of Mandy, and we began developing a close bond. In 2015 after our breakup, Dana went into rehabilitation, and she never came back."

Kevin then sought help from Chevrah Kadisha Social Services and met late social worker Zoe Cohen. "She was part of my support structure for dealing with Dana and finding myself a sudden father." After a lengthy process that involved getting legal consent from both biological parents, Kevin officially adopted Mandy in July 2019.

"By that stage, I thought of myself as Mandy's father," he says.

In adopting Mandy, he eliminated the risk of either biological parent taking her away. "I was already putting her through school, and it's important to me that she has the best upbringing I can possibly give her. I never want her to be in the position that her mom found herself in, both in terms of addiction and depending on others for accommodation."

Today, Mandy is a thriving teenager. She and her mother have a relationship of sorts, but all their in-person meetings are supervised. "I'm a big believer that if you can have some sort of contact with your biological parents, you should, as long as the interactions are positive," Kevin says.

Nevertheless, Mandy has been to therapy to process lingering feelings of abandonment and anger towards her birth parents.

"To me, Kevin is my actual father," Mandy says. "I would have it no other way, even though he's the one that makes me sassy. I've had a lot of questions at school about how I was adopted, but I always say, 'He's my father, end of discussion.'"

Kevin feels the same. "Sometimes, I think about other choices I could have made, yet they all end with the thought that Mandy wouldn't have been with me. I get cold shivers thinking about what might have happened."

Shirley Band* and her husband began caring for their grandson, Jason*, now 11, when he was just more than a month old. "My daughter was unwell, and couldn't look after Jason," Band recalls. Grandparents, she says, don't have any automatic rights. "So, we applied to be foster parents and were given custody when Jason was just more than four months old." They remained foster parents for two years, the standard for temporary placement.

"As my daughter's circumstances didn't improve very much and the father wasn't in the picture, the judge later made us foster parents until Jason turns 18." Yet, the Bands decided that adoption would be

preferable as it would afford them full parental rights without government involvement in everything from medical to travel arrangements. "If you really want the child to be safe instead of being moved from one place to another, then you have to adopt as early as possible to limit trauma," Band says.

She admits that while she's fortunate to have adopted her maternal grandson, who has been loved from day one, adoption isn't an easy road. Her daughter, who is now doing better, is involved to some extent, but this sometimes creates disagreements. Ultimately, however, she and her husband are Jason's legal parents.

"Adoption ultimately brings lots of joy," Band says. "I'm quite strict and I'm not a softy, kissy Jewish grandmother, but I think what you gain is the pleasure of giving."

Melissa Jordaan, a social worker at the Chev, advises those considering adoption to educate themselves. "Understand what the process entails and think deeply about the sort of child you would want to adopt, from

age to race to background," she advises. Should the parents want a non-Jewish child to convert, the Chev helps them liaise with the Beth Din and provides support.

The Chev also provides counselling for biological parents considering having their child adopted. And it screens prospective adoptive parents in terms of their medical and personal history and financial status, and refers them for mandatory psychological assessment.

It helps to facilitate a bond between the child and prospective family, and manages the formal legal adoption process. This generally takes between six to 12 months. The Chev also helps adoptees over the age of 18 to trace their biological families.

"There's a big shift towards having open, age-appropriate conversations with adopted kids to tell them their story in a way that makes sense to them," Jordaan says. Even if you adopt a baby, she cautions, children who are separated from their birth parents come with a difficult story – something she refers to as a "primal wound" – that will always be with them. "Parenting biological kids isn't always easy, but those who adopt have to be more mindful and process issues in advance.

"We have a responsibility to let adoptive parents know the child's exact background, so they know what they're taking on and are properly equipped," Jordaan says. "Managing adoption is a massive responsibility. It's an invasive process, but ultimately it comes with immense joy."

• Those seeking adoption services can contact the Chev's Social Services on 011 532 9616 or socialservices@jhbchev.co.za

*Name has been changed



Veteran anti-apartheid editors slam Ha'aretz sanctioning

NICOLA MILTZ

The founders and former editors of the iconic, independent, and ground-breaking, apartheid-era newspaper, the *Weekly Mail*, have sent a letter of solidarity to the editor-in-chief and staff of *Ha'aretz*, known for its left-leaning stance.

Professor Anton Harber and Irwin Manoim, two South African pre-eminent media veterans, wrote to *Ha'aretz* to commiserate and show support for what it is experiencing at the hands of the present Israeli government.

Their message follows the Israeli government's controversial decision last month to cut ties with *Ha'aretz*, sparking heated debate about press freedom and the responsibilities of independent media in a democracy.

In the *Weekly Mail's* heyday, it was one of the newspapers at the butt of the National Party government's media oppression.

"The Netanyahu government's sanctions against *Ha'aretz* have brought back vivid memories of our own newspaper's struggle against the apartheid government about four decades ago," the two of them wrote on behalf of the Jewish Democratic Initiative (JDI), an organisation which campaigns for free speech, human

apartheid regime had targeted their publication. "Our newspaper was denied government advertising; shunned by government spokespeople; raided by police; banned from publication for weeks at a time; and our journalists arrested on a variety of fabricated charges. The state media was controlled by government propagandists, and much of the rest of the privately-owned media was either muted in its criticisms or loudly supportive."

The Israeli government's move came in the wake of comments made by *Ha'aretz* publisher Amos Schocken, who referred to Palestinian terrorists as "freedom fighters", described Israel's governance in the West Bank as that of a "cruel apartheid regime", and called for sanctions against the government.

Even Leonid Nevzlin, the co-owner of *Ha'aretz*, publicly condemned Schocken's statements made during a *Ha'aretz*-organised London conference on 27 October.

The Israeli government, however, approved a proposal by Communication Minister Shlomo Karhi to stop all state funded organisations engaging with *Ha'aretz* and advertising in the newspaper.

"We cannot allow a reality in which the publisher of an official newspaper in the state of Israel calls for sanctions against it, and support the state's enemies in the midst of a war, while international bodies harm the legitimacy of the state of Israel, its right to self-defence, and actually impose sanctions against it and its leaders," Karhi said.

Harber and Manoim wrote, "We watch the Israel situation today with alarm, as each of these scenarios plays out once more, against *Ha'aretz* and other media and individual journalists. We have also been horrified at the number of journalists who have died in the conflict and the treatment of journalists by all parties to the conflict."

The South African duo praised *Ha'aretz* for its resilience and critical role in Israeli democracy, writing, "*Ha'aretz* isn't just a good newspaper, it's a great and brave one, an institution which

Israel ought to be particularly proud of because, as long as there has been the voice of *Ha'aretz*, Israel could still make some claims to be a free society."

They ended their letter with, "Next year, our newspaper, now known as the *Mail & Guardian*, celebrates its 40th anniversary. The apartheid regime has been dead for three decades. Take heart from that."

Ha'aretz Editor-in-Chief Aluf Benn thanked the duo for their letter, and published it on the "Letters to the editor" page this week.

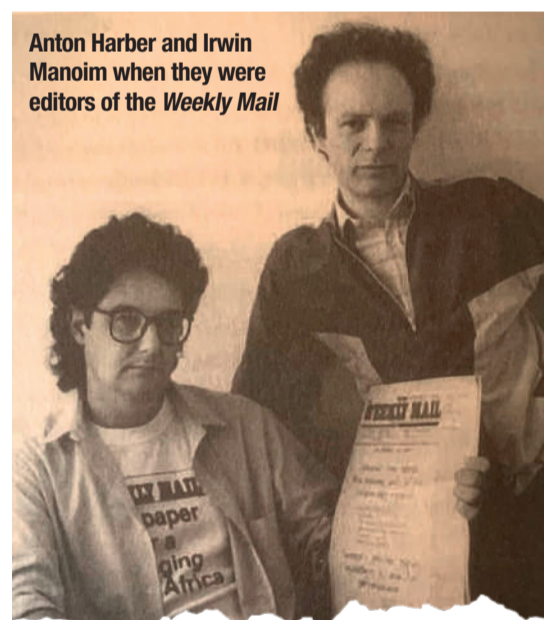
Harber and Manoim criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, telling the *SA Jewish Report*, "If he lays claim to democratic governance in a free-speech society, which he does often and loudly, then he has no business targeting a respected newspaper."

"The purpose of sanctions against *Ha'aretz* is to cut off the paper's revenue," they said in a joint comment to the *SA Jewish Report*. "Based on our own experiences, that's a first step. If it doesn't silence *Ha'aretz*, harsher methods are likely to follow. Which is why we wrote the letter. We recall how important international support and solidarity was for our own survival. It reminded the government that acting against critical journalism came at a reputational cost."

The JDI, which the pair represented in the letter, advocates for a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict.

"No amount of bloodshed will ever offer a solution," the pair said. "In the end, only diplomacy, a willingness by both sides to talk to their enemies, and an openness to compromise, will work."

"In 1988, during South Africa's darkest hours under PW Botha, the notion of a peace settlement here seemed ludicrously naive. Yet a year later, the 'settler colonialist' FW De Klerk and 'the terrorist' Nelson Mandela began a long, slow, difficult process that ended in an agreement. Today's South Africa is imperfect, but it's not at war, and the vast majority of people are substantially better off."



rights, an end to the occupation, and a just and equitable peace in Israel-Palestine. "Indeed, while the Israeli government is enraged by any suggestion of apartheid-like behaviour, it continues to act from the same play book."

Drawing on their experience, they recounted how the

Reach every Jew, everywhere, Chabad emissaries urged

STAFF REPORTER

South African Rabbi Oshy Deren was chosen out of 6 500 Chabad rabbis and lay leaders who attended the 41st International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries (*shluchim*) in New York last week, to deliver the conference's Torah insights.

Deren, of Chabad of the West Coast in Cape Town, was one of 15 Chabad rabbis from South Africa who attended this annual event. South Africa was one of 110 countries represented.

The conference, held in Edison, New Jersey, concluded with a moving closing ceremony, celebrating the vast tapestry of Jewish life worldwide and reaffirming Chabad's unwavering commitment to reach every Jew, everywhere, no matter the obstacles.

This year's gathering took on new meaning, taking



Rabbi Oshy Deren giving Torah insights at the Kinnus

place just a week after the horrific murder of Rabbi Zvi Kogan, a devoted *shaliach* in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The ceremony commenced with a heartfelt tribute to Kogan. Rabbi Levi Duchman, the chief rabbi of the UAE and director of Chabad-Lubavitch of the UAE, addressed the assembly.

Despite the heartbreak, Duchman and his colleagues expressed commitment to continue their vital work.

"That's what Zvi would have wanted," affirmed Rabbi Yehuda Marasow, a Chabad *shaliach* in Abu Dhabi. "We

are all now tasked with carrying forward his mission."

In a touching display of solidarity, the conference connected live with Kogan's family in Jerusalem, who were in mourning. Thousands stood together, sharing traditional words of comfort, demonstrating unity and support for the grieving family.

The conference also honoured the life of Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, who spearheaded the *Kinnus* for the past four decades and dedicated his life to actualising the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson's, vision. His son, Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky, who recently undertook his father's role as director of the conference, took the stage in his father's place.



Photos: Shmuelie Grossbaum/Chabad.org

"My father always reiterated the Rebbe's call to reach out to those who might seem beyond our reach," said Kotlarsky. "Take a moment to think of one more person in your life – a neighbour, a colleague – someone others might deem impossible to connect with, and take action."

He highlighted one of his father's final initiatives: a campaign to inspire 120 million *mitzvot*. To achieve this ambitious goal, they launched OneMitzvah.org, a platform designed to encourage everyone to involve friends and family in acts of kindness. "Engage your network because that's how we'll make a real impact and usher in an era of peace and redemption," he said.

Rabbi Yehoshua Soudakoff, *shaliach* to the Jewish deaf community, addressed the assembly in American Sign Language. His speech was simultaneously translated for all to understand.



Chabad rabbis visiting the Rebbe's ohel (grave) in New York

"For a deaf person, finding a place within the community can be challenging," Soudakoff said. "But we're here to change that narrative."

He shared personal anecdotes about the isolation many deaf individuals felt within the broader Jewish community, and emphasised the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

"Our mission is to ensure that every Jew, regardless of ability, feels a sense of belonging," he said. "Let's continue our sacred work to reach every single one of them and inspire them, just as I was once inspired."



Delegation of South African Chabad rabbis at the Kinnus

A video presentation highlighted Chabad's work on Israel's frontlines. Rabbi Gershon Shnur of Chabad of Ganei Tikvah spoke about serving as a *shaliach* while fulfilling his duties as an army reservist. Rabbi Shalom Ber Hertzal, serving in Israel's far north since recent conflicts began, discussed the nation's challenges and his role in providing spiritual support.

Continued on page 12 >>

Jewish influence in exhibition of FC Bayern

LEE TANKLE

It's football prowess that comes to mind when hearing the name FC Bayern Munich, not a rich Holocaust history peppered with Jewish people.

In fact, the man who shaped the face of what FC Bayern Munich is today was a Jewish salesman, Kurt Landauer, who played for the team and was a four-time president of the club. Before 1933, it had a 10% Jewish membership.

This was revealed by Fabian Raabe, the curator of the travelling FC Bayern Munich Museum at its opening at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 28 November.

Raabe said FC Bayern Munich took on the task of looking back at its history and sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly with a travelling exhibition that has gone to 11 different countries. Though the club has a checkered past, "history has never held us back. Rather, it has pushed us forward as an independent club", Raabe said.

The exhibition "gives us an insight into the club's most difficult years", said German Ambassador Andreas Peschke, at the opening. "Its history isn't only about great successes, outstanding athletes, and inspiring matches. It's also a history of the club and its members during the times of the Nazi dictatorship, Germany's darkest years.



Fabian Raabe, Tali Nates, and German ambassador Andreas Peschke

"And it's a 'history of people who became victims, of people who chose to look the other way. People actively supported the Nazis and committed crimes against Jews'".

Said Peschke, "This exhibition documents what antisemitism and racism in Germany gave rise to. Exclusion and violence against people who think differently or who believe differently must have no place. In the end, this exhibition was also proof of where thought and team spirit can take people."

Raabe said Jews gravitated to football because at the start of the 20th century, football wasn't that popular in Germany. The most popular sport at the time was gymnastics, which he said was rigid, militaristic, and antisemitic. There was a belief that gymnasts would unify the German nation.

German Jews were attracted to football because there was a chance for integration, Raabe said.

When FC Bayern Munich was founded in 1900, it wasn't the city's first football club but it pledged to play a leading role in this emerging sport. Its founding members were from middle-class backgrounds, and most didn't come from Bavaria. Two of the 11 founding members had Jewish roots.

Raabe said that though 10% of the 1 085 members before 1933 had been Jewish, there's evidence that only eight survived the Holocaust. Twenty-seven members were said to be murdered, four took their own lives, and 83 were forced to flee, he said.

According to their research, three Jewish members fled to Johannesburg.

The man who shaped the club at its inception, Landauer, played for the club as a youth from 1901. He left Munich to train as a banker in Lausanne, concluding his apprenticeship in Florence, and then returned to Munich in 1905. He was elected club president for the first time in 1913, but the outbreak of hostilities in World War I forced him to quit the position, Raabe said.

Landauer served a second spell as club president from spring 1919 until March 1933, with a one-year break in 1922. Fuelled by Landauer's ideas and energy, the club grew into an internationally renowned club, said Raabe.

In 1932, the club won the German championship with a Jewish president, manager, and Jewish players.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, many football clubs were reluctant to exclude Jewish people. However, in 1933, the club did sign the "Stuttgart Declaration" that committed itself to the removal of Jews from sports clubs, along with 13 other German football clubs.

Although there was no enforcement of this exclusion, many Jews were wary of the state of their club, with 41 Jews leaving between February and November 1933.

Landauer was forced to resign in 1933. On the day after *Kristallnacht*, Landauer was arrested, and sent to Dachau with 19 former Bayern Munich members and another thousand Jews. He was registered at Dachau as prisoner number 20009. However, because he fought in World War I, he was released 33 days later. Four of his siblings were killed by the Nazis, and then after World War II, he had the chance to immigrate to the United States but chose to stay in Munich because it was his home.

However, Landauer moved to Switzerland on 15 March 1939. In 1940, Bayern Munich went to Geneva for a friendly against the Swiss national team. When the players spotted Landauer among the spectators, they went to greet their former president. The Gestapo wasn't amused, and threatened that this behaviour would have consequences.

In June 1947, Landauer moved back to Munich, and was re-elected to the Bayern presidency in the same year. His final term of office ended in 1951. Ten years later, on 21 December 1961, Landauer passed away in Munich at the age of 77.

During the years of the Nazi regime, the club excluded Jewish members and elected Josef Kellner, a dedicated Nazi official, as club leader in 1938.

Similarly, Adolf Fischer who was club president from 1953 to 1955, was guilty of Nazi plunder by enriching himself as co-founder of the Eidschink Bank through the forced sale of Jewish companies.

Peschke applauded Raabe and the Bayern Munich research team for the exhibition, saying it was unusual for a football team to look back not only at the victims of the Holocaust, but also the perpetrators who were a part of the longstanding club.

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Story of Israeli heroes with unique SA connection

The former managing director of Yeshiva College, **Rabbi Leron Bernstein**, who now lives in Israel, was project director of *One Day in October*, a book about the heroes that emerged on 7 October 2023. The SA Jewish Report spoke to him.

What drew you to put together *One Day in October*?

The idea for the book was conceived by Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, the managing editor of the Maggid label of Koren Jerusalem. Amidst the unprecedented cruelty and horror of 7 October, countless stories began to emerge about the remarkable humanity, courage, and bravery of the Israeli people on that day.

Together with Oriya Mevorach, the editor-in-chief at Maggid Hebrew, Ziegler structured the idea of a book that would bring these “everyday” heroes and their stories to the Israeli people and then to the rest of the world in a way that’s authentic, endearing, compelling, and inspiring. They brought in Israeli writer and film producer Yair Agmon to compose the stories, and Mevorach became co-author in the middle of the project.

I served as project director, responsible for making sure that all the parts came together in record time and within budget. We wanted to get this special book to the Israeli public as soon as possible to provide a much-needed framework and emotional resource to help people begin to process, cope, and rehabilitate.

How would you describe the book?

As tearing open and healing the heart. The book doesn’t sensationalise the violence, it allows the reader to access the facts of the day in a way that doesn’t leave them broken at the end, perhaps similar to open-heart surgery.

Moving from the terribly divided Israeli nation of 6 October through 7 October and then to 8 October, the book presents us with the pain of our people and then the hope and heroism we exhibit when it matters most.

What was so different about that day in October?

I was completely overwhelmed with disbelief that our homeland had been infiltrated and defiled in such a vicious way. Where was our “invincible army”, and how could this be happening to the Jewish people in their homeland in the modern era? How could we be witnessing scenes in 2023 that harken back to the Holocaust? I’m certainly not the same Jew and Israeli citizen I was before 7 October.

How did you select the 40 heroes and 40 stories?

Countless stories were being shared across Israeli society in community groups, social media, and on the news. The stories of heroism weren’t hard to find. It was far more difficult to choose only 40.

What were you looking for specifically?

Agmon brings you to an intimate appreciation of the person before they met the unprecedented horror. You learn about some unique traits that could have been perceived as arbitrary at first, but turn into their “superpower” on that day. And it’s that trait that retains their humanity and gives us reason for hope.

How do you believe we move on from 7 October 2023? Have you done so?

We have to take each day as it comes, with its challenges, blessings, and with the strength that we can find within it. We have to have faith within ourselves to heal and triumph over the challenges that we face. I work on my faith in Hashem despite the situation we face

in Israel, especially the constant loss of precious life. I have found that the more we try to bring light, the more we get to access Hashem’s light pushing through amidst the darkness. Strangely, I have felt Hashem’s providence more in the last year than in any other time.

Why do you believe it’s important for us to read about these heroes?

To restore our humanity and our hope. To keep us united and connected as a Jewish people. Ultimately, they are everyday people. If they could reach such heights of bravery and courage, that potential lies within us too.

Tell me about one hero whose story has had the most impact on your life.

A real-life superhero, Or Ben-Yehuda, an elite commander in the army. On 7 October, she saved the Sufa Outpost on the border while facing almost certain death. In the story, we are told how the head of the Southern Command visited her prior to 7 October and commended her ability to, “command as a woman”. It’s quite a bold thing to say in our society. Yet, she appreciates that he is telling her that her leadership strength comes from tapping into who she truly is, not trying to be anyone else. We all have unique traits, and we often try to mask them to fit in. In *One Day in October*, we see that it was so often these unique traits that propelled them to remarkable heights.



Thomas Hand (father of returned hostage Emily Hand) with Rabbi Leron and Sarah Bernstein

What would entice someone to read this book?

We’re all still carrying trauma from the events of 7 October, especially because the war continues without respite and the reaction of the world has been gloriously disappointing. This book allows us to confront the day with our eyes wide open, yet gives us the tools to process that pain.

What has been the reaction to this book in South Africa, Israel, and elsewhere?

In Israel, the first print of the book was sold out in pre-orders. It held the #1

Bestseller spot for 21 weeks, including during Israel’s national book week. It now has platinum status, with more than 50 000 copies sold. A limited hardcover edition is now being sold to mark the first anniversary of 7 October.

Kollel bookshop made its largest order for this book. Within weeks, there was a handful of copies left. South African friends have shared how the book has enabled them to feel deeply connected to Israel through this difficult period.

The reception across our markets in the United States and the United Kingdom has been similarly successful.

What did the South African Jewish community have to do with this book?

I reached out to my network of South African Jewish philanthropists, and garnered some basic interest at first to sponsor the English version. We then heard the tragic news about my former student, Captain Daniel Perez, who 163 days after 7 October, was found to have been killed after performing the most remarkable acts of heroism. I had been in discussion with Laurence Rapp about sponsorship, but after finding out what happened to Perez, he committed to leading fundraising efforts to dedicate the book in his memory. Rapp recruited philanthropic individuals from across the South African community, and funds were raised on behalf of their communities and organisations. There was meaningful justice in this book of Israeli heroism being dedicated by South African Jews, representing the same country whose leaders have wasted massive public resources to spread libel about Israel through the International Court of Justice.

Are there particular stories in the book that the South African audience will resonate with?

Every story is written with a particularly human feel. They transcend nationalities and even creeds. Of course, the story of Perez is deeply meaningful to the South African audience.

New film examines oldest hatred: antisemitism

SHARON GIVATI

As antisemitism continues to run rampant in the streets of Europe and in communities around the United States, the groundbreaking new film, *Tragic Awakening*, gives viewers a new look at the oldest hatred.

Produced by The Aseret Movement in collaboration with Rabbi Raphael Shore, the film presents a new answer to the age-old question of why Jews are the disproportionate targets of virulent and obsessive hatred.

The film centres on the personal experiences of Arab Zionist Rawan Osman, who channels her unique perspectives and challenges viewers to ask why antisemitism is often so quickly embraced and perpetuated. She also explores the dangers of antisemitism to the world at large.

Rabbi Shore, an acclaimed filmmaker, author, educator, and founder of OpenDor Media and The Clarion Project, has developed hundreds of projects dedicated to shaping public discourse around Jewish identity, antisemitism, radical Islam, and human rights.

“My goal with this film wasn’t to simply chronicle the experience of Jew-hatred because that is something that we know exists and we know has only grown exponentially over the past year,” Shore says. “My objective was to explore the far more important question of why antisemitism exists in the first place, and share the positive message about who the Jewish people are and how we can all be part of making the world a better place.”

In-depth interviews with academics, legislators, and media analysts, combined with footage and commentary from thought leaders, *Tragic Awakening* reaches the fundamental conclusion that antisemitism is less an issue of hating Jews and more an issue of opposing what Jewish values represent to the world.

“We’re raised and educated to believe that people hate Jews for religious, social, or political reasons,” says Rabbi Shore.

“While those are certainly catalysts for specific outbursts, those explanations fall short of truly understanding the real motives behind antisemitism, and in so doing, we fail to combat it effectively. Today, more than ever before since the Nazis were defeated, we are forced

to discover ways of finding greater tolerance in our world. We are completely delusional if we think that hatred of the Jews will end with the Jews. We are always the canary in the coal mine, a harbinger of what’s to come for the entire civilised world.”

Alongside a series of public screenings and discussions hosted across the United States, *Tragic Awakening* will also be available online.

The film is complemented by Rabbi Shore’s first book, *Who’s Afraid of the Big, Bad Jew? Finding Clarity and Connection in the Face of Jew-Hatred*, which further investigates the film’s central thesis.

“As Jews, we have long been forced to look on as the world hates us,



Rabbi Raphael Shore with Rawan Osman

never truly understanding the motivation for this hatred or why we have been constantly victimised. By discovering real answers, we are afforded a sense of clarity, and ironically, a sense of pride, crucial to addressing these challenges on local, national, and global levels. Jew-hatred isn’t going away, but it certainly can be far better understood and effectively confronted.”

Reach every Jew, everywhere, Chabad emissaries urged

>>>Continued from page 11

After the presentation, Shnur and Hertzl led the assembly in a heartfelt recitation of *tehillim*, praying for peace and protection for the people of Israel.

A beautiful song dedicated to the *shluchim* and the theme of the night of *Lech Lecha* was composed by songwriter and singer Shmuel Marcus, which he sang together with Eli Marcus and Zalman Rosenfeld, a young *shaliach* from Aventura, Florida,

The annual ceremony highlighting Chabad’s

international reach took on a new multilingual twist as *shluchim* representing different regions were welcomed in their local tongue.

Each *shaliach* shared updates on their outreach efforts, emphasising the collective impact of Chabad’s global network. The iconic roll call served as a testament to the movement’s expansive reach, touching lives in communities large and small across the globe.

The chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Kalman Ber, reiterated his support for the *shluchim*’s mission

and emphasised the collective responsibility to fill the void left by Kogan’s passing. “We are now all *shluchim*,” he declared.

As the evening drew to a close, music filled the room as the *shluchim* danced joyously. The attendees departed with renewed commitment to return to their communities and make an even greater impact. The message was clear: despite challenges, the dedication to reach every Jew, everywhere, remains unshaken.

G-d's knee-to-know messages

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



You know about my knee. It's a painfully short story made long. I tripped during the warmup at a Krav Maga session, fell embarrassingly badly, and have struggled for three months since. The good news is that it's slowly improving, the swelling is starting to reduce, it's less painful to the touch, and I have (finally) managed to go back to gym.

That having been said, long after the physical wounds heal, I will undoubtedly be burdened by the emotional baggage of it all. Not because the event or the treatment was traumatic, but because of the confident advice that I received along the way.

"It's G-d sending you a message," my wife was predictably first out the blocks. "And you need to hear it!" I know better than to argue, and listened as she set out the conversation that she and G-d had no doubt had about me. "Maybe think of taking on one thing that you don't do, but should. Something small." Sound advice.

But then she also told me that the injury was clearly G-d telling me to slow down. So determined was He that I was doing too much, He took the extreme measure of smashing me in the knee to slow me down.

And so, bravely, I asked her if perhaps G-d was telling me that I needed to take on one less thing. "Maybe," I thought out loud, "I need to stop performing the morning hand washing ritual on waking up. Something small like that?" There are times when she thinks I'm funny. This, it turned out, wasn't one of those moments. So much the contrary that I was surprised that the conversation didn't end with me nursing two knee injuries.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to join a social media content creator for lunch. Given that he was in the country to speak at a Jewish religious event, I was surprised that the lunch was taking

place at a non-kosher restaurant. For whatever reason, he annoyed me from the get-go, an irritation that peaked when I asked him why he had chosen to travel to a dangerous destination after South Africa. He was prepared for the answer, and in responding, he dramatically raised his hands to the heavens, looked upward and said, "Because G-d is sending me there!" "Really?" I mumbled, "Did He also send you to Tashas for lunch?"

G-d it seems, speaks to everyone but me.

The truth is that although He has never told me where to eat lunch, He has guided me every step of my journey. He has made it plain to me what my "mission is", and course corrected me when I needed it. To suggest that this isn't the case would be to deny not only His truth, but my own.

I'm aware that the "message from G-d" approach might be perceived as a coping mechanism. It's unquestionably easier to endure some of our challenges when we're confident that our suffering has purpose and that there's a G-d-like reasoning behind it all. Especially if it makes no sense to us mortals.

When it comes to my knee, I have no idea if the message from G-d is for me to slow down or speed up. I don't know if it means I'm doing too much or perhaps too little. Or if it means that I'm carrying too much on my shoulders or too much on my stomach.

What I do know that is that there are some situations, in the interest of my healthy knee, peace of mind, and happy home, that I accept without question that the message from G-d is what my wife says it is.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Here's to our youth



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

This week marks the start of summer *machanot*, a cornerstone in the calendar of our Jewish youth movements and the canvas for so many formative experiences and cherished memories.

The remarkable growth in camper numbers this year reflects the enduring strength and relevance of these movements within our vibrant community. Their success highlights not just a tradition but a dynamic system nurturing the next generation of Jewish leaders.

This week, our youth movement's gap-year students also returned to South Africa, excited and ready to take on the challenges of maintaining and growing their movements and ideologies in the country. The gap years play an important role in developing our youth movements and by extension our community's future leadership, and we look forward to seeing this year's crop take on some of the community's challenges.

Our Jewish school system continues to stand as a bedrock of excellence and achievement. Year after year, these institutions send a significant percentage of students to top universities, exemplified by King David Linksfield's consistent ranking among the schools with the highest intake at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). This statistic is a testament to the incredible work that the schools do in developing our children.

In fact, in interfaith forums hosted by the Board, our schools are often cited as models of success that other religious groups aspire to emulate. I congratulate the principals, teachers, and staff of all the Jewish schools around the country for their tireless and successful efforts in shaping our school pupils.

At university level, the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) shines as a beacon of courage and advocacy. SAUJS is tasked with the challenging and sometimes daunting task of protecting Jewish students and Jewish interests on our university campuses, and

our student leaders have acted bravely and strategically in their fight against bigotry and hate in sometimes openly hostile environments.

Following the devastating events of 7 October, SAUJS organised a poignant vigil at Wits, where participants sang *Acheinu*. This heartfelt moment of grief and unity exemplified the strength of our student community. As someone involved at Wits, I have witnessed firsthand the tireless efforts of SAUJS in combatting bigotry and maintaining safe spaces for Jewish students. While challenges persist, today's campuses, including Wits, the University of Johannesburg, and the University of Pretoria are among the safest globally for Jewish students – a testament to SAUJS's ongoing commitment and success.

This year, we're also proud to witness the marked increase in the number of Jewish students at the University of Stellenbosch. This has been coupled with the creation of a permanent Chabad on the university campus, and the creation of a SAUJS branch in Stellenbosch. In the development of these institutions, especially SAUJS, we're safe in the knowledge that our students will have a strong base in Stellenbosch, with the representation and backing required to ensure that their needs are met and that they will have a secure and supportive Jewish space on campus.

As we approach the end of the year, I'm grateful and inspired by our various youth movements, schools, and student organisations. Their unwavering dedication and achievements inspire confidence in a bright future for our community.

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

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

YESTERDAY'S LEARNERS

TODAY'S LEADERS

Did you know that 62% of the Bnei Akiva camp leadership and 72% of the Habonim camp leadership are King David alumni? We are immensely proud to be nurturing the next generation of community leaders.

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Sporting heroes of 2024 conquer lofty heights

SAUL KAMIONSKY

With sporting moments such as a swimmer causing a sensation at the Midmar Mile and a goalkeeper signing for the mighty Mamelodi Sundowns, 2024 has been a good sporting year for our community. Here are some highlights.

At the Midmar Mile in KwaZulu-Natal in February, matric student Rachel Smith surprised top swimmers and commentators



Dean Herskovits

by managing to finish tied for fifth place with a time of just more than 23 minutes for the 1.6km race despite starting off in a crowd of nearly 1 000 swimmers with slower seeding times.

Having now finished matric at King David High School Linksfield (KDHSL), Smith says, "A further swimming pool highlight while studying full-time for matric finals was competing at the SA Short Course Championships in Durban, flying out for the last two days of the competition the morning after my matric dance, and still obtaining my South African National Junior time to compete next year at the SANJ (SA National Junior Championships) 2025. Another open-water highlight was winning the Gauteng inter-schools open-water event at Prime View."

Yeshiva College student Judah Rubenstein got scouted by Mamelodi Sundowns and now plays a year above his age in the academy of the Pretoria-based

Caleb Levitan



club that has won past seven top division league titles. "Now I'm going to play in a big tournament called the Iber Cup, and Paris Saint-Germain, PSV Eindhoven, Arsenal, and other big teams are coming from all over the world," he says.

Rubenstein also made the under-12 district team, which came second. "I also made provincials, and we were the best team there," he says.

On top of all this, "I was interviewed by a big journalist

who exposes young football stars. His name is Cellular Jnr, and his nickname is Ah Bafethu."

Yeshiva College student Amichai Asulin says his biggest sporting achievement this year was making the Johannesburg table tennis team, and his sporting highlight was playing in the South Africa National Table Tennis Championships, in which he won a gold medal.

Dean Herskovits and Jayden Myers won a bronze medal in the under-16 boys tennis doubles competition at the 2024 European Maccabi Youth Games in London to continue South Africa's record of winning at least one medal at every Maccabi tournament the country has contested since 1935.

A King David Linksfield student, Herskovits also had a good year in other sports. He was named the most promising junior cross country and basketball player for KDHSL this year.

Fourteen-year-old Caleb Levitan

completed a remarkable climb up the chess ranks by recently becoming the top-ranked South African male chess player. Based on Chess South Africa ratings, this International Chess Federation Master title holder is the youngest player in the top 10, with only two others being teenagers.

His twin brother and fellow KDHSL student, Candidate Master Judah, occupies sixth place in the junior rankings.

Last month, Caleb got the chance to play a friendly game against super grandmaster Wesley So in Singapore while in the Southeast Asian country, having been invited to watch the World Chess Championship after he won an Olympiad match to help South Africa book a spot at next year's Chess World Cup.

Aside from all these up-and-coming youngsters, Michael Said, in his early sixties, completed the demanding David Goggins



Michael Said

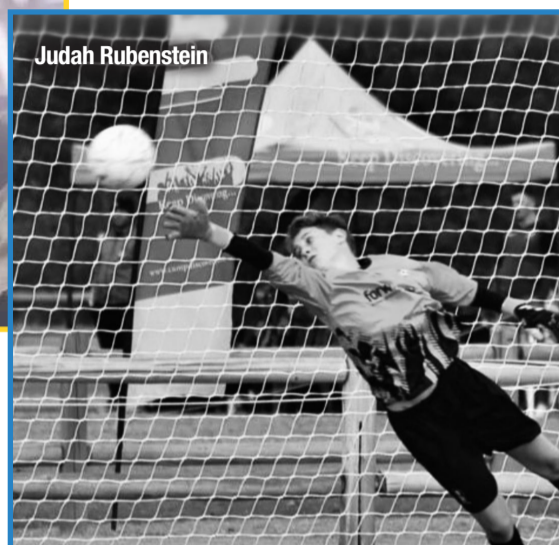
4x4x48 Challenge, which involves running or walking four miles (6.4km) every four hours for 48 hours, walking 77km for more than 48 hours along the streets of Bedfordview.

lover only two years earlier.

"Besides the Goggins 4x4x48, my biggest achievement over the past year was reclaiming my health and fitness," he says.

"I also hiked the Otter Trail and Tsitsikamma Trail back-to-back over 11 days."

The Otter Trail is a 42km, five-day hiking trail along the Garden Route coast, and the Tsitsikamma trail is a 60km six-day trail through indigenous Afromontane forests, mountain fynbos, and ancient river gorges. "These were 11 days of hiking through rain and shine, challenging climbs, beautiful settings, and unforgettable experiences," Said says.



Judah Rubenstein

By doing this walk, Said raised funds to change the lives of kids with cerebral palsy, and capped off a remarkable personal transformation from being an overweight and tired potato chip-



Rachel Smith

Letters

BE KIND, OR BE BOASTFUL AND INACCURATE

I was taught that the essence and meaning of Judaism is kindness hence the "Be kind" signage in Rosebank, Johannesburg, placed there by Chabad. Unfortunately, in Howard Sackstein's opening address at the recent Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, this sentiment was absent. In addition, is our Jewish community boastfully arrogant, trapped in apartheid revisionist history?

Understandably, Sackstein must have been all hyped up, and in the context of celebrating "Jewish achievement", a bit of insight and sensitivity must have slipped.

This address boasted a plethora of individuals and South Africa couldn't have managed without their companies. From your holiday destinations, to where to go shopping, if it wasn't for these people, South Africa would have been at a loss. In the context of the South African history of apartheid, is it kind to be so dismissive of the millions of destroyed lives that these individuals and their companies benefited from? Do apartheid job reservation and cheap labour not come into the equation?

Lastly, regarding apartheid revisionism, please, we need to stop doing this, and our Jewish leadership needs to stop doing it. Sackstein lauded how our Jewish community "was involved in the fight against apartheid". This simply isn't

true. A handful of Jews were involved in "the struggle", but that doesn't constitute the Jewish community. In fact, as Denis Goldberg pointed out clearly at an event I attended, he and his fellow Jews involved in the African National Congress (ANC) were ostracised by the South African Jewish community, they were made pariahs, they weren't at all celebrated. One of the main antisemitic tropes or claims is Holocaust denialism, which rightfully angers Jews to the core, so surely we must afford apartheid history the same respect?

Jews like Ruth First were blown to pieces for their ANC involvement. Judge Albie Sachs was literally blown to pieces as well, and miraculously survived. Denis Goldberg was jailed for 18 years. Raymond Suttner ignored a potentially very comfortable lucrative legal career in his fight against apartheid. These handful of Jews literally sacrificed their lives, their livelihood, they put themselves in harm's way. Surely we at least owe these people the respect they deserve? – **Damon Kalvari, Johannesburg**

Howard Sackstein was founder of the Jewish anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, executive director of South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission, and a bedrock of many of South Africa's organisations that fought for social justice. – Editor

SAJBD bids farewell to legendary driver

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) held a special function at Beyachad last week to bid farewell to veteran and much loved staff member, Sonnyboy Rashaolane, who is retiring after 49 years as the Board's driver and administrative assistant. Lay leaders and fellow staff members took it in turns to pay tribute to their colleague, as much for his friendship and emotional support as his multiple services to the Board.

Born in Kliptown, Soweto, Rashaolane joined the staff of the SAJBD in 1975. As the SAJBD's driver tasked among other things with transporting out-of-towners to and from their respective venues, he came to know and be known by successive generations of Board leaders, many of them themselves legendary figures in the community's history. Among the many eminent public figures he met were all of the country's presidents, from F W de Klerk onwards.

SAJBD President Zev Krengel described Rashaolane as a genuine institution of the Board, one who over nearly half a century had participated in all of its most memorable events and initiatives. National Director Wendy Kahn made



Sonnyboy Rashaolane

special mention of his unrivalled knowledge of the greater Johannesburg area. No matter how distant and obscure the destination, Rashaolane always knew exactly where to go, making him a living, breathing GPS long before the concept

was ever dreamed about. In addition to his role as driver, Rashaolane's institutional knowledge and hands-on assistance has been an invaluable asset to the Board, particularly at conference time and for other important SAJBD events.



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Apter's hilarious comedy show comes home

Home grown, Johannesburg-born stand-up comedian **Gilli Apter**, who now lives in London, is back on stage this week with The Hilarious Deep Amazing Johannesburg Comedy Show. The SA Jewish Report chatted to her before she went on stage.

The title of your show gives nothing away. What can we expect?

You can expect about 90 minutes of stand-up comedy about various, mostly-relatable subjects like the difference between living in South Africa and living in Europe/the United Kingdom (UK), the weather, crime, traversing your 20s and 30s and getting to your 40s, and what that's like regardless of the choices we've all made or where one is on the relationship spectrum. I also cover a bit about what travelling the world is like as a Jewish person, especially in the past year.

You have spent many months travelling the world in concert. What's it like coming home?

It's great coming home to South Africa for many obvious reasons like family, friends, and sunshine and less obvious reasons like how lovely and warm South Africans are. One appreciates it more when you've been away from it.

What does Johannesburg and South Africa mean to you?

Johannesburg is where I was born and raised, so it's home. And like any good citizen of any city, at times I love it, and at times it drives me to the edge of madness.

How do local audiences differ from those abroad?

"Abroad" is very broad. Audiences in London are different to audiences in Zurich or Barcelona. However, generally,

whenever you're on your home turf, audiences fundamentally relate to you in a way that's missing anywhere else you perform.

How do you connect with audiences in countries where their home language isn't English?

I speak slower, talk about universally relatable themes, and avoid terms like "jislaiik", "yoh", "lekker", and "car guards".

When you get up on stage every night, do you have a script in your head that you recite, or do you gauge what the audience will want and take it from there? What's your process?

Almost all stand-up comedy is scripted/rehearsed. Within that script, there's improvisation that takes place depending on what comes up in that particular show – sometimes it's a drunk heckler and at other times,



Gilli Apter

something falls off the ceiling – but these things are all ultimately all woven back into the script.

Do people expect you to be funny off stage? Are you? How do you deal with people expecting the same person on and off stage?

Sometimes I feel that people are disappointed when I'm not cracking jokes constantly. Or they expect one thing and get something else, but I don't resent it, it comes with the territory. What's interesting is that people often feel that they have to be extremely funny around me, and I just want to tell them to chill.

What's Gilli Apter like when she's off stage?

Sleepy or chatty.

Why did you move to London?

Better opportunities for my career, and proximity to Europe where I do most of my shows. In the UK and Europe, one can make a living as an artist without being incredibly famous first because people are accustomed to attending and paying for cultural events whether they know the artist or not. It's just part of the culture.

What inspires the humour that you bring to the stage?

Anything and everything. Whether it's some big thing happening in the world, a relationship with a colleague/friend/spouse/Uber driver, an odd comment, or just a person walking down the road in a strange way – there's tension in everything, and it's my job to find it and share it.

In past shows, you used material around being Jewish and from an Israeli family. Have these become problematic in the past year? If so, how, and how have you dealt with it?

It has been hard to find a way to express it while being very scared – scared both emotionally, for the sake of "the show" so-to-speak, and scared for my physical safety. I've dealt with it by doing it slowly, carefully, and respectfully. And I'm still learning. One thing I've learned is that bravery is something you can practice.

People say that your humour is both Jewish and feminist. How would you react to that?

Agree. It's those things. But it's also a lot of other things – silly, relatable, political, hilarious, deep, and amazing.

• The Hilarious Deep Amazing Johannesburg Comedy Show is on at the Theatre on the Square from 3 December to 7 December.

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