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'Everything is gone' – expats navigate LA wildfires

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When Johannesburg-born mother Lauren Shuster, who lives in the Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles, realised that the blaze that had started less than a kilometre from her house was no ordinary fire, she raced home to where she had left her daughter, her daughter's boyfriend, and their dog.

"I drove like a crazy person to get back to the house," said Shuster. "By the time I got there, there was a big fire roaring on the hill coming towards us. I told the kids to pack bags, got them in the car, and drove out of the driveway literally carrying the shirt on my back, my laptop, and a few important

items. You've got the fire coming towards you, and the traffic's not moving." Many people abandoned their cars and ran, but Shuster managed to drive out of danger. Yet, her house burned to the ground.

Still burning and fuelled by accelerating winds, the most destructive wildfires Los Angeles has ever seen have obliterated entire neighbourhoods, causing 25 deaths. Since they broke out on 7 January, they have also upended the lives of multiple South African expats.

With budget cuts to the fire department, dry but fertile land, powerful Santa Ana winds, and a lack of reservoir water, it was the perfect storm. Sweeping across 40 000 acres of land to date, the fires have left thousands

of LA residents homeless and facing an uncertain future.

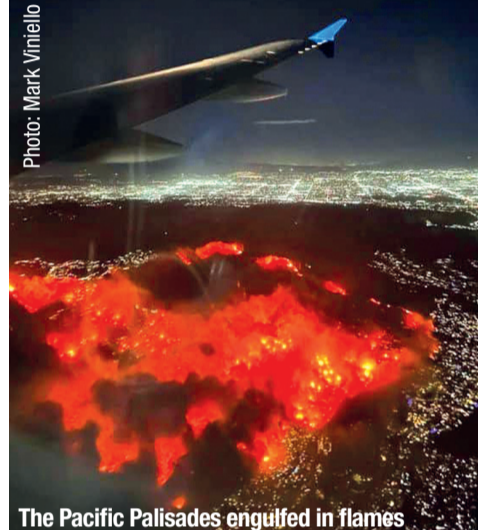
"It doesn't feel real," said Savannah Park, whose Johannesburg-born parents, Jon Jon and Michelle, were forced to flee their Pacific Palisades home when the fires broke out. Their home of 25 years, which held a lifetime of memories, is simply gone. Park's parents have moved three times since the fires began as evacuation orders spread to wider areas.

"All of my and my brothers' childhood and young adulthood memories are there," said Park, who now lives in New York. Everything we had is gone." Jon Jon is the son of the late Reg Park, a famous three-time Mr Universe winner, actor, and bodybuilder. The pain of losing sentimental items like family photos

is compounded by the loss of irreplaceable memorabilia from Reg's career dating back to the 1940s, including trophies and photos

Most worrying to the family, however, is the fact that Michelle, who has metastatic breast cancer and had surgery just two weeks before the fire, lost her life-saving medication. "This medication is extremely expensive if it's not approved through insurance," her daughter said. "She hasn't had approval yet for this year, and there's never a guarantee." Park has therefore started a GoFundMe campaign for her parents to cover medical expenses and the costs of starting over

Park said her family was touched by the emotional support from the South African Jewish community. "There's a ton of South African immigrants in the United States,



The Pacific Palisades engulfed in flames

and my dad has an incredible network of people that he's still in touch with. But our friends, family, and Jewish community back in South Africa have shown up for us more than anyone else, providing love and support. I feel blessed that we have such deep roots in this strong community."

Cape Town-born Kate Wessels was visiting South Africa for the first time in almost 10 years when the fire broke out. Her husband was also away at the time. Wessels was in fact meant to be flying home when the fire alerts came through. Yet, she's grateful that the flight cancellation meant that she could co-ordinate her three children's movements around their Pacific Palisades neighbourhood.

She directed her friend who was house sitting to collect her four-year-old daughter whose school evacuated children to various locations as the fire spread. Her other two children were at school in the opposite direction and were also evacuated, and so her friend raced to fetch them.

"At the same time, I was phoning another friend to get my dogs from my house. My friends

Continued on page 5 >>

New year, new beginnings

Photo: Ian Ossenriver

King David Victory Park Grade 1 pupils Matthew Botha, Jayce Goldberg, and Rio Lapidus are thrilled to begin their "big school" career together. See more photographs on sajr.co.za See story on page 13

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Israel and Hamas agree to ceasefire deal after 15 months of war

BEN SALES – JTA

Israel and Hamas have agreed to a deal that will cease more than a year of fighting in Gaza and Israel, bring dozens of Israeli hostages home, and release hundreds of Palestinian security prisoners.

The agreement was confirmed by multiple parties to the negotiation on Wednesday, 15 January. If it holds, it will mark an end to the longest and bloodiest war in Israel's history.

And it comes after months of efforts by President Joe Biden – redoubled ahead of the inauguration of his successor, Donald Trump – to end a war that has killed tens of thousands, transformed the Middle East, sparked a global spike in antisemitism, and consumed the world's attention and activism.

Now, the eyes of the world will continue to be on Israel and Gaza to see if the sides honour the terms of the agreement and if a tenuous pause in fighting

turns into a longer-term peace that will free all of the 98 hostages Hamas holds and allow the region and its people to move forward.

"Today, after many months of intensive diplomacy by the United States, along with Egypt and Qatar, Israel and Hamas have reached a ceasefire and hostage deal," President Joe Biden said on Wednesday afternoon. "This deal will halt the fighting in Gaza, surge much needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians,

and reunite the hostages with their families after more than 15 months in captivity."



Israeli hostages released by Hamas in November 2023

Photo: Stringer-Anadolu via Getty Images

He said Hamas and Israel had both agreed to the deal, which he called "one of the toughest negotiations I've ever experienced".

Trump also hailed the deal, writing on social media, "We have a deal for the hostages in the Middle East. They will be released shortly. Thank you!"

Celebrations and rallies broke out in Israel and Gaza as news of the deal spread. Israel's government is expected to approve the deal formally on Thursday at 11:00 local time. Some details of the agreement reportedly have yet to be finalised, but they aren't expected to prevent its approval. Hamas has reportedly also announced its acceptance of the deal.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hasn't publicly commented on the finalisation of the deal, but President Isaac Herzog, whose role is largely ceremonial, urged his government to accept it.

"I offer my support to the prime minister and the negotiation team in their efforts to finalise this deal, and call upon the Cabinet and the government of Israel to accept and approve it when presented –

bringing our sons and daughters home," he said. "As the president of the state of Israel, I say in the clearest terms: this is the right move. This is an important move. This is a necessary move. There is no greater moral, human, Jewish, or Israeli obligation than to bring our sons and daughters back to us, whether to recover at home, or to be laid to rest."

Under the reported terms of the deal, its first phase will last 42 days and involves the Israeli military withdrawing from populated portions of Gaza. During that time, Hamas will release 33 hostages in exchange for a much larger number of Palestinian prisoners convicted of terrorism by Israel. Approximately half of the Israeli hostages in Gaza are thought to be dead, and the initial group of 33 is expected to include hostages who have been killed.

Hamas is reportedly set to release a number of civilian women hostages first. They would be followed by Kfir and Ariel Bibas, the two remaining child hostages who have become a symbol of the captives' plight. Hamas said the Bibas children had been killed early in the war, and Israel has not confirmed that allegation. The release of women soldiers and older and ailing hostages would follow.

The Israeli military is reportedly preparing to receive the released hostages in an operation whose name means both "Sparrow's wings" and "Freedom's wings".

In the second phase, there would be a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and what Biden called a "permanent end of the war", in addition to the release of all living hostages and more Palestinian security prisoners. In the third phase, the bodies of deceased hostages would be released as reconstruction of Gaza begins.

The war began on 7 October 2023, when Hamas invaded Israel, killing about 1 200 people, taking about 250 hostages, and ravaging southern Israel. Israel began shelling Hamas in response and

Continued on page 3>>

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Torah Thought



Rabbi Dr David Nossel

"The attitude of gratitude." I hear this expression a lot. It certainly sounds good. It has a luring, alliterative lustre. And not only is it attractive to the ear, it appears to be appealing to the mind too. If one can train oneself to think in an appreciative way, one can tap into an admirable mindset of successful, happy, and virtuous living, or so the proponents of the attitude of gratitude purport.

But I beg to differ. A slightly altered alliterative expression is far more apt, meaningful, and accurate: "The platitude of gratitude."

Ouch. That sounds harsh. A platitude isn't desirable, to say the least. In my Google research on platitudes (Wikipedia) I found the following: "A platitude is even worse than a cliché. Not only old and overused, but often moralistic and imperious, and can lull us into accepting things that are actually false and foolish."

What could possibly be so bad about gratitude? The answer isn't complicated. Gratitude, far from being ideal, is a replacement for and displacement of greatness.

Let's take the scenario of the parents who give their children a gift. "Say thank you," they insist as the gift is handed over.

What values are the parents really instilling in their children by educating them to express appreciation? Is it a need for the parents to receive appreciation for their giving? Hopefully not! Is it then a need for the children to respond to receiving? Hopefully yes. But what is the nature of that response?

Surely the response parents truly want to instill in their children is their ability to make a positive difference, to be a blessing, to grow up to be mature

and responsible contributors to society. Is merely saying t'cution at all? Sadly, no.

The same applies to our relationship with our Father in Heaven. When He bestows on us all that He does, He certainly doesn't do so out of a need to receive our appreciation. He does so wanting a response from us, not a dismissive response of "thank you", but a mature response of using what He gives us to take responsibility.

Knowing this, it will come as no surprise that the correct translation of the Hebrew words "todah" and "modeh" isn't "thanks" or "appreciation". Instead, they are better

translated as "affirm". They are expressions of affirmation – the agreement to take what one has received and run with it.

When someone gives us something, the G-dly way to respond is, "We affirm that we will use what you have given us to be a blessing." Not to trip up by saying, "Thank you."

Speaking out against the attitude of gratitude is a thankless task, but it needs to be done. We need an alternative attitude to that of gratitude – the attitude of "gratitude" – affirmation that any good that we receive we'll turn into greatness.

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Counter-terror team to probe Cape attack

NICOLA MILTZ

Nearly six weeks have passed since an explosive device was thrown into the precinct of the Jewish communal offices in Gardens, Cape Town, and in spite of the Hawks being brought into the investigation, there has been no significant developments.

Critical footage was reportedly handed over to the Hawks of the improvised explosive device (IED), which failed to detonate, being thrown into the Samson Community Centre. The footage is believed to show two perpetrators including a getaway car.

“At this stage, there are no further

recommendations to protect places of worship, schools, and community centres.

The move, announced in a video on YouTube, comes in response to escalating global threats to Jewish communities worldwide. The IED incident in Cape Town occurred on the same day as an attack on a synagogue in Melbourne, Australia.

Goldstein said, “I have asked the task force to write a report on its findings, including an assessment of the terror threat here in South Africa within the global context, and to make recommendations for protecting places of worship, schools, and community centres in South Africa and worldwide from the threat

when we deal with reality rather than pretend otherwise. And that’s why when the explosive device was thrown at the community centre in December, I felt it important to call it for what it was – a terror attack – even though it didn’t detonate. This work of this task force will make a significant contribution to making us safer. That’s why I invited it to South Africa.

“I have assembled this task force to better ensure the security of the Jewish community. The community, as is the case with Jewish communities globally, faces a significant threat of future terror attacks,” he said. “The task force has assembled global experts to advise on

to strengthen the safety of places of worship and support the efforts of local authorities. In due course, it will release a report and brief interested parties.”

The other task force members include Dean Haydon, the former senior national co-ordinator for counter-terrorism in the United Kingdom and former deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police; Admiral Mike Hewitt, former deputy director for global operations, joint chiefs of staff, United States Defense Department; and Major General David Tsur, the former commander of the counter-terrorism unit in the Israel Police.

The task force, which is also working with the Security Advisory Council of the World Jewish Congress, has been mandated

to investigate recent attacks and develop a comprehensive report with actionable recommendations to safeguard Jewish community spaces, said the chief rabbi.

Asked whether the Hawks had been consulted about this initiative, Vukubi said he had no comment.

Liron Sanders, the director of the CSO in Johannesburg said the organisation was working closely with the CSO Cape Town as well as all relevant law enforcement authorities to glean as much information as possible.

“We’re reviewing the evidence, which includes video footage to try identify possible suspects. The CSO in both provinces has increased security procedures in and around all facilities.”



Samson Community Centre in Cape Town

updates regarding the incident,” said Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch. “An explosive device was thrown into the community centre which didn’t detonate, and the Hawks are still investigating all possible leads, including the nature of the device and the perpetrators behind the attack.”

Hawks spokesperson Siyabulela Vukubi told the SA Jewish Report this week, “The matter is still under investigation and there are no new developments.”

Meanwhile, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein this week announced that he had invited a counter-terrorism task force to assist with the investigation into the terror attack in Cape Town and to make

of terrorism.”

Professor Glen Segell, an expert in intelligence, terrorism and civil military relations, said, “The throwing of the bomb was an act of terrorism, and should receive the highest priority and attention even if it didn’t explode. Concern is that until the culprits are arrested it might happen again. No doubt police intelligence knows more or less the individuals, gangs, or organisations that could perpetrate such crimes. There seems to be no urgency or prioritisation even to arrest or question the ‘usual suspects’. The chief rabbi is correct to investigate and to draw attention to the severity of this event.”

Goldstein said it was important to acknowledge the risks we face because “it actually makes us safer

how shuls, schools, and community installations can be secured against terror threats.”

He said he would be sharing the findings of the task force with the leadership of the Community Security Organisation (CSO), and that the skills of the task force were available to local authorities.

“The advice of the task force will also have global application, and will be shared internationally. By acting firmly and proactively, we can better ensure the safety of South Africa’s Jews,” Goldstein said.

The task force is led by Andre Pienaar, the co-founder of the Directorate of Special Operations, known as the Scorpions.

Said Pienaar, “The task force will work closely with local communities

Israel and Hamas agree to ceasefire deal after 15 months of war

>>Continued from page 2

invaded Gaza weeks later. Since then, more than 46 000 people have been killed in Gaza, according to authorities in the Hamas-run territory. About 400 Israeli soldiers have also been killed.

The war spread across the region almost immediately, with the Lebanese terror group Hezbollah bombing Israel beginning on 8 October 2023. Israel has also been bombed by the Houthis, a Yemeni terror group, as well as directly by Iran, which backs all of the aforementioned groups. Israel struck back at all of them, engaging in a months-long ground invasion of Lebanon that led to a ceasefire last fall.

Israel also bombed Iran and Yemen in response to the bombings, and has conducted extensive counter-terror operations in the West Bank, where hundreds of Palestinians have been killed. Last month, the Iran-backed Assad regime in Syria collapsed, an outcome widely viewed as fallout from the Israel-Hamas war. Israel also decimated Hamas and killed its leaders.

The question of when and how to institute a ceasefire has dominated conversations about the war for more than a year. In a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023, more than 100 hostages and hundreds of Palestinian security prisoners were released.

Over the course of the war, the families of the hostages have led a mass protest movement in Israel and beyond to keep the country’s and the world’s

attention on their plight and push for their release, though some hostage families objected to a deal that would leave Hamas in power. Surveys have consistently shown that most Israelis support a deal to free the hostages and end the war.

“We anxiously await the reunions of families with their loved ones. The next few weeks will bring a wave of emotions, but one thing remains unwavering, we will stand by the families until the very last hostage is brought home,” the New York branch of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement after the deal was announced. “Our collective strength is making a difference. Yet our fight is not over.”

Multiple rounds of negotiations appeared to come close, but each hit an impasse and devolved into mutual recriminations, with Israel and the United States saying Hamas was to blame, though tensions also emerged between Biden and Netanyahu, who at times seemed reluctant to strike a deal that would impede Israel’s military campaign. Israel’s far-right also opposed a deal.

Biden announced the outline for the current deal last May, saying that it had been endorsed by Israel. A renewed push came ahead of Trump’s inauguration on Monday, 20 January, with the incoming president threatening “hell to pay” if the hostages weren’t released by then.

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Grieving family uses son's death to unite the nation

NICOLA MILTZ

First Sergeant Netanel Pessach, the son of an ex-South African, was killed in combat in Gaza in December. His family's call for unity has sparked acts of reconciliation far and wide.

Netanel, 21, died on 23 December while serving in the Kfir Brigade of the Israel Defense Forces. Netanel, alongside his comrades Hillel Diner and Ilay Atedgi, was killed in Beit Hanoun, Gaza, by an explosive device planted by Hamas terrorists.

A quiet, determined young man, Netanel's story reflects a sense of duty rooted in a rich heritage with a profound connection between Israel and South Africa.

His father, Elad Pessach, 56, born and raised in Cape Town, shared the immeasurable pain of losing his son. "It's impossible to answer how I'm feeling," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I have my ups and downs. I have to be strong for my other seven children and my wife, therefore, I need to get up and go to work. I can't stay home all day and be down. Life goes on. I have to believe that my son died for a reason. We have to believe that it wasn't in vain."

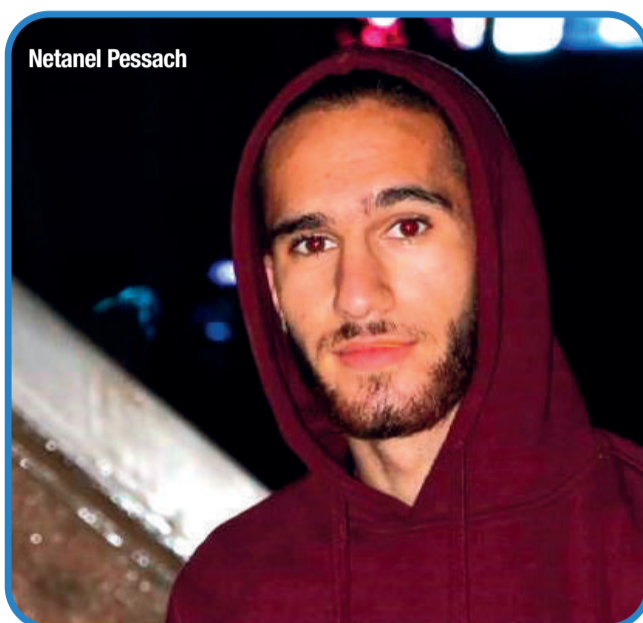
Elad, who matriculated at Yeshiva College in Johannesburg, made aliya at the age of 24 in 1992. He said he had long dreamed of showing his birthplace to his Israeli wife, Revital, and their children.

He described the difficult reality of living in an Israel at war. "We're in a war zone. It might not be in our neighbourhood, but it's there. You're reminded of it every day. Since my son died, another 19 soldiers have been killed. In our area, there are 750 families, and seven kids have lost their lives since 7 October, including one who was at the Nova festival. These are trying times, but life goes on."

Despite their grief, the Pessach family has chosen to focus on Netanel's legacy of kindness and unity. His death, though devastating, is a reminder of the sacrifices made by those who serve to protect their country.

Netanel was the fourth of eight children, growing up in the close-knit *frum* community of Elazar, in Gush Etzion. Known for his quiet nature and sensitivity, he preferred to work behind the scenes, ensuring that everything he did was done with care and excellence. "He wasn't a man of many words," said Elad, "but he always worked quietly and made sure he did everything to the best of his ability."

His family continues to uncover stories of his kindness, which Netanel never sought to publicise. "He volunteered in hospital wards, bringing smiles and comfort to patients, and accepted people from all walks of life without judgement," said Elad.



Netanel Pessach

At his military funeral, which was attended by hundreds of mourners, Netanel's mother shared a heartfelt request, saying, "He believed in what he was doing by joining the army. He believed that this was what needed to be done, that we fight even

when it's hard and even when we're a little afraid, because our people need us here."

Revital asked that in memory of her son, people work for greater unity. "I ask that every person in the nation of Israel stops for five minutes, closes their eyes, and thinks about someone they aren't at peace with. Simply call them and say, 'In memory of an Israeli hero, Netanel Pessach, I'm willing to take one small step, remove one barrier, and give a hug.'"

Her words have resonated far beyond the funeral, inspiring countless individuals to mend fractured relationships and embrace the values of kindness and unity that Netanel embodied, Elad said.

"Since my wife shared her request, we've heard many incredible stories of people reaching out to mend broken relationships. A friend of mine who hadn't spoken to his sister for years due to their political differences, reached out to her, and they've agreed to meet. It's deeply moving

to see how Netanel's legacy is inspiring acts of reconciliation and unity."

Netanel's final mission was in Gaza, searching for Israeli hostages who remain in captivity.

The Gush Etzion Regional Council mourned Netanel's death, expressing its condolences to his parents, siblings, and the entire community of Elazar, and the Pessach family has received an outpouring of support and condolences from around the world.

Elad emphasised the importance of carrying forward Netanel's legacy. "He's the product of the old South African, no-excuse Zionist upbringing. He was a serious kid, did everything until the end, no excuses. He accepted everyone without discrimination."

Revital's plea continues to inspire others. "Netanel didn't live unity just as a slogan like, 'Let's be united.' For him, it was simple and clear. He never said a bad word about anyone. His light needs to continue in the world."

His story serves as a reminder of the ties that bind Israel and South Africa. Netanel may have lived and died far from the land of his father's birth, but his legacy will be cherished on both continents.

Lawfare amplified: Ireland at ICJ, SA grants immunity

STEVEN GRUZD

Global pressure on Israel for its conduct of the war on Hamas after 7 October is mounting. Ireland has become the latest country to join South Africa's case accusing Israel of "genocide" against the Palestinians at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It joins Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Libya, the Maldives, Mexico, Nicaragua, Spain, Turkey, and "the State of Palestine".

Also in the field of lawfare, South Africa has granted diplomatic immunity to all staff of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes. The timing of South Africa's announcement sought to pre-empt the vote by the United States (US) House of Representatives on 9 January to sanction ICC staff for going after the Israeli leaders.

"Ireland has joined South Africa's case against Israel before the International Court of Justice, not as a party but to provide a legal interpretation of the Genocide Convention," said Mark Oppenheimer, advocate at the Johannesburg bar. "It argues that the intent required to prove genocide – traditionally understood as the subjective intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group – should also include recklessness or negligence. In a case where a reasonable person would have foreseen that genocide is the natural and probable consequence of the acts of the perpetrator, the intent requirement would be met."

"Ireland also argues that it should not be necessary to show a specific plan to commit genocide. Instead, a pattern of conduct should suffice. Moreover, while the standard test requires that genocide be the only reasonable conclusion drawn from a state's conduct, Ireland proposes that it should merely be one reasonable conclusion among many. It further contends that a state could simultaneously act in self-defence and harbour genocidal intent, and should still be held liable for genocide in such cases."

Said Oppenheimer, "All of these contentions represent a significant departure from established case law and risk diluting the strict terms of the Genocide Convention."

International law consultant David Benjamin said, "Apparently South Africa's case for the existence of genocide in Gaza isn't very convincing. Why else would Ireland urge the ICJ to lower the threshold of proof to intention to commit genocide?"

Dr Glen Segell, Professor at the NATO-EU Strategy Group, University of Cambridge, highlights the politics. "Ireland's action was long anticipated. It's

within the context of two issues. First, the decision to intervene in the case reflects Ireland's longstanding support for Palestinian civilians, rooted in part in a shared history of British colonialism and in Ireland's own experience with a seemingly intractable sectarian conflict – The Troubles. Second, last month, Israel announced it was closing its embassy in Dublin, citing what it said were 'the extreme anti-Israel policies of the Irish government'. The two are connected, yet the second dominates due to antisemitism."

"Joining South Africa in the case against Israel at the ICJ was just the latest in Ireland's hostile actions against Israel, following its recognition of a Palestinian state and the vote in Parliament to declare that Israel was committing genocide," said Israeli journalist Rolene Marks. "So, it's no surprise, but it does help us understand why Israel shuttered our embassy last month in the Irish capital. I would make a distinction, much like in South Africa, between the citizens and the government. I have been contacted by many Irish people who stand resolutely with Israel, and we also can't forget that."

In relation to the ICC, South Africa invoked the Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges Act to protect ICC staff from being arrested, detained, charged, or sued in South Africa, through a notice issued in the Government Gazette in December.

The Illegitimate Court Counteraction Bill, which passed the US House of Representatives by 243 votes to 140, proposes "sanctions against foreign persons [individuals and entities] who assist the International Criminal Court [ICC] in investigating, arresting, detaining, or prosecuting certain individuals". It now moves to the Republican-controlled Senate. Measures could include visa denials and blocking US funding for the ICC. The law is aimed at prosecuting US citizens or foreigners that assist the court in going after US citizens or US allies from countries that do not recognise the authority of the ICC. This would, of course, include Israel.

Oppenheimer said, "Although the bill hasn't yet passed through the Senate, its bipartisan support suggests it's likely to do so. Meanwhile, South Africa has granted immunity to ICC officials for their work within its borders, a move that could create tensions between South Africa and the US."

Said Marks, "This is South Africa trying to bolster, in its mind, its moral conscience, and I find it absolutely ludicrous and totally hypocritical. This is the same country that wouldn't hand over [Sudan's] Al Bashir [to the ICC in 2015 when he was in South Africa]. And we can't forget that the chief prosecutor of the ICC is being investigated for alleged sexual harassment. So, this is South Africa very much taking sides. And I think this is also cocking a snook at the incoming Trump administration. This is South Africa trying to establish itself as the leader of the anti-West alliance."

This year is well set to embroil Israel, South Africa, and the US in a series of interconnected legal and political battles.



Cryptocurrency terror funding case – ‘tip of the iceberg’

NICOLA MILTZ

The case of a Sandton man accused of using Bitcoin to finance terrorist activities has highlighted South Africa's escalating security threat, experts warned this week.

Terror-financing accused, Ziyadh Hoorzook, 35, appeared before the Lichtenburg Magistrate's Court in North West this week to apply for bail. He faces a charge of contravening the Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act.

Hoorzook was arrested at his home in Johannesburg in the first week of 2025 following a lengthy investigation that began in 2018 when the Financial Intelligence Centre and the Hawks received information about suspicious transactions allegedly linked to terror financing.

He allegedly donated R11 500 to Al-Sadaqah, a Syrian organisation investigated by United States authorities for financing "Al-Qaeda and affiliated foreign terror organisations" through the use of cryptocurrency.

Said Hawks spokesperson Colonel Philani Nkwalase, "Cryptocurrency in the form of Bitcoin worth R11 500 was allegedly purchased, through Luno, a virtual asset service provider, via transfer of money from the accused's bank account to Luno's custody account on 30 November 2017. On the same day, Bitcoin was reportedly transferred from the suspect's Luno wallet to the wallet associated with an organisation that describes itself as an independent charity."

The charity in question was linked to two other organisations, the Hawks said.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the transfer was a response to an advertisement appealing for financial support of [terrorist] activities with weapons, financial aid, and other projects assisting the participants in another country," said Nkwalase.

According to US authorities, Al-Sadaqah is allegedly used as a vehicle to finance weapons purchases and forms part of Al-Qaeda's network of fundraising organisations.

In Hoorzook's court appearance on Friday, he



claimed that Al-Sadaqah wasn't listed as a terrorist organisation when he donated R11 500 to it in 2017.

During his bail application, his lawyer, Mohammed Razak, read into the record his client's affidavit in which he denied funding a terrorist organisation through the use of Bitcoin. He said he was aware of several initiatives to support the people of Syria who were subjected to human rights violations.

Although the money involved is insubstantial, experts agree that his arrest is a step in the right direction. "We're pleased to see the Hawks and police taking the correct action against terror financing, which remains a grave concern in South Africa," said Liron Sanders, the director of the Community Security Organisation in Johannesburg.

"However, it's worrying that this case appears to be just the tip of the iceberg in the broader landscape of terror funding. The value and size of the donation the accused allegedly facilitated through Bitcoin is small, and the time it has taken to get to this point is worrying. Nonetheless, this marks a small but significant step in the right direction, potentially leading to further arrests of those involved in terror financing," he said.

"What's hugely concerning is the extremist material

found in the accused's possession, including content about Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda leaders, and other radical groups. Extremist material, such as videos and speeches by Bin Laden, were allegedly among the items discovered on electronic devices.

This highlights the dangerous ideologies at play and underscores the urgency of addressing this threat comprehensively," Sanders said.

According to newspaper reports, Warrant Officer John Sithole of the Hawks told the court he had found evidence on Hoorzook's electronic devices that showed that he knew his money was destined for a terrorist organisation aiming to commit terror-related activities in Syria.

Extremist material such as videos, images, articles, and speeches by well-known Al-Qaeda leader Bin Laden were among the items found, he said.

According to Sithole, more material emanating from groups such as Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria were also found on Hoorzook's electronic devices.

He said he could confirm that the material downloaded from Hoorzook's devices, including three Al-Sadaqah advertisements, illustrated he knew about the group's activities.

"The three above-mentioned adverts by Al-Sadaqah found on the accused's cellphone clearly demonstrate the knowledge of wrongfulness by the accused. It further tells us that Al-Sadaqah isn't

a charity organisation and that the accused was clearly aware that the funds were to be used for terror activities," Sithole said.

Terrorism financing from South Africa has become a pressing matter, with the 2024 SA National Terrorism Financing Risk Assessment identifying the country as a high-risk zone.

South Africa was greylisted by the global financial crime watchdog Financial Action Task Force in February 2023 for not complying with international standards around the prevention of money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.

Professor Glen Segell, who writes about terrorism in Africa, urged South African authorities to act swiftly in addressing these crimes. "Global efforts to curb terror financing depend on the willingness and swift action of each country. Most do so as terror affects their economy adversely. So, South Africa dragging its heels in this case is somewhat puzzling."

Willem Els, senior training co-ordinator at the Institute for Security Studies, agreed, saying that this case represents only the surface of a much wider problem, but marks a positive move forward.

"We have been found not to curb terror funding and money laundering effectively. That's why we were greylisted. However, South Africa has been working hard to meet all the obligations, and has made some good progress. We're not there yet."

He said South Africa was being forced to act against this illicit activity, and he believed there would be quite a few more prosecutions in the near future.

"If they can bring down this case and successfully prosecute this guy, it will demonstrate to others out there that there will be consequences for these acts because terror funding has been criminalised in our legislation," Els said.

Hoorzook's bail hearing was continuing at the time of going to print.

'Everything is gone' – expats navigate LA wildfires

>>Continued from page 1

managed to get a lot of our personal stuff out of our house as I had two labelled boxes prepped in case of an emergency," Wessels said.

The house burned down and, to date, the family hasn't been allowed to return. They have photos of the wreckage from a journalist they know who was able to visit, providing some closure. "Our Range Rover was parked in the driveway and melted, but our BMW is parked outside our house and is still standing," Wessels said incredulously.

"My husband is Jewish, and we had an amazing response from the Jewish community," she said. "People are banding together, asking what everyone needs. If there's a silver lining, that's definitely it."

South African-born Food Network chef and author, Melissa Mayo, had to evacuate her Beverly Hills home, but is grateful that it's still standing. Since the fires began, she's been actively providing support to those affected, particularly in the Jewish community, literally driving towards the fires as they began.

"My Chabad rebbetzin and I went through about 12 checkpoints to deliver 50 kosher pizzas and Gatorade and water to first responders. With strong Santa Ana winds, I thought my car would flip. I woke up the next morning to this massive level of devastation," she said.

The Jewish community has come together, Mayo said, providing meals, clothing, and more. "I've also got friends in Israel who were helped by people in LA during the war and who are now putting together Judaica kits for Jews who lost their Judaica in the fires." Miraculously the Chabad shuls in both the Pacific Palisades and Brentwood are still standing despite the surrounding devastation.

Yet there are considerable challenges, she said. People who have lost their homes are facing price gouging in the rental market where they're being asked to sign a three-year lease with a year's rental paid upfront. Landlords are boosting rental costs – something Shuster has experienced firsthand. "The situation has brought out the best and the worst in people," she said.

Another major problem is the air quality. Many are drawing comparisons to the toxic air around Ground Zero after the 11 September 2001 terror attacks, which caused lingering adverse health effects. LA has now experienced much wider destruction. "It's like two Manhattans burned up, and you've got to live in that toxic wasteland," Shuster said.

South African Danna Yevilov Sachs, who has been able to return to her ash-infused Santa Monica home after being evacuated and staying in a hotel, said many people were again wearing masks, something she cannot fathom doing.

Yevilov Sachs, a hairdresser, said her salon in the Palisades was miraculously still standing amid the ruins, but she couldn't return to the area yet. "My whole community, my clients are in the Palisades – there's nothing to go back to. I'm completely numb. I haven't shed a tear, I'm not quite here. I can't sleep or eat. I can't watch TV. It took me three days to actually shower."

Yet Shuster believes that immigrants have an added edge in navigating such upheaval. "When you've been through moving countries and cities, and the associated ups and downs, it makes you a lot more resilient," she said. "You're used to starting again. We're alive, and that's the most important thing."

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The upside of downtime

There's nothing better than downtime to reassess where we are at, how we see the world, and how the world sees us. And there's no better time for that than during our December holidays, which for South Africans is sacrosanct. Nobody willingly works through this annual holiday period. It's our time for letting go of all our troubles and chilling out.

After last year, we all seriously needed it. The stress hasn't let up for the Jews in South Africa or anywhere in the world since 7 October 2023. Our worries have just grown as antisemitism has dug its ugly pitchfork into our world.

It was deeply troubling on holiday when I was chatting to people whom I imagined to be like minded, to hear them offhandedly remarking about Israel supposedly committing genocide. Granted, I experienced this only a handful of times. In some cases, they were quick to back off as soon as I questioned or challenged them. I'm still not sure that they backed off because they understood the facts or they were just trying to keep the peace. I wondered if they chose not to engage with me because, as one of them said, "You're Jewish, of course you'll deny the genocide!"

The point is, when talking to someone who isn't part of this community, you don't always know what their opinions are about Jews or the Jewish state. And right now it is at the fore. So, when people asked what I do, I braced myself for their reaction because there invariably is one. Everyone seems to have taken a side.

Invariably, though, people were actually very supportive of our community and Israel, but they felt the need to say so. In fact, many were excited to tell me how much they loved us, which is a tad disconcerting. In the past, I don't recall ever having felt this sense of unease in telling people I was Jewish.

I can only imagine how tough this must be in Europe and other parts of the Western world. On this point, it's worth reading David Saks' piece on rising antisemitism on this page.

I was sure at the end of last year that we would start this year off with the return of hostages and the end of the war with Hamas. I felt certain that we were getting to the point then where negotiations were coming to a head. And this week, I have been on *shpilkes* (anxious), waiting to hear that the hostages – or at least most of them – were coming home.

Hearing on Monday that hospitals in Israel have been alerted to be ready for the return of hostages got us all excited. But then we waited. Information was leaked that the deal was done, which turned out to be fake news. Then there was another indicator. More fake news. The truth is as I read somewhere, "There is no announcement until there is an announcement".

It certainly hasn't been easy as we count down to deadline on the *SA Jewish Report*. And as we put this newspaper to bed on Wednesday, there was no outcome to the negotiations.

How hectic and distressing this situation must be for the families and loved ones of the hostages! What they have only been through! How they have survived waiting for so long, I cannot imagine. And as for the hostages, I just pray that they hold onto hope until they are released. Can you imagine them being reunited with their families?

One of the special experiences we all look forward to during our holidays is spending time with close family and friends. There are few things as rejuvenating as those special moments that make memories that last forever. Often, they aren't the moments when things go smoothly, they are more likely to be when you run out of petrol with your son, and there isn't a garage within 10km. It's that walk that you'll never forget!

In my extended family, though, machaneh invariably comes before family time in December. And I understand why, having spent many of my formative Decembers on a campsite.

This December, I went back to Habonim camp for the first time in more than three decades. Dina Diamond went back to Bnei Akiva machaneh (see page 12). We both witnessed such happy youngsters. So many smiling faces.

I do understand that camp may not be for every young Jewish child, but if your child hasn't experienced machaneh, they are missing out on something that only those in our community can experience. (See page 14.)

It doesn't matter which youth movement you choose, because while Bnei Akiva is a perfect fit for many, Habonim is a perfect fit for others. It's sad that Betar is no longer around, and we need to do everything we can to keep the rest of the youth movements alive and functioning at full strength.

Those who went to camp this year had three weeks in which nobody challenged them because they were Jewish. And when they did discuss Israeli politics, it was in a safe environment.

I get that you may be leaving all your creature comforts at home when you go to camp, but you get so much more than that when you are there. The idea of not having parents or adults telling you what to do for three weeks is exciting for most youngsters. Just saying ...

One of the important lessons I have learnt of late was not to put off for tomorrow or next year what you can do today or this year. It takes watching the unfolding of the wildfires in Los Angeles and recalling the horror of the 7 October attacks to bring this home.

I don't mean one has to break the bank, but if you have travelling to Vietnam on your bucket list and you can manage it, do it. Don't wait forever.

On that note, may we all have a year of fulfilling our dreams, and one of bonding with those we love and finding a way to stop rising antisemitism!

Shabbat Shalom and happy 2025!

Peta Krost
Editor



Antisemitism closes curtain on Jewish life in the West

OPINION

DAVID SAKS



"Skyrocketing rise"; "Spreading a fire already out of control"; "Like a dam burst"; "Open season on Jews"; "A year of disbelief". Reports on what Jewish communities the world over have been experiencing since 7 October 2023 are replete with such phrases.

There are those that might ask whether the gravity of the situation is perhaps being overstated, but even a superficial acquaintance with the bald statistics will quickly dispel any doubts on that score.

Globally, antisemitism has been on the rise from the very start of the present century. However, 7/10 and its aftermath has taken things to an altogether different level. According to a recent report, issued by the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University, antisemitic incidents across the world have been rising at a rate unseen since World War II and if this situation persists or deteriorates, Jewish people around the world will no longer be able to live as Jews in safety and freedom.

Though most diaspora communities have yet to release complete reports on antisemitism in their respective countries for 2024, the preliminary figures that have become available are sobering enough.

The great majority of incidents, however, took the form of verbal insults and threats, targeted social media, and other hate mail.

An area of concern was the prevalence of boycott campaigns against Jewish-owned or headed businesses, although the actual impact of these initiatives appears to have been fairly limited.

While South Africa has certainly witnessed a steep rise in antisemitic attacks over the past 15 months, it's striking to note how much worse the situation has been in other major diaspora countries. This has consistently been the situation ever since the start of this century, when the collapse of the peace process in the Middle East triggered off a global wave of antisemitism that has since progressively intensified.

Whereas in a normal year, South Africa averages only a few dozen incidents, the comparable figures for countries like the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, France, and Germany has routinely been in the hundreds, and of late in the several thousands.

So serious has the situation become in Canada that in October, the Israeli government took the unusual step of releasing a report singling out that country as a hotbed of antisemitism since 7 October.

Whereas the neighbouring United States experienced a 340% increase in antisemitic incidents over the previous 10 months, in comparison to the same period, Canada's increase was almost double that. Though comprising just 1.4% the population, Canadian Jews are the victims of 70% of religious hate crimes.

An especially disturbing feature was the mounting instances of Jewish schools being targeted for violent attacks. Among other incidents, in May alone, both the Belz Yeshiva Ketana in Montreal and Bais Chaya Mushka in Toronto were fired at by masked gunmen.

The situation in the UK is hardly any better. According to the Community Security Trust, 5 583 antisemitic incidents across the country were recorded between 7 October 2023 and 30 September, 2024, the highest tally recorded in any 12-month period since annual figures began to be compiled in 1984. The total included 302 incidents of assault and 266 involving "damage and desecration".

When assessing the impact of ubiquitous and rising antisemitism across the globe, it's important also to look beyond the actual incidents of anti-Jewish hostility to consider their broader emotional and psychological impact on the communities thus targeted.

Here, a survey conducted by the Central Council of Jews in Germany has special poignance. The report "spoke of an atmosphere thick with hostility, fear of violence, and a chilling sense of vulnerability" that members of the community were feeling. Many had chosen to erase public markers of their Jewish identity, concealing who they were to avoid becoming targets.

Commented one of those interviewed, "I no longer show publicly that I am Jewish. Most of my family was murdered in the Holocaust, and I never imagined that, as a Jew, I would have to hide again in Germany."

One can also quote here Uriya Shavit, one of the compilers of the above-mentioned Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry report: "If current trends continue, the curtain will descend on the ability to lead Jewish lives in the West – to wear a Star of David, attend synagogues and community centres, send kids to Jewish schools, frequent a Jewish club on campus, or speak Hebrew."

However difficult things have been for the South African Jewish community over the past year and more, we can be thankful that in our own country at least, we're still a good way away from that situation.

• David Saks is the former associate director and current consultant to the SAJBD.



A protest in New York City

Over the past 15 months, there has been a pronounced rise in recorded attacks – a high proportion of them involving serious acts of violence – on Jews and Jewish institutions. Parallel to this is the increasingly poisonous discourse around Jews – their identity, history, and beliefs, particularly on social media and university campuses. It may be that few Jews today live in countries where antisemitism is official state policy – quite to the contrary – but what's happening on the street is a different matter.

Paradoxically, it's in the world's most democratic, human rights-compliant regimes that people have been showing less and less compunction about expressing – and with increasing regularity acting out – their anti-Jewish hatred.

Historically, South Africa has always experienced its highest levels of antisemitism at times of intensified conflict between Israel and its neighbours, and this has certainly been the case since 7/10. According to figures jointly compiled by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and Community Security Organisation, in 2023, there was the highest ever number of antisemitic attacks for a single calendar year recorded.

Of the more than 200 incidents logged, about three-quarters occurred in the final three months of the year. During 2024, antisemitism levels fluctuated from month to month, sometimes being markedly higher than comparable periods in the past while at others, dropping to levels that could almost be called "normal".

In the end, though, more than 125 incidents were recorded, the third highest total since detailed records began to be kept by the SAJBD from the mid-1990s. By local standards, there was also a relatively high number of incidents (14) involving physical violence, including assault and damage and desecration to Jewish property.

What Trump 2.0 holds for SA and Israel



STEVEN GRUZD

On 20 January, Donald Trump will be inaugurated for his second term as United States (US) president. The world had one dose of this mercurial, capricious, thin-skinned maverick from 2017 to 2020, and should expect the unexpected.

Relations between Washington and Pretoria are prickly and volatile. South Africa benefits hugely from market access under the US's Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), especially in the automotive, citrus, and wine sectors. Trump – now with a Republican-majority Congress – is likely to demand more concessions from African countries when AGOA comes up for renewal in late 2025 – if it's extended at all. Trump asserts that the US gets the raw end of the deal. He's bombastically threatened to impose tariffs on allies and enemies alike.

Sara Gon from the Institute of Race Relations said, "Trump is unlikely to be as accommodating of South Africa's 'non-aligned' foreign policy. I'm not sure that Trump will be convinced by South Africa's inherent geostrategic importance, even given the shipping crisis in the Middle East. Our ports are a mess anyway. Under Trump, therefore, AGOA may not be safe for South Africa."

Africa was neglected in Trump's first term. Infamously, he called African states "shithole countries", and mispronounced "Namibia" as "Nambia". He tweeted garbled, controversial ideas about farm murders in South Africa. He didn't visit the continent.

"Africa is hardly a priority for Trump, based on past statements," said Dr Martha Bridgman, who has tracked US foreign policy since the 1980s. "But if the trade war with China ratchets up as expected, and the US looks around for diversified sources of

resources such as critical minerals for manufacture of electric vehicle components, the US may well resume its courting of African states for favourable trade terms. South Africa as a leader on the continent will be important to cultivate diplomatically, so we may see a new ambassadorial appointment more quickly this time around."

Another thing that's different this time is that South Africa chairs the G20 (Group of 20 most important economies) in 2025. Trump is expected to attend the G20 summit in South Africa, and both countries need to ensure a smooth handover to the US in 2026.

Bilateral ties have seldom been warm recently. The African National Congress has persistently railed against what it considers an imperialist, arrogant, hegemonic US. This view has been amplified since South Africa joined BRICS in 2011, a bloc composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and now including Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

With China, and to a lesser extent Russia and Iran, considered rivals to the US's dominance, Pretoria's closeness to these states and Hamas has irked Washington. On top of ill-timed joint naval exercises; refusing to condemn Moscow; and the Lady R embarrassment; the proposal to rename Sandton Drive, the location of the US's Johannesburg consulate, after Palestinian hijacker Leila Khaled has also annoyed the US. A Republican Congress will probably push to punish South Africa for its closeness to

"malign actors".

South Africa hauling Israel to the International Court of Justice on "genocide" charges is one of the biggest obstacles in the US-South Africa relationship. South Africa has also supported the arrest warrants for Israeli leaders from the International Criminal Court (ICC) and has granted immunity from prosecution to ICC staff members, to the chagrin of Washington.

In his first term, Trump was extremely supportive of the Benjamin Netanyahu government. Trump finally moved the US embassy to Jerusalem; recognised Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights; unveiled his pro-Israel "deal of the century" peace plan; kept the pressure on Iran; and brokered the 2020 Abraham Accords, normalising relations with Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the UAE.

Said Gon, "I believe Trump will give Israel the space to do what Israel deems necessary to finish the wars against Iran and its proxies."

But it's not so simple. Trump was furious when Netanyahu hastily congratulated Joe Biden on his 2020 electoral victory, accusing Netanyahu of the greatest Trumpian sin: disloyalty. Last week, Trump – ever vindictive – reposted a video of Professor Jeffrey Sachs calling Netanyahu "a deep, dark, son-of-a-bitch" who had dragged the US into conflicts in the Middle East.

Said Bridgman, "While the campaign promises to end the war in the Middle East immediately are unlikely to be fulfilled – there are still the hostages to rescue, after all – Trump 2.0 will most likely be able to capitalise on the changed power equation in the Middle East – the diminished power base of Iran and the now defanged Hamas – to bring about a ceasefire of some nature. Whether this will lead to longer peace is much less clear."

Brooks Spector, a retired US diplomat and writer, said, "With the sudden collapse of the al-Assad regime [in Syria]; the near-destruction of Hamas, but at the cost of the horrific devastation of Gaza and its population and a tide of international opprobrium directed against Israel; the decimation of Hezbollah and its capabilities in southern Lebanon; and the apparent inability of Iran and Russia to forestall any of this, Donald Trump enters office when there's a window of opportunity for the reshaping of the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

"But at the same time," Spector said, "The ongoing war in Ukraine, despite candidate Trump's promises, will continue, and it will test Trump's ability to reach a deal with Vladimir Putin that doesn't traduce the resolve of the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] alliance. Ultimately, Donald Trump will need to learn yet again that bluster and catch phrases are insufficient to make a coherent foreign policy.

Trump has threatened that "all hell will break loose" if the remaining hostages in Gaza aren't released by inauguration day. What that will look like is anyone's guess. That's if he's not buying Greenland, annexing Canada, and invading the Panama Canal.

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



President-elect Donald Trump

Why was ceasefire easier with Hezbollah than Hamas?

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



Although the ceasefire with Hezbollah may well not last and is by no means being perfectly observed, the two sides were at least able to get there. Why was it so much easier for Israel and Hezbollah to come to some arrangement than it has been with Hamas?

Although Lebanon has been struggling financially for years and its government isn't united, it still does have a functioning government which exercises some authority. Moreover, the government desperately wanted to end the war and Lebanon's suffering. That meant that there was someone on the other side to deal with and who was keen to come to some arrangement to end the war. Although Israel and Lebanon don't have diplomatic relations, negotiations took place through United States (US) intermediation.

Then, although Hezbollah is a powerful actor in the Lebanese government, other political parties are represented both in parliament and the government. There's no doubt a large majority of them and the Lebanese people wanted to end the war and come to a deal.

Lebanon also has a long and distinguished cultural history, and a long association with both the US and France as the ex-colonial power. They both wanted to avoid the destruction of Lebanon, and were able to apply pressure on Israel and Lebanon.

Unlike in Gaza, the US was the main mediator, and has a good relationship with both governments. There's also a history of successful US mediation. The US was the mediator in the 2022 agreement that, for the first time, set out maritime boundaries between Israel and Lebanon.

In this case, an agreement seemingly suited all parties. On the Israeli side, Israel had probably achieved a big chunk of what it could have hoped to militarily.

Also, the ceasefire terms dictating that Hezbollah must retreat behind the Litani River allowed Israel to achieve its strategic aim of making the north safer.

On the Hezbollah side, there was strong domestic pressure from the rest of Lebanese society to end the war, and a ceasefire allows it to regroup.

On the US side, the ceasefire gave the Biden administration one final foreign policy success.

Although there are still some minor border disputes between Lebanon and Israel, in the main, this isn't an issue either side wishes to go to war over. In reality, the borders between the two are pretty clear and both sides are probably happy for the status quo to continue.

Israel doesn't really intend to occupy southern Lebanon if the ceasefire holds. Of course, the same doesn't hold for Gaza, where all indications point to Israel intending to occupy the Netzarim and Philadelphai corridors for the foreseeable future in some form.

The biggest block in terms of Gaza, is the fact that Hamas still holds almost 100 hostages, making things much more complex and the negotiations far more intricate.

While the deal with Hezbollah was mostly transactional – both sides to stop firing at each other and Hezbollah to withdraw from the border so as not to threaten civilians in the north, with Hamas holding the hostages, it now comes down to excruciating details: how many Hamas will release up front and over what time period the balance will go free; how many Hamas captives will be released in return; who they will be; their rank; and so on.

The hostages give Hamas leverage, and allied to the fact that it wants to survive the war as a functional unit and that the domestic pressure on it to end the war does not appear to be that intense, it means it's still prepared to continue fighting.

Another vital issue is that although Hezbollah has been responsible for the deaths of more than 120 Israelis in the north, it wasn't part of the 7 October massacre and atrocities carried out by Hamas. That not only made it easier for Israel to strike a deal with it, but Israel's objectives were more limited.

As discussed above, these included getting Hezbollah to stop firing at the north; degrade its operational capabilities to do so in future; and get it to withdraw behind the Litani River.

With Hamas having carried out the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust and threatening further such outrages, Israel's objectives are far more maximalist. It wants to ensure Hamas's removal from power and prevent it from carrying out a similar type of attack in future. That can seemingly be done only by trying to control Gaza's security going forward and remaining in some form of control over its borders. That again makes the negotiations much less transactional and much more intricate than they were with Hezbollah.

Due to the hostages still being held and the 7 October massacre, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced much less political opposition from within his own cabinet to a deal with Hezbollah than he did in respect of Hamas. In fact, his government could fall over a deal with Hamas, which wasn't the case with the Hezbollah ceasefire.

Without doubt, an end to the war in Gaza will come – and maybe in time for the inauguration of Donald Trump – but the negotiations getting there have been and will continue to be an exhaustive and arduous process.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

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Jews not invited to ANC's 113th birthday party

NICOLA MILTZ

The anti-Israel lobby made sure its presence was felt at the African National Congress (ANC's) 113th birthday celebration on 11 January, as chants of "Free, Free Palestine" echoed through the Mandela Park Stadium in Khayelitsha, Cape Town.

A persistent chant over a loud speaker of "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" momentarily shifted the focus from a unifying celebration of the ANC's legacy to a partisan display of solidarity with Palestine. A small group of keffiyeh-clad marchers carried placards showing clear support for Hamas, and signs saying, "Gaza the Worst Holocaust".

This also marked one of the rare yet increasingly common instances where the Jewish community has been excluded from the ANC's customary interfaith prayers at major events, reflecting a troubling discriminatory trend.

The South African Jewish Board

of Deputies (SAJBD) this week condemned the exclusion, with SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn saying that was contrary to the ANC's historical commitment to inclusivity.

Since 1994, Kahn said, it had been customary for the Jewish community to be invited to offer prayers at significant ANC events reflecting the ANC's stated commitment to inclusivity and recognition of South Africa's diverse faith communities.

"However, this tradition was unceremoniously abandoned in October 2023, signalling an alarming disregard for the Jewish community's role within South Africa's vibrant multicultural fabric," she said.

The ANC justified its decision by claiming that faith-based leaders who prayed at the event did so on behalf of all cultural communities. However the SAJBD dismissed this

explanation as "disingenuous and dismissive", pointing out that no single religious group could represent South Africa's diverse faiths.

unity and inclusivity South Africa has worked so hard to achieve," she said.

Political commentator Kenneth Mokgathe said the Jewish

community was conspicuous in its absence, as members of all other faiths stood on the podium to offer prayers.

Echoing Kahn's sentiments, he described the exclusion of the community as upsetting. "The ANC's

decision reflects a party in disarray with mismatched priorities. Its obsession with the Palestinian cause detracts from what truly matters to South Africans. This exclusion is emblematic of a broader issue – the ANC increasingly being influenced by a radical agenda, to the detriment of

its broader constituency," he said.

Mokgathe also bemoaned the South African government's absence in recent historic developments in the Middle East. "When you look at this week's breakthroughs, such as the significant hostage deal being brokered, South Africa's government has missed an opportunity to be part of something historic and meaningful on the global stage."

The SAJBD said that had it been invited, its prayer would have affirmed shared aspirations for unity, peace, and prosperity – a message that resonates across all faiths.

Terence Corrigan, project manager at the Institute of Race Relations, labelled the presence of pro-Palestine lobbyists at the ANC celebrations as "morbid political theatre".

"It's farcical," he said. "The direction the country has taken under the ANC, the largest ruling party for the past three decades, has been reduced to leveraging a geopolitical issue – one over which South Africans have no influence and nothing to contribute – as a talking point.

"The ANC is a party in terminal decline. No foreign affairs issue has ever been an important electoral matter in South Africa. Polling research shows this. If the ANC wants to pretend that ordinary South Africans care deeply about this, then it seems like advanced political senility to me."

As the ANC continues to grapple with its identity in a post-liberation era, critics argue that its prioritisation of foreign causes over domestic challenges is a sign of a party out of touch with its electorate. With declining electoral support and a struggling economy, the ANC's actions may be alienating more South Africans than they are inspiring.

"The ANC remains a liberation movement at heart, and the Palestinian issue allows it to cling to that identity. It cannot celebrate much success; even the transition to democracy has become a well-worn memory," said Corrigan.

The reality was that the ANC was now a 40% party, presiding over an anaemic economy, Corrigan said.

"It's underperforming and being cannibalised on both sides of the political spectrum. I wouldn't say it's a dying horse, but it's certainly one well past its prime. It can no longer pull the wagon, yet it's trying to put on a show of vitality. The Palestinian issue speaks to what the ANC wishes it was. It never fully adapted to being a political party in a constitutional democracy. There's something about the Palestinian cause that it finds ideologically irresistible, particularly in places like the Western Cape."

The problem, he said, was that there was no counter-narrative of progress or societal well-being that the ANC could point to as worth celebrating.

"That, in itself, is enormously sad."

The birthday celebration serves as the party's platform to outline its plans for the year, headlined by a speech by ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa. Issues at the top of the list included the South African Communist Party's decision to contest elections on its own while remaining within the Tripartite Alliance as well as the government of national unity (GNU).



The ANC's 113th birthday celebration

The omission underscores the discriminatory nature of the decision to single out the Jewish community for exclusion, said Kahn.

"Sidelining the Jewish community isn't only hurtful, but sets a dangerous precedent of selective representation, undermining the

Israel's crisis sharpens IsraAID's global commitments

ELKA COHEN

While the world sees Israel as a country at war, it's quietly sending humanitarian aid and vital relief to help save lives in countries in dire straits.

Within days of Cyclone Chido striking Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province on 15 December, leaving more than 190 000 people in desperate need of aid, IsraAID, Israel's leading humanitarian organisation, was there to help. At the time of writing, IsraAID was in Los Angeles helping to combat the fire devastation in that city.

With powerful winds and torrential rains, Cyclone Chido claimed at least 94 lives in Cabo Delgado and injured hundreds more. In the region, already grappling with ongoing civil conflict, displaced communities were at the mercy of yet another disaster. IsraAID mobilised its emergency response, drawing on five years of experience working in Mozambique, part of its ongoing commitment to the African country.

The organisation provided vital relief after Cyclone Idai in 2019, and Cyclone Eloise in 2021. Its ability to act quickly in the face of catastrophe speaks to its long-term engagement and deep-rooted connections with Mozambican communities. "Building a strong local team ensures that ongoing disaster response is sustainable," says Yotam Polizer, IsraAID's chief executive.

"We provide the expertise from Israel – everything from trauma care to water technology, but the key is in the teams we set up and train locally," he says.

Over the past few weeks, the IsraAID teams in Mozambique have been working to distribute essential supplies, rehabilitate water systems, and rebuild critical infrastructure such as community centres.

"In places like Mozambique, we face what we call 'neglected disasters'," says Polizer. "The scale of the crisis is vast, but it remains largely overlooked by the media, and consequently by the international donor community. That's where we step in, committed to responding regardless

of the scale or media coverage."

But the organisation's humanitarian work extends well beyond Mozambique. It's a global force with a network of 300 staff worldwide, providing immediate relief and long-term recovery programmes in 15 countries.

When Israel was thrust into its own crisis on 7 October 2023, IsraAID launched its first-ever emergency response on home soil. In the immediate wake of the violent attacks, the organisation swiftly provided critical support to those affected by the massacre. But despite the urgency of responding domestically, IsraAID's global mission has remained steadfast as it continues to deliver aid and support to communities in need around the world.

"Even while Israel was reeling from its own tragedy, we continued our international missions," says Polizer. "The world is fragile, and

understand their communities best, and we've seen how they've managed to mobilise quickly, offering effective relief and support," says Polizer.

Says Idan Markovich, IsraAID's senior emergency programmes officer, "Our goal isn't just to rebuild but to strengthen resilience in the face of future disasters, whether natural or man-made."

Despite IsraAID's success on the ground, securing attention and funding for these often-neglected crises remains a challenge. "Media coverage is directly linked to donor funding," Polizer says. "Disasters that don't grab headlines often lack the resources they need."

IsraAID has built a broad and diverse network of support, including private donors, family foundations, international organisations like the United Nations, and various governments and religious groups, allowing it to help those in need, regardless of the circumstances.

Polizer remains resolute in his commitment to IsraAID's work, regardless of global or political circumstances. "We will always be there, first on the ground, side by side with the communities we serve," he says. "Our mission is simple: we are here to offer help, whether in Mozambique, Israel, or any other part of the world. Our work is purely humanitarian and non-political, and is appreciated by the vast majority of countries we work in globally. It's our duty and responsibility to serve all, regardless of ethnicity, religion, politics, or media attention."

As IsraAID navigates the complexities of today's global challenges, Polizer remains confident about the organisation's impact and potential to create meaningful change.

"We're not just responding to emergencies; we're building long-term resilience," he says. "The communities we serve are stronger for our work, and we're stronger for them. In a world where so many feel overwhelmed by crisis, IsraAID's commitment to humanitarian action is a reminder that we all have a role to play in building bridges and restoring hope."

In an all too often divisive world, feelings of helplessness can be overwhelming, but IsraAID's unwavering commitment to providing life-saving aid and fostering resilience offers a powerful antidote to despair. Whether responding to Cyclone Chido in Mozambique, assisting refugees in Ukraine, or supporting health initiatives in South Sudan, IsraAID's mission is clear: to be there to make a difference when it matters most, one community at a time.



The results of the work done by IsraAID in Malawi

the expertise we've developed in Israel – shaped by our own challenges and experience – is needed now more than ever. It's not just the right thing to do; it's the Jewish thing to do."

From South Sudan to Uganda, Ukraine to Afghanistan, Kenya to Malawi, IsraAID's teams are committed to ensuring that support reaches even the most overlooked regions.

IsraAID focuses on empowering locals to deal with crises, providing lasting solutions. After Cyclone Idai in 2019, IsraAID trained and supported Mozambican teams, who today are leading the response to Cyclone Chido. "They

The courage to begin again: from *chiddush* to *kiddush*



MIKE ABEL

OPINION

It's the first month of 2025, so it's appropriate to start this piece with another new beginning. Of a different magnitude, going back a few millennia.

When Noah stepped off the ark, he most certainly didn't walk into a new paradise. The flood had swept away everything. Homes, communities, and life itself. What greeted him wasn't lush fields or thriving cities but a barren world, drenched in utter silence.

And yet, we're told, Noah's first act wasn't to build a shelter or a storehouse of supplies. He planted a vineyard.

It's an extraordinary choice when you think about it. A vineyard isn't about survival; it's about hope. Grapes take years to mature, and even then, the work is only beginning. Vines need pruning, grapes need fermenting, and wine needs time to develop its character. In this small act of faith, Noah wasn't just rebuilding his world, he was renewing its purpose.

This is the Jewish concept of *chiddush* – the act of renewal. Not a quick fix or a return to what was, but a courageous step toward what might be. Today, as we face our own floodwaters – the rising tides of antisemitism yet again; economic challenges; wars; climate crises; and global uncertainty. Noah's vineyard offers us a timeless lesson. Renewal isn't about instant results; it's about planting, pruning, and believing in what's possible, even when the soil feels entirely barren.

The wisdom of grapes

Every vineyard starts with soil, but not all soils are created equal. Interestingly, the world's greatest wines often grow in rocky, arid, and seemingly inhospitable conditions. These brutal environments force vines to dig deep, searching for water and nutrients, producing grapes of extraordinary character.

In life, as in wine, challenge is what shapes greatness. Fertile soil may seem ideal, but it often leads to abundance without substance. Rocky soil, by contrast, yields fewer grapes, but each one is rich, concentrated, and resilient.

After World War II, Europe was a barren vineyard of another kind – its cities bombed, economies shattered, and millions of lives uprooted. And yet, in that devastation, renewal took root. Countries like Germany and Japan didn't rebuild what was; they imagined what could be. They pruned away their deeply destructive ideologies and resultant, self-imposed carnage, and planted new seeds of collaboration, peace, and innovation.

The result? A vintage the world still drinks from today. Vibrant economies and cultures, and decades of a lasting peace. They learned and grew from their floods.

South Africa, too, is standing in its vineyard moment. Decades of criminal oppression, followed by recent years of systemic corruption, ongoing inequality, and dysfunction have left our soil rocky and barren. But barren soil, as any winemaker will tell you, often can yield the richest harvests. Renewal doesn't demand perfection; it requires courage and the willingness to dig deep for better solutions.

Painful pruning

Planting is only the beginning. In vineyards, pruning is

essential. Cutting back overgrowth allows the vine to focus its energy on producing the best fruit. It's an act of discipline and faith, trusting that what you remove will make room for something better.

In behavioural economics, this principle echoes the concept of loss aversion. We cling to what we have, even when it's holding us back. Pruning, whether in a vineyard or in life, is counterintuitive because it means letting go of what feels safe.

For South Africa, pruning means facing hard truths. It means cutting away the deadwood of corruption, rethinking broken systems, and refocusing our collective energy on education, innovation, and unity. It's painful work – pruning always is – but it's the only way to produce a harvest worth celebrating. And our miraculous GNU (government of national unity), imperfect as it is, has allowed new and fragile buds of growth to start reappearing.

On a personal level, we're all faced with pruning decisions. What fears, habits, or grudges do we need to let go of to grow? Renewal demands focus and courage, not just to start over, but to trust that what we remove will make room for something better.

Fire, flood, and resilience

Vines are surprisingly resilient. Even when fire scorches their surface, their deep roots often survive, ready to regenerate when the rains come. Much like fynbos requires fire in order to propagate. For seeds to burst from their pods. Devastating as that can be at the time.

This resilience mirrors the human spirit. After the Holocaust, survivors who had lost everything planted vineyards of their own, both literal and metaphorical.



They built families, businesses, and communities, many of which stand as testaments to their courage and vision. And this was after enduring unimaginable horror. They had every reason to give up, and they, like Noah, chose hope.

In Los Angeles, where wildfires have been raging and blackened landscapes stretch for miles, vineyards will endure. Renewal doesn't erase devastation, loss, and pain, but it ultimately transforms it. The vineyard reminds us that no matter how inhospitable or dire the conditions, the possibility of renewal is always present. This observation, in no way undermines the visceral tragedy those poor families are currently going through. But it does somehow remind us of the enduring truth that "this too shall pass".

Wines of 2025

Not all grapes are meant to age. Some wines, like some ideas or efforts, are best enjoyed in their youth. Vibrant, full of energy, and immediate in their reward. Others need time to lie down and mature, deepening in complexity with each passing year.

As we step into 2025, we must ask: what in our lives needs immediate attention, and what can afford to rest?

South Africa's challenges, like those of the world, won't be solved overnight. Some pruning, like addressing corruption and inequality, need to be tackled urgently. Others, such as cultural healing and generational change, requires the longer, patient, and deliberate work of maturation. Renewal asks us to embrace both timelines, balancing urgency with the wisdom to wait.

From *chiddush* to *kiddush*

In Jewish tradition, wine is woven into our moments of renewal and celebration. *Kiddush*, marking the Sabbath or a festival, is an expression of gratitude, faith, and hope in the potential for better days.

The journey from *chiddush* to *kiddush* is never easy. It takes time, patience, and courage. An inherent belief that today's rocky soil can become tomorrow's fruitful vineyard. As we enter 2025, let's plant carefully, prune courageously, and nurture faithfully.

And when the time is right, let's celebrate – not just what we've achieved, but the promise of what's yet to come. And let us share this fruit.

Blessing for 2025

On the note of wine, pun intended, I feel compelled to offer my own prayer. May this year bring us the courage of Noah to plant vineyards in barren soil; the resilience of vines to endure fire and flood; and the insight to know which fruits to harvest and which to let mature.

May our lives be infused with renewal; and may we drink deeply from the possibilities of *chiddush*, believing that the best vintages are yet to come.

L'chaim! To life! To *chiddush*. To the vineyards we will plant and future we will build. Both individually and collectively.

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

Lighting the way from Chanukah 5785 to 2025

OPINION

BENJI SHULMAN



This past December was unusual, with Chanukah coming later in the year and coinciding with Christmas when many members of the community were well into their summer holidays. In Cape Town, South African Jews celebrated by lighting chanukiahs on the beach, while the Sea Point promenade was adorned with tinsel and multi-coloured lights.

Such a scene would have infuriated Christopher Hitchens, who was a member of the New Atheists, a group of public intellectuals known for their caustic and derisive approach to religion. In 2007, the late Hitchens penned an article titled "Bah, Chanukah", where he bitterly criticised public displays of Christmas and even more so, Chanukah. As an atheist, he claimed to be upset that the Maccabees had won. Hitchens said he supported the Hellenists, the Greek-influenced Jews who, in his words, "weaned many people away from the sacrifices, the circumcisions, the belief in a special relationship with G-d, and the other reactionary manifestations of an ancient and cruel faith". But Hitchens went further than this, claiming that "when Judaism repudiated Athens for Jerusalem, the development of the whole of humanity was



Photo: Andrew Rusk

Christopher Hitchens

terribly retarded".

The whole of humanity? This might seem like a bit much. After all, the most one could criticise Chanukah for is an extra eight days of excuses to eat fattening donuts and latkes. In fact, Hitchens made a wider point: the miracle of Chanukah preserved Judaism at a time when there were no other widely recognised monotheistic religions in the near east.

The events surrounding the festival created the political and religious context for the birth of Jesus and the emergence of Christianity. In Hitchens' words, "to celebrate Hanukkah is to celebrate not just the triumph of tribal Jewish backwardness but also the accidental birth of Judaism's bastard child in the shape of Christianity". As I said, caustic.

But he didn't stop there. He then argued that Judaism and Christianity laid the theological groundwork for Islam, the world's other major Abrahamic religion. For him, the events of Chanukah marked what could have been the erasure of monotheism from human history. Instead, because of the Maccabean revolt, billions now believe in a single G-d through a variety of faith traditions.

Hitchens' arguments have many flaws, but a key one is that he refused to follow his reasoning to its logical conclusion.

Continued on page 11 >>

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Ts and Cs apply

Dov Fedler: spiritual hitchhiker with comedic superpower

TRIBUTE

JOANNE FEDLER



My father, Dov Fedler, loved the spotlight but abhorred grandiosity, so I'm not sure how he'd feel about being described as a "legend" or "national treasure".

"He's not a legend, he's a very naughty boy," I imagine him mimicking Monty Python's *Life of Brian*.

He made people laugh. That was his superpower. Give him an audience and the plumage of his personality shone. He was a loveable Gruffalo of a man who could zap out a punchline with ferocious timing.

Humour was both his genius and shield, the way he made sense of the madness and tragedy of the world. His was an exquisitely original imagination which wrestled with life's inexplicable paradoxes like Jacob did with the angel. He was long-winded and loud, could infuriate, inspire, entertain, but never bore. He didn't have a financial bone in his lumbering frame.

No-one I knew had a cooler dad when we were kids. He was the key attraction at the Hobbies Fair each year at King David, where kids crowded at his elbows



Dov Fedler doing his final cartoon

as caricatures streamed effortlessly from his pen. The Aladdin's cave of his studio was a treachery of junk and treasures from which puppets, sculptures, and other astonishments materialised as if you could simply imagine something and, behold, it would appear. From this he taught me a blank page was the deepest invitation to your own soul's calling. Listen, and it would speak back.

He painted me a poster, "Superman Loves Joanne" with Christopher Reeve flying through the sky, because oh, did I have a crush at 10. He told me to stop dieting because I'd never be a model, not with my build. "You'll be other things," he promised. He seemed so certain pretty and skinny were the booby prizes in life.

When I was 14, he gave me Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices*, like a wizard in a fairytale might hand over a magical bean that just needs seeding in the right soil. He read my hunger, and granted me what I longed for myself before I knew what to wish for.

An effervescence of talents spilled out of him, like hidden tricks up his sleeve – cartooning, sculpting, painting, and in his later years, writing. Never without a pen and paper, he doodled and drew, read and ruminated. He collected thousands of books and movies, ever fascinated with Einstein, Van Gogh, the Coen Brothers, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Born in Johannesburg in 1940 in the shadow of the Holocaust, to immigrant parents from Lithuania, he was obsessed with Walt Disney and comic books. His earliest memory at the age of four was of a yellow pencil in someone's hand making a mark on a page. Right then, his hands grasped their destiny.

His mother, Chaya, a Yiddish poet, died from a heart attack just after his Barmitzva, and his father, Solomon, a printer, remarried Dov's Hebrew teacher who had lost her son and husband in the concentration camps. The darkness in his family home was smothering, and at 22, he fled into the arms of the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, my mother, Dorrine, a medical student.

By 30, he was father to three daughters, one with a profound hearing loss. He devoted himself to helping my sister, Carolyn, learn to speak, and my parents became active members of the Society for the Hard-of-Hearing

Child.

For more than 50 years as *The Star's* leader page cartoonist – sometimes meeting three to five deadlines a week – he exposed the hypocrisy and injustices of South African political history in cartoons and caricatures which were poignant, satirical, sometimes biting, but never cruel, some of which ended up in matric history exams.

Though he is best known for his social and political commentary, the truth is, he wasn't a political beast, but a spiritual hitchhiker, a yogi before he became Lubavitch for a few years.

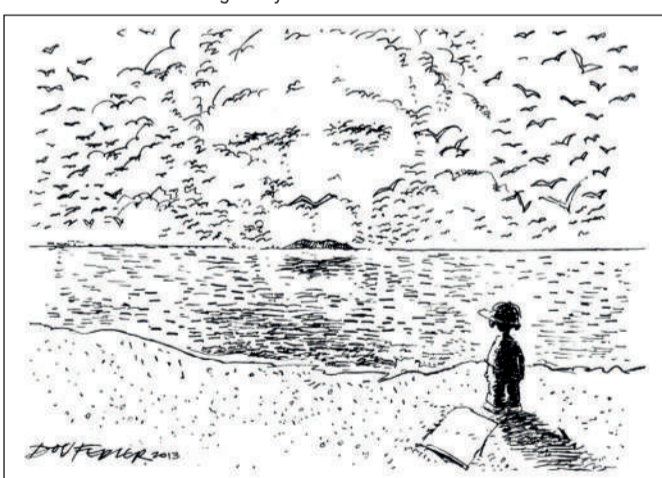
He remained a soul-searching mystic who believed in signs and miracles, and often spoke of a dead bird which flew from his hands just when he and my mother were waiting on a diagnosis to confirm my older sister, Carolyn, didn't have brain damage. She went on to become the first hard-of-hearing person to qualify as a medical doctor in South Africa.

Like many artists, he was cared for by selfless women all his life – his older sister, Rae, when his mother was too ill, my mother, sisters, cousins Charlene and Sandra, and beloved domestic workers, Violet, Alexina, Nomusa, and Bridget. My mother, and then my sister, Laura, managed his financial affairs so he never had to worry about "The Money" as he called it.

Over the years, I helped him write, edit, and publish four books, including his memoir *Out of Line, If You Can Write, You Can Draw, Starlite Memories* and his magnum opus, *Gagman*, in the making for more than 35 years, about an inmate in the concentration camps who survives by telling jokes. He was absurdly creative, with more ideas than he could keep up

with. He invented a comedic impressionist persona, Nolan Marx, which inspired dozens of paintings including one of Monet pissing in the lily pond, which hangs in my home. Years back, he gave my daughter, Jess, a sketchbook with the bones of a story about a magician, Shamansky, which she has now turned into a three-part romantasy trilogy.

On 23 December, I rushed from Sydney to be at his bedside as he began to slip away. I sat vigil with my sisters and his angelic carers, playing his favourite Leonard Cohen songs, whispering last words of love and comfort into the giant elephant flaps of his ears, and rubbing his size 12 feet. Even then, he couldn't help being funny.



An iconic Dov Fedler cartoon

When the doctor asked him how he was, he responded, "I've been worse."

I promised I would find a home for his massive body of work in a public-source archive so it could continue to be enjoyed as part of the commons.

"So many promises," he said. "I just want a Coke."

His humour remained shatterproof to the end. But after my mother died in October 2021, his spirit flailed.

"What shall we do, Dad?" I asked.

"We carry on."

"What does 'on' mean?"

"I wish I could find the off switch," he sighed.

On 11 January 2025, 10 days shy of his 85th birthday, he finally found it.

Dov Fedler, 21 January 1940 – 11 January 2025.

• *Joanne Fedler is an internationally bestselling author and Dov Fedler's daughter. Her 15th book The Whale's Last Song will be launched in South Africa in March 2025.*

From braai to brisket, Sharon Glass leaves a legacy

LEE TANKLE

Sharon Glass didn't just teach people how to make meals and share the recipes she created, she made it her mission to take people on a journey to foster a love for cooking.

Glass, who passed away last week after battling cancer since 2020, which she told few about, left a legacy in the homes of the community where her cookbooks will continue to be proudly and regularly used to make delicious meals.

"My mom's philosophy around cooking was to make everything simple," said her daughter, Teri Cohen. "Her biggest thing was making sure that cooking was a simple yet enjoyable task – whether that be making something from scratch or using store-bought things and integrating it into something amazing."

Glass taught cooking lessons for more than 30 years from her home, and wrote nine bestselling cookbooks. She also had two cooking shows on the Home Channel, and had multiple appearances on *Cook with Noeleen Maholwana Sangqu* over five years.

Glass always had a love for the culinary arts and learned everything she knew from her mother and grandmother. It was only after she completed her schooling at Redhill that her family decided to move to Los Angeles, where she realised her passion for creating food.

While studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree in French at the University of Los Angeles, she got the opportunity to work part-time for the famous actor Danny Kaye. She was able to cook for him and his celebrity friends, and discovered a true passion for cooking.

There, she met her husband, Anthony, in 1983, and six weeks later, the pair were engaged and moved back to South Africa.

Back home and newly married, Sharon prepared everyday meals for people as well as for Shabbat. Their popularity resulted in her husband suggesting that she give cooking lessons.

Her first class back in 1986 had only four attendees. These grew over the years, with her largest class having 150 attendees. Sharon's lessons would cover things as basic as spaghetti bolognese and fried fish to intricate meze platters or apple tarts.

Said acclaimed kosher caterer Delores Fouche, "There are thousands of kitchens and dining tables the world over whose tastes and offerings are indebted to Sharon's culinary flair, knowledge, expertise, and passion. Across her diverse lessons, she offered confidence and skill to new cooks, old cooks, trained cooks, all cooks."

As well as training home chefs, Sharon would run team-building cooking classes for many large corporates from her home.

In 2000, Anthony and Sharon decided that the cooking classes weren't enough and there was a need to write a recipe book so even those who didn't come to lessons would be able to cook her dishes at home.

"We went to every publishing house," said Anthony. "They weren't so keen, so we published it ourselves. The first book was so popular, we decided to do more, and here we are where there are nine books in total," he said.

Her books have been sold all over the globe, often landing in weird places like Hong Kong and Turkmenistan, and becoming bestsellers there.

She also gave "braai lessons", which would cover everything a person needed to know about putting on the best braai. "The big thing

for her was that she taught the husbands that it's not just standing at the braai and turning the meat," said Anthony. "They would get involved in making stuff like pizzas that we put on the braai, toasted sandwiches, stuff like that."

Sharon took the role of being a mother seriously, and became the matriarch of the family after Anthony's mother passed away.

"My mom was a true matriarch in every sense of the word," said Cohen, "My grandmother defined what a matriarch was, and my mother refined it."

Said Sharon's other daughter, Ricci Kurman, "She would take charge, be the one arranging meals, co-ordinating everything – it's weird without her here."

Sharon would connect with anyone. "A simple run to Checkers that should only take 10 or 20 minutes would be like an hour because she would be talking to everyone around her," said Kurman.

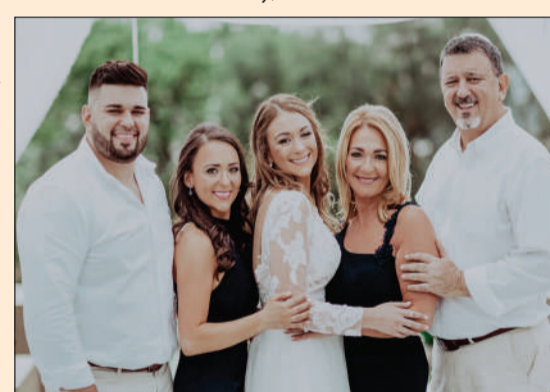
Although she never taught her children explicitly, all three have a love for being in the kitchen and now see it as a way to connect with her.

"She just had this ability to connect with people," said Cohen, "And connect people with the world, to their Jewish roots, through cooking. But she never wanted to talk about herself. If she met somebody, it was always about them. It was never about her."

When Sharon was diagnosed with cancer in June 2020, she kept the diagnosis private as she didn't want anyone to see her as being sick.

"She said she wanted to live her life as if she didn't have cancer," said her son, Jake Glass, "So she would always make sure that she was positive, even when she wasn't feeling well."

"She wasn't just the matriarch of our family, but our community," said Cohen.



Jake Glass, Teri Cohen, Ricci Kurman, Sharon and Anthony Glass

Sharon loved to share in the joy of food with others, and would help her community, whether that be through food donations to Yad Aharon or free cooking classes, and even launched a project with Community Assisting Schools.

Through this project, she ensured that 120 students at HA Jack Primary School would be fed two meals a day. Often those would be the only meals those pupils would get.

"She was quietly charitable, and never looked for any recognition," said Anthony.

"Sharon shared the magic of Jewish cooking with women around the world, connecting them to their heritage in a deeply personal and spiritual way," said Mira Hasofer, the principal of Moriah College in Sydney.

Said Fouche, "Each time someone, somewhere, opens a Sharon Glass cookbook and creates one of her recipes, that will forever be her legacy."

Olga Meshoe Washington – an extraordinary activist and friend

LEE TANKLE

It's not every day that a Christian born in South Africa and living in America is buried in Israel, but then Olga Meshoe Washington was certainly not ordinary and her relationship to Israel, the South African Jewish community, and world Jewry was unique and extraordinary.

On hearing of her passing, South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "This isn't just a loss for the community but for the whole world."

Meshoe Washington, the chief executive of Defend Embrace Invest (in) Support Israel (DEISI) and chief operating officer of international Zionist youth organisation Club Z, died at the age of 43 on 6 January after a month-long battle with lupus.

She had been at Newark Airport on 26 December travelling back to South Africa with her brother, Joshua Meshoe, when she seemed to fall asleep while waiting to board the plane and wouldn't wake up. She was rushed to hospital in New Jersey, and was immediately put into intensive care. The doctors said she had contracted pneumonia and had respiratory failure.

She was scheduled for surgery on 7 January to have a feeding tube inserted, but didn't make it to see the sunrise. She passed away holding her husband, Joshua Washington's, hand, and was surrounded by her family.

"I didn't know she was about to transition, but I slept in the hospital room with her and was able to speak to and sing to her just about 30 minutes before she passed," her husband wrote on social media on 7 January. "She always talked about the day when she would finally hear the applause of heaven for the life she lived. That day is today."

The Israeli president's office and various communal organisations enabled her to have her funeral on 22 January at the Tel Regev Cemetery in Rekhasim in Haifa. "This serves as a tribute to her and what she dedicated much of her life to – being a strident voice on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people. A fund has also been set up to cover the expenses of the funeral," said Jonathan Feldstein, the founder of the Genesis 123 Foundation and a respected bridge between Jews and Christians.



Olga Meshoe Washington

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Meshoe Washington is the eldest daughter of Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, the parliamentary leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, and one of the staunchest supporters of Israel in South Africa's legislature.

Meshoe Washington founded DEISI in 2013, and was chief executive of the organisation with co-chairperson Mark Hyman, of the South African Friends of Israel, and her father. Said Hyman, "From its inception on 5 December 2013, Olga's leadership set the tone for what would become a transformative movement advocating for justice, faith, and reconciliation."

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said, "In the early days, South African Jewry found itself alone in confronting Boycott Divestment Sanctions [BDS] hate. Olga dedicated her life to standing with us in fighting these bullies. Olga was a trailblazer, pioneering activism that grew even after she left South Africa to marry and start her family in America. She then took that battle globally in a way that has been emulated by so many on campuses and in communities

worldwide."

When she travelled to the United States (US) in 2015 to visit various Jewish organisations to promote DEISI, little did she think that she would never return to live in South Africa. This was because on this trip, she met Joshua Washington, the son of Dumisani and Valerie Washington. Dumisani is one of the most vocal black religious Christian supporters of Israel in the US. The pair wed in the dusty streets of Vosloorus on the East Rand in 2018, and have two sons, Judah, 6 and Ezra, 3.

Benji Shulman, the executive director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, said Meshoe Washington showed unwavering support for Israel and the Jewish community. "Olga understood the importance of building bridges between communities. It wasn't just the local Jewish

community and the wider South African community. She understood why it was important not just to be worried about South Africa, and why we had to build relationships with the whole continent. She knew people in Israel, and she was connecting with Israelis. She was building bridges between the Jewish people and all the different people in Africa. That's rare. There's not a lot of people who understand that mission like she did, and can articulate it like she did."

Other than continuing to advocate for Israel in her community and going on trips to

Israel with her church, Meshoe Washington got involved with the South African Jewish community. Shulman said that she took a particular interest in supporting Jewish students during the annual Israeli Apartheid Weeks on campus, and making sure that they had the necessary tools to be on the frontline.

Said Hyman, "She fearlessly pursued justice and truth, even in the face of adversity. Her optimism and ability to inspire action were truly remarkable and left a lasting impression on all who worked with her."

Similarly, Marks said that beyond their working relationship, she and Meshoe Washington had a deep friendship. "I don't think anyone could meet Olga without just adoring her on sight."

"Olga was an extraordinary blend of wisdom, compassion, and strength," said Hyman, "She had a unique ability to connect with people, inspire them, and bring diverse voices together for a common cause. Her kindness and courage made her not just a leader, but a deeply beloved figure."

"She was warm and engaging," Marks said. "She would phone at any time that we've had stress here, and especially over the past year, would often phone just to check how I was coping. We would often share ideas. She was just a girl's girl. She was brilliant at everything she did. It was impossible not to love her."

Ben Swartz, the former chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, said, "She just had this incredible energy. It wasn't just her Israel activism that stood out. She was commercial, she could have been a great businessperson, she could have been a great leader, intellectual, and academic. She said she was just like this energizer bunny, and nothing would slow her down."

Lighting the way from Chanukah 5785 to 2025

>>Continued from page 9

Though some forms of proto-atheism existed in Greek and Indian cultures, its real birth as a political and cultural force came from the clash between Christianity and the movements of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Were it not for Chanukah's contribution to Christianity, there likely would have been no atheism. Perhaps Hitchens owed as much to Chanukah as the rest of us.

Unsurprisingly, Hitchens couldn't be called a supporter of Israel. That doesn't mean that he held any truck with antisemites. As Islamist terror has spread from attacks on Israel, through the wider Middle East, and into Europe and Africa, Hitchens saw the risk this posed for liberal democracy and minorities. He also called out fellow travellers on the left who were prepared to make excuses for such barbarism. Beyond its religious significance, Chanukah holds out the lessons of the defence of Jewish autonomy that anyone can get behind.

Former Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy has pointed out that several years after the miracle of the oil, the Syrian king Antiochus sent an emissary to Simon, a leader of the Hasmonians, complaining that cities, including Jerusalem, had been taken from him.

Simon replied, "We have never taken land away from other nations or confiscated anything that belonged to other people. On the contrary, we have simply taken back property that we inherited from our ancestors, land that had been unjustly taken away from us by our enemies at one time or another."

The technology has changed, the enemies have changed, but the attempt to deny the Jewish people

the right to live in their ancestral homeland remains the same.

Since 7 October, Jews have faced a surge of deadly antisemitism in Israel and around the world. Yet, in spite of this, the global Jewish community has stood united against its adversaries, making the same 2 000-year-old argument that Simon made to the Syrian king. In the process, we have discovered that we have many enemies. We have also learnt that we have many friends who have understood the role that Israel plays in a wider civilisational conflict.

These friends come from many backgrounds. Some turned out to be atheists, like British reporter Douglas Murray, some have even been Muslim, and some have just been members of the public who understand the simple justice of the moment. Of course, we can't forget those who are our Christian allies. In this edition of the paper, you can read about Olga Meshoe Washington, a fearless and outspoken supporter of Israel who had deep ties to our community and who tragically and suddenly passed away on 6 January. We owe all these friends our gratitude.

In this war, we have already witnessed miracles and endured immense loss, much like the Jews who fought for our survival 2 000 years ago. As we move into 2025, we must remind ourselves that the fight isn't yet over, and the hostages haven't yet returned home. But with the light of Chanukah, we are also reminded that true peace and safety is possible. It's a hope that matters not only for Jews but for the entire world.

• Benji Shulman is a broadcaster on 101.9 ChaiFM.

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Oh to be 16 again, and at Habonim!

OPINION

PETA KROST



As my car pulled onto the gravel road towards the Habonim machaneh campsite, I had a sense of residual excitement, a memory from days gone by, of the impending fun that had always been at the end of that road.

The words, “Everywhere we go, the people want to know, who we are, and so we tell them. We are Habonim, the mighty, mighty Habonim,” came to mind. These were words I hadn’t sung in many decades.

I was on my way to machaneh, 36 years after last being there as a *madricha*. This time, I was going as a mom and a journalist not a *channie* or *maddie*. I had a good sense of what I would find because the site is still on the same prime piece of real estate on the Western Cape coast.



But more importantly, I had it on good authority that the same fun I used to have so many years ago was still happening every single December. Much has changed, but so much has stayed the same. Machaneh was, as I recall, the best way for young Jewish kids and teens to have good, clean fun at the end of the year without adult interference.

Driving under the Habonim Dror entrance arch, I felt a sense of homecoming, and *déjà vu*. If you had asked me about what the entrance looked like, I wouldn’t have been able to tell you before, but being there, it was all so familiar. As was the drive down to the *kikar* through the campsite.

The first thing that struck me as I got out the car were the many happy faces I saw and the joyful sounds emanating from them.

I had come to visit my son, who was having the best time, but also to revisit the place I spent the best holidays of my youth and a place where I learnt that it was acceptable to question the things many people take for granted. It was while there so many years ago that I understood what it meant to be a socially-conscious Jewish person.

Habonim machaneh *peulot* had a huge impact on my growth as a thinking person, and it enabled me to find likeminded people within

our community. The singing and made-up songs and chants still stick in my head. I could see that lifelong friendships were being built all around me. I could feel the sense of camaraderie and that exciting feeling of people who may not have known each other long connecting on a deep level.

I could also see, on visiting the different *shichvot*’s sites, messy tents with washing hanging on lines around them. I could see youngsters laughing, chatting, and “chillaxing” between *peulot*.

I heard about the heated but deep discussions regarding the situation in Israel post-7 October. I love the fact that teens

discussed, argued, discussed some more, thought deeper about it, and then talked some more.

Did they reach solutions? Not necessarily, but they engaged with the issues, how they arose, and what could potentially be done about them. That epitomises what Habonim offers.

On another level, walking into the *hadar ochel* (eating space) for one of the *shichvot* and witnessing the loud singing, “Close the doors, they’re coming through the windows, close the windows, they’re coming through the doors. Oh my gosh, they’re coming through the floors ...” Anyone who has ever been to Habonim machaneh knows that is the age-old Habo grace before meals. I got tears in my eyes because it made me feel like no time had passed since I sang that for my supper.

Going onto the *kikar*, where so many gatherings are held, I saw the *migdal*, which looks so much like I remember it, but I have it on good authority that it was recently rebuilt to ensure it was safe. This *migdal* had a yellow ribbon on it as a reminder of the 101 Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza.

In fact, there are many posters, painted signs saying, “Bring them home now”, and artwork reminding about the war and situation in Israel all over the campsite.

My son showed me where they had had an exciting night time *peulah* (activity), with a haunted house and scary stories. He also showed me a hidden view of the beach from one of the *shichvot*’s sites.

I couldn’t help noticing that there were no comfy chairs, beds, or any luxuries really. That wouldn’t be camp. Even the new – or newer than me – cabins for the youngest *shichvot* are rudimentary and simple. The point is that Habonim camp isn’t fancy or swish, it’s good fun and real camping.

Walking from the campsite straight onto the most pristine beaches brought back such beautiful memories. I couldn’t help but notice that the security within and surrounding the campsite is helluva better than days gone by.



I had spaghetti bolognese for lunch in “Docsville” with the few adults staying at the site. The food was a whole lot better than the food I remember from machaneh in my days. And there was a vegetarian/vegan option.

After an exciting trip down memory lane, seeing young people having the time of their lives irrespective of the dust and lack of creature comforts, I felt a twinge of envy at not being able to be 16, and enjoy machaneh for three whole weeks of fun and learning.

I still can think of no better holiday for young Jewish kids than machaneh.

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

Bnei Akiva machaneh – from camping to glamping

OPINION

DINA DIAMOND



The minute you drive onto the Bnei Akiva campsite, the energy, hubbub, and presence of more than a thousand excited participants is palpable.

There’s activity everywhere you look. There are kids jumping on trampolines, swinging on swings, playing soccer, volleyball, and pretty much every other sport. There’s music blaring from various sources, announcements over the loudspeaker, an underlying buzz of chatter and excitement, and there just seem to be kids running in every direction you look.

Bnei Akiva machaneh 2024, Machaneh Oz, has come a long way from the Bnei of old. Camp, the campsite, and the campers have evolved through the years. The first major change is the mode of transport. Back in the day, the majority of attendees who hail from Johannesburg, would converge on Park Station in the old Johannesburg central business district to board a passenger train with six kids in each compartment, each equipped with enough sandwiches and food supplies for the full three weeks. Two nights and a full day would be spent wayfaring south through the Karoo and the Cape landscapes. Despite the long journey and non-luxurious sleeping arrangements, this was always a highlight. The modern-day camper now drops off their trolleys for mass trucks to lug down a few days before, and simply boards a plane, arriving fresh and lively.

One small trolley has now become two supersize trolleys, with enough electrical equipment to boost the Eskom grid, and food and clothing to survive an apocalypse. Real buildings, termed *kfar chabibi* have been constructed to house the now full staff of doctors, clinicians, councillors, rabbis, and specific support staff. Swimming pools have been built to cater to those who may find the 15-minute walk to the beach too taxing. Mini golf, trampolines, swings, and play equipment are dotted around the campsite to ensure that campers are never bored and maintain their golfing handicaps. Action courts have been installed to cater to the sports enthusiasts and their supporters, including netball, volleyball, and soccer. These sports contribute to the continued energy and excitement that extend into the evenings and sometimes early mornings. Full fitness points would definitely be awarded by Discovery for them all.

The tuck shop is fully stocked, including options for real coffee and the essential “freezo”. It’s housed in a structure with a top deck, allowing for chilling and a bird’s-eye view of the happenings across the campsite. Gone are the mass containers of sugar-inducing Oros, replaced with water fountains, far better suited to the nutritional requirements of millennials. The food has also improved tremendously, forgoing the daily canned sweetcorn for greater variety. Benny, who runs the kitchen and has attended 23 camps attests to this. Sanitiser is provided at the entrance to each *chader ochel* (eating hall). This could be a remnant of the COVID-19 pandemic, but additional hygiene is always applauded.

The only solution for laundry in the past was

a bar of Sunlight soap. This, too, has progressed into campers being offered the opportunity to send their dirty clothes offsite to be laundered for a small fee – a great saving for many parents on their kids’ return.

The requirement to sneak into the *maddie* showers at 03:00 to benefit from the hot

water is also not needed as all showers are equipped with hot water and the ultimate spoil of shower doors.

The latest upgrade on the campsite is the installation of charging boxes. These look like the old classic post boxes, the closest most of these kids will ever come to such a structure. They allow for each camper to store and charge their cellphones safely – a *metzia* (saving grace).

Everyone onsite dons a Bnei band on their wrist, which allows them to pay at the tuck shop and be counted for the

beach and various outings. Security is nothing

short of superb, with a massive team providing

the highest security around-the-clock.

The most impactful improvement on the campsite, though, would have to be the new, supersize, luxurious tents. These come with a built-in groundsheet, massive windows on each side allowing for the free flow of air and cooling, as well as a gazebo attached at the front. Campers also bring additional gazebos and camping chairs with them, ensuring the ultimate in glamping and ability to “chill” in comfort. There are various campers who like to go a step further, adding collapsible shelving, solar, fairy lights, and picnic tables ... the list is endless.

An amphitheatre has been built which is used for *mifkad* (a gathering) before Shabbat and other collective events such as *ruach* (spirit) sessions. Watching everyone holding candles and singing in unison truly elevates the entire experience to a spiritual level.



One thing that definitely hasn’t changed is the commitment of the *madrachim* and staff and the amount of energy and effort, notwithstanding the sleepless nights, in ensuring that all required preparation is done. This past year’s *rosh machaneh*, Joshua Pimstein, also contributed tremendously, as one *madrach* commented, “He makes it run like a finely oiled machine.”

There’s no doubt that Bnei Akiva machaneh provides a warm, welcoming environment that caters to the ever-changing needs of teenagers within the context of shared values and ideology. It enables the growth of individuals, forming of lifelong friendships, memories, and the opportunity to connect. For anyone who has attended a Bnei Akiva camp, the nostalgia of being back on the campsite, or watching your own kids attend is heartwarming. In fact, it’s a privilege.

• Dina Diamond is a mom, marketer, radio contributor, community activist, and banker.

The beginning of big school gets Grade 1s going

ELKA COHEN

Bright-eyed young pupils at King David Linksfield, King David Victory Park, and Yeshiva College expressed excitement at starting an unforgettable adventure this week.

Stepping into the thrilling world of “big school” for the very first time, they arrived with bright smiles and backpacks full of hopes and dreams. Ready to embrace the challenges and experiences that will shape their futures, they couldn’t wait to share their thoughts on the first day.



Twins Miracle and Marvellous Emeka with their parents Geraldine and Johnbosco

At King David Linksfield, Eva-Rose Segal (7) was quick to share her dream. “I want to be a marine biologist one day, so I hope my new teacher will help me learn all about it!” Rafael Janks (6) was equally eager,

saying, “I love acting, so I want to learn everything about it!” With a cheeky grin, he said, “The smartest person I know is my sister, but I’m pretty clever too!”



Jannah Kopping

For Jannah Kopping (6), the excitement of Grade 1 is all about discovering new things. “I really want to learn about new things, but I’m not sure what they are yet,” she said. Sadie Isaacs (6)

is certain that her interest lies in science, and proudly names her brother as the smartest person she knows. “It’s because he does lots of homework!” she said.

Noah Bricker (6) had a special reason to be excited this year – he now gets to go to school with his big sister. “I’m excited to see my big sister at school,” he

beamed. “Grade 1 means I have to work hard so I can be smart when I grow up.”

At King David Victory Park, Holly Blecher (6) shared how her new school filled her with a mixture of excitement and some nerves. “Grade 1 feels different because I’m wearing a uniform!” she said, clearly proud of her new look. For Reo Lapidus (6) and Akhela Horn (6), both budding sports enthusiasts, joining the swimming team and playing soccer and cricket are what they’re most looking forward to.



Eva-Rose Segal

Twins Miracle and Marvellous Emeka (6) were anticipating the new experiences that Grade 1 would bring. Miracle couldn’t wait to “read books and make new friends”,



Mikaela Kruger

while Marvellous was in awe of the school’s incredible facilities, including “the slides on the playground, laptops and computers, and all the games!” Tali Mae Johnston-Kowen (6) offered wise words with a bright smile. “If I could make one rule for school, it would be ‘always be kind’,” she said.



Mati Garber



Tali Mae Johnston-Kowen



Uriya Schwartz

Meanwhile, the Grade 1s at Yeshiva College are just as excited for the adventure ahead. Uriya Schwartz (6); Mati Garber (6); and Liora Chiger (6) all share a passion for learning more about Torah, with Mati adding, “And soccer too!”

Mikaela Kruger (6) shared her perspective, saying, “It’s better to be a grown-up at work because you earn money.” However, Aaron Issarow (6) had a



Holly Blecher with her parents Taddy and Annie

different view, saying, “It’s better to be a child at school because you learn more about everything!”

These energetic, curious, and eager young pupils are ready to take on the year ahead, each bringing their own unique dreams, hopes, and personalities to the classroom. With the unwavering



Noah Bricker

support of their teachers, parents, and community, they are sure to make exciting discoveries, create unforgettable memories, and form lifelong friendships. The future shines brightly for them.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Farewell to a true friend

This is the first edition of the SA Jewish Report since the untimely passing of Olga Meshoe Washington, a dear friend of our community and an unwavering advocate for Israel. Meshoe Washington was a Zionist, a Christian, a leader, a champion of human rights, and a source of inspiration to all who knew her.

As chief executive of DEISI (Defend Embrace Invest (in) Support Israel) International, Meshoe Washington dedicated her life to fortifying the bond between Africa and Israel, passionately advancing the Christian imperative to support the Jewish state. She boldly confronted and refuted comparisons between Israeli policies and South African apartheid, describing these analogies as “woefully ignorant” and a diminution of black South Africans’ lived experience.

Meshoe Washington’s influence extended far beyond Zionism. Her impactful work in socio-economic and youth development earned her recognition as one of *The Jerusalem Post’s* “25 Young ViZionaries”. Her leadership in programmes, non-profit organisations, and non-governmental organisations demonstrated her commitment to building a brighter future.

On a personal note, Meshoe Washington’s poise and grace shone through in every encounter. Whether facing aggressive attacks in the media or addressing contentious topics at events, she stood firm with dignity and eloquence. She was a beacon of courage, wisdom, and compassion.

Our heartfelt condolences go to Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, Joshua Washington, their children, and the entire Meshoe family. Meshoe Washington’s legacy, defined by her faith, resilience, and unwavering love, has left an indelible mark on our society and will

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



continue to inspire generations to come. May her memory be a blessing.

Matric results and a return to studies

This week, we celebrate the release of last year’s matric results, which once again showcase the excellence of our community’s schools and brilliance of our pupils. We’re thrilled to see a significant increase in Jewish students pursuing medical studies, which is a trend that fills us with pride.

For the first time, the University of Stellenbosch will host a South African Union of Jewish Students chapter, reflecting the growing number of Jewish students choosing Stellenbosch for their tertiary education.

At the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, we’re all too aware of the challenges that face our students on campus, and we’re committed to ensuring that our universities remain safe, welcoming spaces for Jewish students, just as they have always been. We look forward to seeing Jewish students thrive on all campuses.

Summer camps

There was another successful season of youth movement summer camps in December. These machanot continue to have a profound impact, fostering community, identity, and leadership among our youth. This year’s camps were especially memorable, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Community Security Organisation and its dedicated volunteers, who sacrificed their own holiday time to ensure the safety and security of all participants. To them, we extend our deepest gratitude.

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'A feeling of love' – channies share machaneh moments

LEE TANKLE

Tens who went to machaneh this past December haven't stopped raving about it, saying they had the best time with their friends and gleaned a deeper understanding of their Jewish heritage.

"There was never a boring moment," said Bnei Akiva camper Meir Levy. "You're with your friends all the time and you get to learn something new about our religion and how to be better people."

Levy's favourite part of machaneh was celebrating his birthday. "I was able to spend it having fun with my friends," he says, "It was made even better by the fact that my birthday was the day we went on *tiyul*."

Similarly, Tasha Weisz, a 17-year-old Habonim *chanicha*, said she never felt bored once on machaneh. "There was always somebody new to speak to, and there was such an openness on the campsite where you could just go and have an entertaining conversation with anyone. I didn't feel confined by my age group. I could just go around and banter."

Erin Chait, a 13-year-old Habonim *chanicha*, said this year's machaneh was special, particularly because of the connections she made. It made it hard for her to leave at the end.

For Chait, the best parts of the experience were Havdalah;



Habonim

going to the beach; and having fun in the sun with friends. "These were so much fun, and I would 100% go back to camp now if I could," she said.

Chait particularly enjoyed the freedom that machaneh brought her, and would even sometimes run away from her *madrichim* when it was time to go to bed so that the fun never ended.

Weisz's age group had a theme centred on Israel. This meant that at the beginning of camp, there were activities focused on having constructive and respectful arguments, leading up to *peulot* about the conflict in Israel.

"It was valuable to have *maddies* from Israel, to hear their personal experiences, and to gain first-hand understanding about the war," she said.

Shalva Sifris, a 15-year-old Bnei Akiva *chanicha* from Yeshiva College, said, "We were having the time of our lives, whether waiting in line at the tuckshop, watching the volleyball late at night, having meaningful and fun *tochniyot*, *ruach* sessions, or *tischs* on Friday nights, we were just having so much fun."

Da'el Basserabie, 17, who went on his last Bnei Akiva

machaneh as a *channie* said that what made machaneh particularly special was the way that everyone on the campsite was interested in the learning that was taking place.

"There was such an atmosphere, especially around the Extra Quality Torah [EQT] in the afternoons and Geshet and Kollel learning in the mornings," he said. "The Beit Midrash was never empty. Before camp, some people were completely disconnected, completely uninspired, and by the end of

camp, were constantly asking the *madrichim* to learn more with them."

Basserabie said one of the highlights of camp was when he walked into the Beit Midrash after midnight one night and was invited to learn with another camper until the early hours of the morning.

"There's always something being planned," said Weisz, "From the carnival to Shabbat to Havdalah, to band's night, to Burning Man, to the naming ceremony, to the talent show. But the amazing thing is that these are all organised by us *channies* with some help from the *maddies*. So, amid the fun, there are these teaching moments."

For Grade 9 Habonim camper Ben Rabinowitz, the best part of the experience was when his age group



Habonim



Bnei Akiva

By the end, camp felt like home, and we were all incredibly close, like a second family."

"Naming night signified the Habo journey," said Rabinowitz, "Standing together as one group was so special because it showed the growth that we have made. We just came together that night, and now we all share this unbreakable bond."

Sifris said that the most special moment on Bnei Akiva machaneh was the first Kabbalat Shabbat session on the campsite, at which they danced and sang together for the first time. "I felt unity and happiness," she said. "We were all dancing because we were proud and happy to serve Hashem."

A 16-year-old Habonim *channie*, who didn't want to be identified, said he felt most connected to his fellow campers when they were working together on special projects, particularly the band's night; Habo Burn – reminiscent of the Burning Man festival; and taking part in outreach work with the community-led organisation Ivamba.

"All these projects were rewarding in a different way," he said. "On band's night, it was rewarding to have that *joy* after the work we did. Habo Burn was a beautiful and thought-provoking night. Messimah showed us how good it feels to help out, regardless if it's in the form of outreach, painting the arch, or hanging out with other people."

An anonymous Bnei Akiva camper who has been going on camp for the past three years said machaneh was the best way for her to spend her holiday. Her favourite part was Shabbat on camp. "It is a time when everyone is unified, and you don't get that feeling anywhere else," she said.

We're wholly different on holiday. Here's why

OPINION

DYLAN BERGER



What started off as an Old English word referring to special religious "holy days" has now become the holy grail of what people eagerly work towards. Holidays are what we yearn for, and they bring out the best – and sometimes the worst – in us.

More than six decades ago, the lyrics of *Summer Holiday* by Cliff Richard became an anthem which flips a switch that changes the mindset and attitudes of all people when embarking on a summer holiday. "We're all goin' on a summer holiday, No more workin' for a week or two ..."

Almost instantly, we become different people, and the holiday version of ourselves emerges like a butterfly from its cocoon.

What is it about going on holiday that makes us act so differently? We become friendlier, we greet and make conversation with our holiday neighbours, our children make new friends with ease, we leave our accommodation without setting an alarm, and we happily let a person we don't know from housekeeping service and clean our rooms. We have the energy to braai every night, and going for a walk or doing exercise happens with little to no fuss. When flying, we queue in an orderly way to board and we're courteous – most of the time – to fellow passengers.

Research shows that when we step away from

our mundane environments and responsibilities, we enter a space where freedom, leisure, and novelty can significantly influence how we interact with others and the world around us. If going on holiday brings out the best in us, then perhaps we should look for ways to make some of our holiday traits and characteristics more permanent.

My grandmother used to tell my sister and I stories about how our grandfather would morph into a totally different person once he had closed his grocery shop in Johannesburg's central business district and headed down to Muizenberg on holiday.

Like a dangling carrot, a booked and well-planned holiday is a great incentive to push through our daily worries and tasks knowing that we have something in the not-too-distant future to look forward to. It's the energy and enthusiasm that we put into planning and organising our holidays that we need to replicate in other aspects of our daily lives.

Though New Year's resolutions last as long as ice-cream in the boot of a hot car, what we can all try to do is be the holiday versions of ourselves more often throughout the year.

• Dylan Berger is editorial co-ordinator at the SA Jewish Report.

Letters

ARAFAT, NOT SHARON, INSTIGATOR OF SECOND INTIFADA

Howard Sackstein ("Can we talk peace in the midst of war?" *SA Jewish Report*, 12 December) states that in 2000, "The hardline Israeli general standing for election, Ariel Sharon, would visit the Temple Mount and spark what became known as the Second Intifada, which claimed the lives of more than 1 000 Israelis."

There's ample evidence that the Second Intifada was preplanned by the Palestinian Arab leadership, not a spontaneous response to Sharon's peaceful and legal visit to the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. The website of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) notes, "Well before the Sharon visit, there were incendiary calls for action in the Palestinian media and in sermons by religious leaders. Furthermore, on 29 September, the Palestinian Authority closed the schools under its jurisdiction and co-ordinated the busing of demonstrators to the Temple

Mount. Palestinian leaders have been quoted boasting that the violence was planned as early as July 2000."

But there's no need to take the ADL's word for it. Suha Arafat, the widow of Yasser Arafat, has publicly acknowledged that her husband planned the Second Intifada. In an interview with Dubai TV, reported in the *Jerusalem Post* on 29 December 2012, she said, "Immediately after the failure of the Camp David [negotiations], I met him in Paris upon his return. Camp David had failed, and he said to me, 'You should remain in Paris.' I asked him why, and he said, 'Because I am going to start an intifada. They want me to betray the Palestinian cause. They want me to give up on our principles, and I will not do so.'" – Moshe Phillips, national chairperson Americans For A Safe Israel, New York, USA

Couple meets and weds at Sandringham Gardens

Sandringham Gardens Shul in Johannesburg hosted the wedding of residents Lorraine Benson and Joseph Hovsha. Benson, an artist and Hovsha, one of the *gabbaim* at the Sandringham Gardens Shul, met and fell in love at the retirement home. The couple tied the knot on 22 December 2024, with Chevrah Kadisha Group Rabbi Jonathan Fox officiating.

Joseph Hovsha and Lorraine Benson



UJW sewing school graduates walk red carpet

The 2024 class of the Union of Jewish Women's Sewing Empowerment School graduated on 12 December 2024, with graduates modelling their creations on the red carpet.

The group of students, male and female, made outfits out of donated denim jeans, including hats, bags, jackets, skirts, and trousers.

The Sewing Empowerment School was launched in 2010 to help alleviate South Africa's most pressing problems: skills development and poverty.



One of the graduates from the UJW Sewing Empowerment School modelling the outfit they created

Since then, more than 117 students have graduated from this course.

The school provides practical basic sewing skills for unemployed men and women during a four-month, intensive, fulltime course. Students are taught the basic principles of sewing, including design and manufacturing, equipping them with the ability to earn an income from selling items. Sewing instructor Nomvula teaches and looks after students with her creative skills, patience, and passion for the job. Sewing school manager Ariane Heneck ensures that the school runs efficiently and successfully.



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Excessive flattery – it’s an undying art

It’s unlikely ever to happen. But just once, I would like to attend an honest funeral. One where the rabbi doesn’t articulate what a loving family man the deceased was and instead lets us know that he was a living narcissistic creep who never had a kind word to say to anyone, let alone to his wife and children.

I have heard magnificent eulogies that the deceased themselves wouldn’t have recognised as relatable. And there are others where, if the soul of the dearly departed were present and hovering above the crowd, they might wonder if they were attending the wrong burial.

Just once I would like to shout an objection or at the very least enter a

“Community Notes”, as is allowed on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) when a user makes outlandishly and inaccurate statements.

This could be why I have only once been asked to speak at a funeral. And that was because Craig, the deceased’s funeral, took place at a Reform Temple in Staten Island, New York, and his family loved my “British” accent. To be fair to the clergy, having not known him particularly well and seeing him in the open casket beneath the pulpit at which I stood, I, too, kept it pleasant and even remarked how good Craig looked in the shiny blue suit he had last worn 20 years before at his Barmitzva. He

really did.

Barmitzvahs, although more joyous, are equally dishonest. Consider the following, if speeches at these events are to be believed, representation of Jewish soccer players in the first division should be significant. Sporting talent among our 13-year-olds – according to witnesses with a microphone – is impressive, with about 70% of youngsters showing remarkable talent. And yet, the reality is that this doesn’t seem to translate into successful sporting careers. And as it’s unlikely that we’re a community of liars, it must mean that something is going awry somewhere between the ages of 12 and 18. Those years are a deep hole

where Jewish sporting talent is lost.

Whereas a funeral speech might need to reflect a lifetime of achievement, Barmitzva and Batmitzva addresses don’t. As wonderful as our youth are, anything that they have accomplished by this age belongs to their parents, grandparents, and teachers. They stand without question on the threshold of greatness but to announce that they are one IQ point shy of Einstein, more generous than MrBeast, and more popular than Taylor Swift, is a serious case of premature exaltation.

Which I have heard, leaves everyone disappointed.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



Change is never easy. I’m not saying we should air a lifetime of indiscretions at a funeral, but when it comes to coming-of-age celebrations, let’s dial it back. Let’s honour our kids for who they truly are, not who they aren’t. Let’s skip the reminders of all the talents that they lack, and instead focus on celebrating the unique gifts they bring to the world.

Let’s leave hyperbole at the cemetery where it belongs.

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