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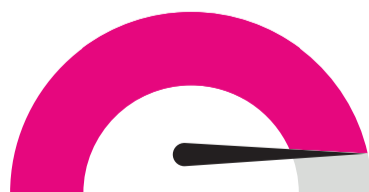
■ Volume 28 - Number 02 ■ 23 January 2025 ■ 23 Tevet 5785

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# Jewish Report

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Volume 28 - Number 02 ■ 23 January 2025 ■ 23 Tevet 5785

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## Israeli ophthalmology expert faces down SA bullies

NICOLA MILTZ

**A** renowned Israeli expert in ocular oncology will speak at the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa (OSSA) Congress next month despite facing a campaign of bullying and intimidation which forced the withdrawal of his invitation.

Professor Ido Didi Fabian's reinstatement at the congress this week, following a vote by OSSA members, comes after weeks of controversy instigated by the Islamic Medical Association (IMA) and condoned by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC). They not only called for a boycott of the congress, but launched a deeply offensive campaign likening the Israeli doctor to a Nazi wartime physician, a comparison particularly grotesque and hurtful given Fabian's family history.

Fabian, who has spent decades successfully treating children with life-threatening retinoblastoma, including Palestinian patients from Gaza and many from a number of African and other low-resource countries, has chosen to attend the congress despite the hostility.

"As doctors, our role is to build bridges, not deepen divides," he told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

"I have decided to come to South Africa so that I can share my knowledge and thank and meet the many people who have supported me these past few weeks."

One of them, Professor Grant McLaren, said the bullying tactics adopted by the anti-Israel lobby and its efforts to hijack the congress were "evil and shameful".

"It's puerile and infantile behaviour," said McLaren, who has also come under attack for being an Israel supporter.

The IMA criticised the OSSA not only for inviting Fabian, but for awarding McLaren

the prestigious DJ Wood memorial lecture and medal for lifetime service to South African ophthalmology. It labelled McLaren "a very public Zionist supporter on social media".

"I do pray that Professor Fabian attends the congress. He is a decent, humane person and delegates will gain hugely from his impact. Without him, it will collapse. Many colleagues will withdraw, including myself," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"You cannot exclude people on the basis of their religion or nationality. It's offensive to Christians as well."

At Sheba Medical Center in Israel, where Fabian serves as an ocular oncologist, he treats

children from all backgrounds, irrespective of their religion, nationality, or political context. He has also spearheaded global initiatives, including the Global Retinoblastoma Study Group, which unites nearly 1 000 professionals worldwide to improve care for this curable yet life-threatening paediatric cancer.

"There has been a malicious attempt to hijack the conference," said Dr Dory Neu-Ner of the South African Society of Paediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (SASPOS), responsible for inviting



Professor Ido Didi Fabian treating a baby from Bethlehem, Israel

Fabian as guest keynote speaker at the congress.

"A few months ago, a number of anti-Israel interest groups started putting pressure on the organising committee and the OSSA executive committee to withdraw Fabian's invitation because of his Israeli nationality.

"First indications were that the OSSA would withstand the bullying, but then the pressure started building up," said Neu-Ner.

He said that by December, the IMA had escalated the situation, issuing a call for a boycott of the congress and pressuring the OSSA to rescind its invitation.

The campaign quickly devolved into a series of aggressive and offensive tactics. The IMA and MJC vowed to involve political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters to denounce the congress and disrupt its proceedings. Sponsors and trade delegates were also pressured. OSSA and SASPOS members who stood by Fabian faced a backlash, creating fear and division.

Faced with these threats, Neu-Ner said OSSA "shamefully capitulated", rescinding Fabian's invitation on 12 January 2025, citing concerns about safety and potential disruptions.

The decision to disinvite Fabian sparked widespread condemnation. Critics accused OSSA of bowing to pressure and compromising its principles with many participants, Jew and non-Jew alike, threatening to withdraw attendance.

Amid this backlash, OSSA held an emergency executive committee meeting

**Continued on page 3>>**

### Back home



Nechama Freinkel-Ashkenazi, on a visit from Israel to family in South Africa, updates the status of the hostage poster of Doron Steinbrecher outside KoshersWorld in Glenhazel. Steinbrecher was one of the three young women released from Gaza on Sunday, 19 January.

See pages 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9.

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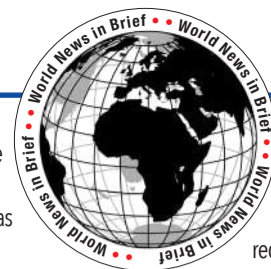
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### Israeli army chief resigns, citing 7 October failure

The chief of Israel's military has announced his resignation, taking responsibility for the failure that led to the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi is the latest senior Israeli leader to announce his resignation in the wake of the 7 October attack, which killed about 1 200 people, took about 250 hostage, and sparked the war in Gaza. Halevi made the announcement of his impending exit on Tuesday, 21 January, the third day of a ceasefire in that war. He will step down on 6 March, days after the ceasefire's initial six-week phase ends.

"On the first day of the war, I took responsibility, out loud, for the IDF's failure to defend civilians on Simchat Torah 5784," he said, using 7 October's Hebrew date. "The central goal of the IDF is to defend the citizens of the state. We failed. I have carried and will carry with me what happened on that terrible day for the rest of my life."

He defended what he said was the IDF's in-depth investigation of what led to 7 October. And he praised the achievements of the military in the nearly 16 months since in its conflicts with Hamas in Gaza; Hezbollah in Lebanon; terror groups in the West Bank; and in direct fighting with Iran.

"I'm responsible for the IDF's failures. I'm also responsible for the achievements," he said. "I will say at the outset that I wish those achievements were unnecessary. There's no achievement that will take away the pain, the suffering, and the great loss that was caused on the first day of the war."

And though he noted the ceasefire, through which dozens of Israeli hostages will be released over the first six weeks, he said the goals of the war

hadn't yet been fully achieved.

"We haven't yet returned all of the hostages, and we still have missions to complete against the rule of Hamas and against the group's remaining fighting and guerrilla capabilities," he said. "We are determined to achieve and be decisive."

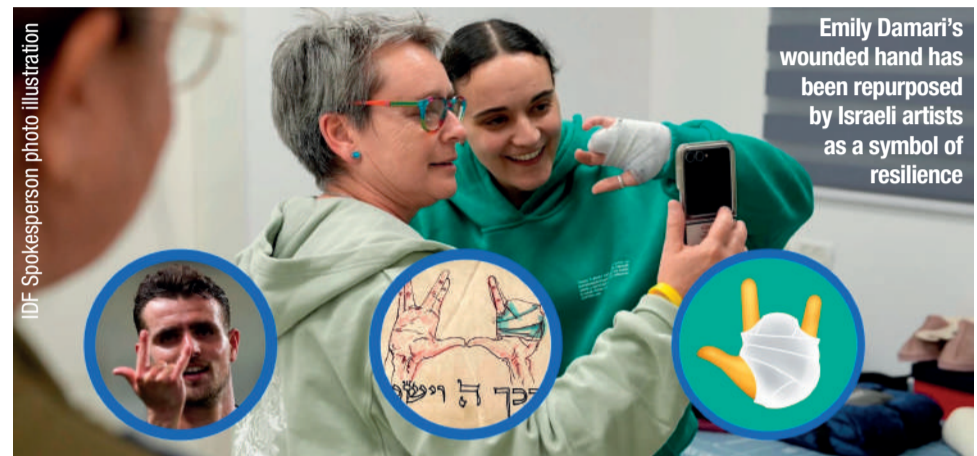
### Damari's injured hand becomes symbol of defiance

Within hours of her release from captivity in Gaza, Emily Damari's hand had become a new Israeli icon.

Damari was injured on 7 October 2023, when Hamas terrorists shot her and took her hostage. It became clear

The most widely circulated version was made by Aviad Amergi, an Israeli sneaker artist, who posted it on Instagram along with the words, "A great small victory." His followers quickly requested that he turn it into a sticker for WhatsApp, the messaging platform massively popular in Israel, where it soon circulated widely.

Others adapted Damari's gesture as well. A drawing of Damari's hands demonstrating the Jewish priestly blessing circulated online, with words from the biblical benediction, "May G-d bless you and keep you." The drawing was attributed to Moshe Shapira, a Jerusalem artist and architect whose son, Aner, was killed on 7 October after saving the lives of others.



IDF Spokesperson photo illustration

Emily Damari's wounded hand has been repurposed by Israeli artists as a symbol of resilience

after she was released on the first day of a ceasefire on Sunday that she had lost the ring and middle finger on her left hand.

The clearest evidence came in a photograph released by the Israeli government, and later confirmed by pictures her family shared, showing Damari video chatting with her brother and father. In it, she was smiling as she showed off her hand, which was bandaged, with her thumb, index, and pinky fingers visible.

Soon, supporters had added bandages to the "rock on" emoji, which uses the same configuration of fingers, to transform Damari's injury into a symbol of defiance. Damari's mother, Mandy, added the emoji to her handle on the social network X, and posted a photo with her daughter grinning while displaying the wounded hand.

Israeli soccer player Ohad Hazut made the sign with his hands after a win on Monday, 20 January, writing on Instagram, "An important victory."

And at least one Israeli has even had the image etched onto his leg as a tattoo, according to a video shared by the pro-Israel influencer Hen Mazzig.

Together, the symbol is emerging as a companion to "We Will Dance Again", the refrain adopted by survivors of the Nova festival massacre as a show of resilience for Israelis traumatised by 7 October. And it joins the yellow ribbon, which has become a ubiquitous symbol of advocacy for the hostages.

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## Born great, becoming greater Torah Thought



**Rabbi Pini Pink**  
Chabad of Greenstone

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." This famous line from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* feels especially relevant to this week's parshah, Va'era, where we are formally introduced to Moses.

Though Moses' birth is described earlier in *Exodus*, this week, the Torah details his lineage, tracing back to Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, through Levi, Moses' great-grandfather. Why does the Torah revisit Moses' background? What's the message behind his ancestry?

According to the Midrash, Moses was "born great", with a divine light filling his parents' home at his birth. As he grew, circumstances thrust greatness upon him. Despite his initial protests at the burning bush, G-d insisted Moses was the right leader for the Jewish people. But greatness is never just about destiny, it's also about personal effort.

This is where the concept of *yichus* – lineage – comes in. Often, *yichus* is used to gauge someone's merit, especially in the context of matchmaking. It reflects noble ancestry or spiritual merit, suggesting the influence of virtuous ancestors watching over their descendants. But *yichus* isn't everything. As history shows, Abraham, the first Jew, had no distinguished lineage, while Esau, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, squandered his spiritual inheritance.

The saying goes that *yichus* is like a series of zeros. If preceded by a "one" – representing personal merit – those zeros multiply its value. Without that "one", they remain meaningless. In other words, great lineage

without personal virtue is hollow.

The Torah's emphasis on Moses' genealogy counters potential misconceptions. With the mysticism surrounding his birth and mission, it could have been easy to mythologise him, much like figures in other religions. Instead, the Torah grounds Moses in reality: he was born to human parents, grew up in human circumstances, and achieved greatness through effort and divine guidance.

This lesson speaks to all of us. Though Moses was born into unique circumstances, his ultimate greatness

came from his actions and choices. Every Jewish child has the potential to be a Moshe Rabbeinu, a leader in their own generation, not because of their lineage, but because of their capacity for growth, self-refinement, and dedication to their mission.

Greatness isn't a birthright or mere happenstance. It's a choice, shaped by how we respond to the opportunities and challenges G-d places before us. Like Moses, we all have the potential to transform our inherent gifts and circumstances into a legacy of true greatness.

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In this week's parsha, Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, "Let My people go!" How beautiful was it to see three young girls being reunited with their families. Here's to many more. **Bring them all home.**

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# ADL under fire for condoning Musk's "Nazi" salute

ANDREW LAPIN – JTA

Hours after President Donald Trump's inauguration, many Jewish groups sounded the alarm when Elon Musk appeared twice to deliver a Nazi salute at the presidential parade.

But the Jewish group most famous for fighting antisemitism had a different take.

"It seems that Elon Musk made an awkward gesture in a moment of enthusiasm, not a Nazi salute," the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) wrote on 20 January in a statement on Musk's own social media platform X, referring to Musk's outstretched-arm that came as he was thanking his supporters.

"In this moment, all sides should give

a progressive group that has collaborated with the ADL, wrote on X. "If we can't, we're not ready for what's coming."

At a time when the ADL itself has documented historic levels of antisemitism, how did it decide to give the world's richest man the benefit of the doubt? The group declined to say.

The statement also raised questions among many about how the ADL planned to fight antisemitism during the second Trump administration, when a growing number of people in the president's inner circle, including Musk, have track records that include rhetoric and actions the ADL usually condemns. Shortly after defending Musk, the group condemned Trump's decision to pardon the 6 January rioters, a group that

request for comment.

Others, including many progressives, were quick to denounce Musk, the ADL, or both.

"Elon Musk, the richest man in the world and a high-ranking member of the new Trump administration, gave an unambiguous Nazi salute at a post-inauguration Trump rally," the Jewish Council of Public Affairs, a progressive group, wrote in an email. "We need to be prepared to call out and fight back against hate and extremism wherever we see it."

One of the most widely shared condemnations came from Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, one of the most prominent progressive voices in Washington.

"Just to be clear, you are defending a Heil Hitler salute that was performed and repeated for emphasis and clarity," she wrote in response to the ADL. "People can officially stop listening to you as any sort of reputable source of information now. You work for them."

That, in turn, drew backlash from a range of voices chiding Ocasio-Cortez, who isn't Jewish, for discounting the voice of a prominent Jewish group.

Zioness, which stated its "vehement" disagreement with the ADL, also accused Ocasio-Cortez of engaging in "exploitation of this moment to openly attack the most identifiable Jewish organisation in America." But it also said, "There's no such thing as an accidental Nazi salute."

IfNotNow, a progressive Jewish group that has been a prominent voice accusing Israel of genocide, said it was "appalled that the Anti-Defamation League, which purports to be the leading organisation fighting antisemitism, glossed over Musk's Nazi gesture, admonishing those of us who were aghast at the Hitler salute to give Musk 'the benefit of the doubt', even as the ADL assumes the worst intentions of those in the movement for Palestinian human rights."

The group said the ADL's statement "marks the completion of the ADL's transition from a civil rights organisation to a willing partner in the neo-fascist governing coalition".

This is far from Musk's first brush with accusations of antisemitism. Recently, he promoted the German far-right AfD party, whose politicians have downplayed the Holocaust, along with anti-immigrant figures and causes in the United Kingdom and

elsewhere. Weeks after Hamas's 7 October attack, he endorsed an antisemitic conspiracy theory shared on X as "the actual truth", prompting many advertisers to flee. He later mounted a rehabilitation effort, visiting Auschwitz, where he opined that X could have saved Jews from the Holocaust, and advocating on behalf of Israeli hostages in Gaza.

In recent months he has also praised a Tucker Carlson X interview with a Holocaust denier, though later deleted his endorsement of the video, and invited avowed antisemites, including Nick Fuentes, back onto the platform after they were banned by the site's previous owners.

But some pro-Israel and conservative influencers rushed to Musk's defence, accusing Ocasio-Cortez and other progressives of hypocrisy for not loudly condemning Nazi sympathisers and salutes at pro-Palestinian protests.

"Today, because Musk's gesture looked like a Nazi salute, today was the day they finally decided that Nazi salutes are bad," pro-Israel activist Jordyn Tilchen wrote on Instagram, in one representative post. Yet Tilchen also noted that "Musk should make a

statement" about his gesture, "because there are far right extremists on neo-Nazi Telegram channels right now who believe it was" a Nazi salute.

Also defending Musk was Representative Elise Stefanik, Trump's nominee for ambassador to the United Nations, who made a name for herself by condemning university presidents for their response to antisemitism. Stefanik took part of her Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday to deny Democratic Senator Chris Murphy's charge that Musk had performed "two Heil Hitler salutes".

"No, Elon Musk did not do those salutes," Stefanik responded. "The American people are smart. They see through it. They support Elon Musk. We're proud to be the country of such successful entrepreneurs."

Musk, for his part, pinned a video of his speech with the salute to the top of his X page. He also mocked critics without explicitly clarifying the salute's intent, writing on X, "Frankly, they need better dirty tricks. The 'everyone is Hitler' attack is sooo tired." He called a Wikipedia page mentioning his salute "an extension of legacy media propaganda".



Elon Musk at the Inauguration Day rally showing what looked like a Nazi salute

one another a bit of grace," the ADL said, "perhaps even the benefit of the doubt, and take a breath. This is a new beginning."

Musk replied, "Thanks guys," adding a laughing emoji.

Others were less grateful for the ADL's response. A range of groups on the left have long opposed the ADL for what they say is an improper focus on policing pro-Palestinian speech and advocating for Israel, and they criticised the group's reaction to Musk's gesture. But they were joined by others who have aligned in the past with the ADL, including pro-Israel group Zioness, which said it "vehemently disagreed with ADL's take on Elon Musk's behaviour today".

"When we see what is clearly a Nazi salute – without apology or clarification – we must unequivocally call it out. Organisations committed to fighting antisemitism must do so no matter where on the political spectrum it comes from," the New York Jewish Agenda,

included members of far-right extremist groups, and also praised his newly sworn-in secretary of state, Marco Rubio.

The ADL's own former director, Abraham Foxman, wrote on X that he considered Musk's actions "very disconcerting", writing, "Elon Musk may be the world's richest man, but that doesn't excuse thanking Trump supporters with a Heil Hitler Nazi salute."

Deborah Lipstadt, who served as the Biden administration's special envoy combating global antisemitism until this week, downplayed the incident.

"We have much, much bigger things to worry about regarding contemporary antisemitism than this particular issue," Lipstadt told JTA, saying she was referring both to Musk's salute and the ADL's response. Lipstadt separately told The Forward she accepted the ADL's reading of the gesture as "awkward". The US Holocaust Memorial and Museum didn't respond to a

## Israeli ophthalmology expert faces down SA bullies

>>Continued from page 1

on 16 January 2025, where it resolved to put the matter to a vote among its members. The results were resounding: 81.8% of members voted to reinstate Fabian's invitation.

OSSA later issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to non-discrimination and calling for unity. "OSSA remains a non-political organisation that doesn't discriminate based on race, gender, nationality, or religion. We ask all members to respect the outcome of the vote," it said. Fabian's personal story adds poignancy to the saga. In an earlier letter to OSSA recounting his family's history, he said his father had narrowly escaped Poland in 1938, less than a year before the Nazi occupation. "My maternal grandmother, an orthopaedic surgeon, served in the Red Army during World War II, while my grandfather died in the war. My mother and grandmother eventually fled Europe as Jewish refugees, arriving in Israel in 1948."

"I have dedicated my career to caring for patients with ocular tumours, particularly children with retinoblastoma, a curable yet deadly paediatric malignancy. My focus has been specifically on improving care in low-resource countries."

The OSSA Congress 2025, scheduled

to be held from 12 to 15 February at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, will proceed with Fabian as one of seven distinguished international speakers from the United States, United Kingdom, and India.

"While the reinstatement marks a victory for fairness and professionalism," said Neuner, "the incident highlights the persistent challenge of combating antisemitism and discrimination in professional spaces."

"These are challenging times," said Fabian. "I have to deal with the fact that I'm Jewish, I'm Israeli, and I collaborate with doctors from many countries, some of which are the enemies of Israel such as Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, and others. I have to face up to anti-Israel groups in different parts of the world, including South Africa. But I feel that my passport is a medical passport. As a medical doctor, my goal is to help people, especially little children, no matter who they are and where they come from."

Despite the ordeal, Fabian has expressed hope for future collaboration. "I'm happy to work with colleagues from all backgrounds, including those in South Africa. Let's set aside boycotts and disputes to focus on what matters: saving lives and advancing medicine."

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## SA politicians use Gaza ceasefire to roast Israel again

STEVEN GRUZD

South African government departments, political parties, and parliament have heaped blame on Israel in highly loaded, emotive language, and barely mention Hamas in their response to the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. They casually deploy the term “genocide”. And some are remarkable for what they don’t say.

The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) welcomed the ceasefire, but said it came “after 15 months of Israel’s genocidal onslaught on Gaza, after Hamas and other armed groups launched an attack on Israel”. An attack? This wasn’t a minor shooting or stabbing. More than 1 200 innocent people were murdered, and 250 taken as hostage into Gaza’s labyrinth of subterranean tunnels on 7 October 2023. That triggered this brutal war.

DIRCO says the International Court of Justice (ICJ) deemed Israel’s actions in Gaza “plausibly genocidal”, an interpretation at odds with many legal experts. DIRCO calls for a two-state solution, respect for human rights, and no further annexation of land by Israel. It further urges a ban on settlement expansion and the rapid acceleration of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

There isn’t a single word about the almost 100 hostages still being held by Hamas in the most inhumane and appalling conditions. DIRCO essentially shows no sympathy for their plight. No wonder the South African Jewish community feels abandoned and betrayed by its government!

Traditionally, the African National Congress (ANC) uses even more extremist language than DIRCO, and it doesn’t disappoint in this regard

in its January 8th Statement. It “continues to condemn the genocidal slaughter and ethnic cleansing by the apartheid Israeli government”. It cites 55 000 Gazans killed, almost 10 000 higher than official figures. It claims that more than 100 000 were forced to flee Gaza. Where did they go, as the Egyptian and Israeli borders are closed?

The ANC calls on the government “to remain seized with the cases at the ICJ and International Criminal Court”. It does call for “the release of hostages and political prisoners”, although scores of convicted criminals who murdered Israelis will be released as well. These aren’t political prisoners.

The statement advocates a two-state solution based on 1967 borders. It doesn’t say that Israel should be a Jewish state; its detractors never do. It has also been said before that everyone wants two states – except for the Palestinians and Israelis.

Not to be outdone, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) issued the most detailed – and antagonistic – statement. The opposition party

acknowledges the ceasefire agreement “as a small but critical reprieve in Israel’s genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people”. The EFF ignores Hamas’s launching this war due to its maniacal killing spree on 7 October, and its capture of hostages.

The EFF says the Gazans “have endured systematic starvation and medical blockades”, and that the ICJ ruled that withholding aid “constitutes extermination – a verdict Israel has flagrantly ignored”. This is untrue. Israel has allowed more than a million tonnes of supplies into Gaza since the start of the war.

The EFF statement does acknowledge that the deal provides for 33 hostages to be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails over a six-week period. It notes that Israel must allow Palestinians to return to their

destroyed homes, and that the number of aid trucks entering Gaza daily is set to increase drastically. “While these steps offer a glimpse of hope, they do not erase the catastrophic destruction inflicted upon Gaza or the genocidal intent behind Israel’s actions,” it said. However, this view has decidedly not been upheld by the ICJ, which is still investigating the charges.

Also playing the numbers game, the EFF says more than 100 000 Palestinians have been killed, almost doubling official figures. It says “the indiscriminate destruction of Gaza’s hospitals, schools, universities, and places of worship reveals the genocidal intent of Israel’s occupation. The aim is clear: to erase Palestinian history, identity, and existence from their ancestral land.” This is a highly partisan view of this complex conflict. It fails to mention, of course, that Hamas has shamelessly used these civilian buildings to house its fighters and weapons.

Pledging unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people, the EFF says, “We ... categorically reject the framing of their struggle as terrorism and instead recognise it as a battle for freedom against a colonial occupation that has endured for far too long.”

Wielding words as weapons, the EFF calls Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and “the Israeli occupation forces” war criminals. It calls for South Africa to implement resolutions of the previous parliament, including the “the expulsion of the Israeli Embassy (sic)” and cutting all diplomatic ties with Israel.

Parliament’s Portfolio Committee on International Relations weighed in too. Committee Chairperson Supra Mahumapelo said, “South Africa is vindicated once more. It gives great pleasure to realise that even Israel herself was not convinced about the correctness of indiscriminate genocidal attacks that affected so many children, women, and other vulnerable groups in that region ... This bout of aggression against civilians has never been seen anywhere possibly in history.” Supra liberally uses superlatives.

In the same breath, despite the country being so aggressive towards Israel, he has the audacity to claim, “South Africa is committed to its stance of negotiated solutions to conflict, and it remains non-aligned in its diplomatic posture. We are on the side of peace and negotiations. That’s what we offer as an intervention to conflicts.”

Other political parties, including those in the government of national unity like the Democratic Alliance and many others, have been totally silent about the ceasefire. That speaks volumes too.



EFF Deputy President Gardee Godrich giving his views on *Russia Today*

## Trump victory a triumph of faith

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I’ve been a loyal and committed Trump supporter ever since that famous day in 2015 when citizen Donald Trump descended the golden escalator in Trump Tower Manhattan announcing his intentions to Americans and the world that he would be running for the United States presidency. Thinking back to my own predictions of Trump’s certain success in those early days, it was a bold, unrealistic, and unpopular view. My support for Trump has been a central theme in my life over many years. My family, friends, and associates have known my unwavering views. Our interactions, discussions, and debates often surrounded Trump and his constantly transactional approach to complex problems facing America and the world – and the solutions to them.

In the early days of Trump’s 2015 campaign, I even wrote to the campaign volunteering to join the team as it battled its way through the rallies of the “land of the free and home of the brave”.

I closely followed Trump’s path to the White House. Slowly but surely, my predictions were realised, and when Trump was inaugurated in 2016, I was inspired to be there. I made my way to Washington, D.C. with my wife, Andy, and son-in-law, Fitch Bronstein. Together with hundreds of thousands of supporters, we celebrated the inauguration of the new president and the



Mark Stein, his wife Andy, and sons Yisroel and Yehudah at Donald Trump’s victory rally in Washington, D.C. on 18 January

dawn of the new era.

Even during the uncertain years of the subsequent 2020 elections, the lawsuits, libels, “fake news”, and the establishment’s efforts to keep Trump away from power, I remained faithful and resolute that Trump would fight, fight, fight and win, win, win. Losing is simply not in his vocabulary.

The 2024 elections and its results tell the story exactly as it is. Trump was again chosen by the people, for the people, producing record wins in both the electoral college and popular vote, with voters expressing America’s desire to be great again. There was no way I would miss the opportunity, for the second inauguration. Andy and I again made our way to Washington, D.C., this time with my two sons, Yisroel and Yehudah.

Messages of encouragement,

amazement, and inspiration poured in from my many friends and associates around the world. I always understood that America and its presidency was a global issue and quickly realised that people were sharing my excitement over Trump’s victory. We formed a WhatsApp group with more than 500 interested participants who followed our every move and interaction. Trump supporters or not, everybody understood the relevance and global impact of this historic inauguration.

We spent Shabbos with Rabbi Levi Shemtov at Chabad of D.C. The energy was palpable, with dignitaries from all over America, Israel, and Europe. Washington continued to fill up, and we interacted with many celebrities, statesmen, government officials, and regular citizens. Wherever we

went, the many visitors were amazed by our determination and effort to travel across the globe to participate in the inauguration.

As it happened, Washington, D.C. was hit with unusually severe cold, rain, and winds. The president made the call to move the inauguration indoors, denying the many hundreds of thousands of people the opportunity to attend the ceremony in person. I must say, we were disappointed, but for those who know me, my optimism is unwavering and I believe everything is for the good. In a sense, the change of venue encouraged people to be more engaging, and gave us further opportunities to connect with people in a more meaningful way.

On Sunday, 19 January, we attended the Trump victory rally in the Capital One Arena on the eve of the inauguration ceremony. People stood in line for seven or eight hours in the freezing cold and rain, the line full of jubilation and excitement. This was certainly a highlight of our trip, as we joined the thousands of people fortunate enough to gain entry into the arena. Key members of his administration shared messages of victory, hope, inspiration, positivity, and the changed approach to the future of America, Israel, and the world.

In the midst of the celebrations, the hostage deal was looming, sparking further discussion, debate, hope, and sadness. I was reminded that *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*

are no less important than the inauguration, arguably the most significant political event in modern history. All the news agencies, visitors, and discussions were fixed on the unfolding events. As South Africans, we were questioned about our government’s disappointing actions in its case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. Wherever we went, we expressed difficulty with our government’s stance, and reiterated Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein’s strong voice on this issue, namely that the South African government doesn’t represent the people of South Africa. As ardent Chassidim of The Rebbe, we echoed The Rebbe’s voice that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people, and that the security of its inhabitants can never be compromised.

I’m confident that Trump’s presidency will be great for America, Israel, *Am Yisrael*, and the whole world. The president is forward looking, positive, resolute, and an extremely strong leader! Enjoy the ride and as a masterstroke of succession, Trump chose Vice President JD Vance, just 40 years young, to lead the Republican Party in the future. My belief is that he will, please G-d, be elected the 48th United States president.

• Mark Adam Stein is a South African international entrepreneur based in Johannesburg.



# EFF leader alleges Cape Town 'Zionist' land conspiracy

TALI FEINBERG

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) member of the National Assembly, Mogamad Nazier Paulsen, has blamed the dearth of reasonably priced property in Cape Town on Jews.

He wrote on Facebook recently that people struggling to buy a home in the Mother City should "blame it on people who vote DA [Democratic Alliance] and give them the power to wheel and deal with our land over Shabbas". Paulsen wrote this in response to a Facebook post about a Shabbat dinner celebrating Cape Town being voted "best city in the world" by *TimeOut* magazine.

He was referring to former ward councillor for the Atlantic Seaboard and current property consultant Jacques Weber's post, in which he described a celebratory Shabbat dinner at the home of Cape property icon Denise Dogon.

The guests included City of Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis and Western Cape Premier Alan Winde, both of the DA. "The evening was one of thoughtful discussion, celebration, and pride in Cape Town's continued success on the global stage," wrote Weber.

Paulsen wrote about Dogon Properties, a Jewish-owned company, on his own Facebook page on 18 January, saying, "To make it in the property market, you need solid connections with powerful politicians. Powerful like the premier and the mayor. And you need to be a cold-hearted Zionist."

"If lucrative land is released on the Atlantic Seaboard or anywhere in Cape Town, it's been released with a certain buyer in mind, discussed over dinners," he wrote. He imagined a fictitious scenario in which property agents ask Cape leaders, "Given the Atlantic Seaboard has a very influential Jewish community, with half our agents of that faith, are your Muslim buyers Jewish by any chance?"



places. There's an air of white and Zionist monopoly driving through Clifton and Camps Bay and the like," wrote Tris Dampies.

Abduragmaan Mohamed, whose profile picture shows a Star of David dripping blood, wrote that Paulsen was describing "colonisation under the guise of democracy". "Europeans out-voting the indigenous people, out-voting them from their land. End dual citizenship! Don't allow another Palestine with Zionist dual citizenship! End corrupt Zionist DA!"

Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says his organisation is investigating Paulsen's comments.

Conspiracy theories suggesting that the DA and Jews are colluding to "sell off", "colonise", and "occupy"

the Western Cape often circulate on social media. For example, in early 2024, an article published by the South African Muslim Network, warning Western Cape residents to "Wake up before you find a little Israel near you!" was widely shared. It stated that "The Zionist new world order has come to the Western Cape, and people must rise up and stop it."

Local antisemitism expert Professor Milton Shain says both Paulsen's post and the comments on it are "a replay of European discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – with one difference. The

commentators – to further a political agenda – use the word 'Zionists' instead of 'Jews'. But the meaning is obvious. Allusions to the Israeli 'occupation' ensures this. At times, the veil is dropped, exposing an ugly underbelly informed by simple hate.

"The mayor and premier should nip this in the bud," says Shain. "Language of this kind never has a good ending. Especially disturbing are the comments by Paulsen. Is this acceptable for a parliamentarian?"

Paulsen wrote that Weber had deleted the post about the Shabbat dinner, but Weber told the *SA Jewish Report* that he didn't delete it, he simply blocked Paulsen on Facebook as he wouldn't "engage with individuals who clearly have antisemitic tendencies".

Weber says Paulsen's comments about the increase in property prices "couldn't be more incorrect, but that's the manner in which he operates. Cape Town property prices are increasing due to the demand to own property in a city that is one of the only major functioning municipalities in South Africa. This says a lot about other provinces, which are failing hands-down under the management of other political parties."

He notes that Paulsen's agenda is always "to drive a wedge [between people] based on religion and cultural beliefs, but history has shown that the majority of Cape Town citizens don't tolerate this. If he really understood how government worked, he would also know that eligibility to vote is set out in the Constitution, and regardless of who runs Home Affairs, such policy changes would need the support of the full Cabinet to be tabled before a parliamentary setting."

Member of the National Assembly for the DA, Michael Bagraim, says, "In this blatantly antisemitic and discriminatory post, Paulsen lets down his veneer of disguise by mentioning Jews. People of his type normally hide behind the word 'Zionist'. They try desperately to

pretend that some of their best friends are Jews."

He notes that Paulsen earns more than R1 million per year, with other perks. "He pretends to be exceptionally poor and part of the proletariat," says Bagraim. "But in one of his replies to followers, he asks the individual to 'organise me a lekker property on the Atlantic Seaboard to occupy. It must at least have a lap pool for exercising.'"

"The reality is that Paulsen has nothing to offer other than to attack the other," says Bagraim. "His own political party, the EFF, is collapsing around him. He talks about the Atlantic Seaboard being a cesspool of racism, which is strange, because that's exactly what he's guilty of. The negativity found in his discourse is unfortunately indicative of the individual."



Jacques Weber and City of Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis

Paulsen stated that the Atlantic Seaboard, where many Jews live, is "a cesspool of racism and Islamophobia". Then, writing on X on 20 January, he said an anti-Israel "carcade" protest through Sea Point the day before had "descended upon the occupied Atlantic Seaboard" in celebration of "the victory of the faithful over evil and falsehood".

Commenting on his Facebook post about the Shabbat dinner, many South Africans agreed with Paulsen's conspiracy theories. "The bogus Jews – Zionists – are streaming into the Western Cape in their hundreds every day, and have identified the Western Cape as their safe haven," wrote one follower, Charles Nene.

"Selling off Cape Town piece by piece. European settlers flooding in just like in the West Bank and soon to be Gaza. Same modus operandi. Zionist mafia property developers being facilitated by the City of Cape Town to seize and gentrify land," wrote Patric Tariq Mellet. "The DA and the city being joined at the hip to Zionist property developer mafias is corruption, no different to the Gupta scenario."

"I recently visited Cape Town, and something felt incredibly ominous about the sheer opulence in some

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## Resilience through anguish

Seeing those three young Israeli women hugging their mothers for the first time in almost 16 months was heartbreaking, but beautiful. I'm sure that we all felt the sheer love and understanding between them. For the first time in 471 days, Romi Gonen, Emily Damari, and Doron Steinbrecher felt safe and protected.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who wondered how they would come home. I was surprised at how well they looked. But looks can always be deceiving, and we have no idea what these women endured. I have no doubt that they were truly happy to be home and with their families no matter what they had been through in Gaza.

I also know that Israel is pulling out all the stops to get them healthy, mentally and psychologically, as best it can.

I'm not sure that we'll ever hear the truth of what they endured in Gaza, but what's truly astonishing is how they survived. The story of how they held and supported each other, giving strength when they had it. We heard that Romi – a trained medic from Kfar Veradim, a town up north, who was captured at the Nova festival – tended to Emily's wounds. Emily had three of her fingers shot off on 7 October 2023, when she was captured on Kibbutz Kfar Aza. As I understand it, Romi ensured that Emily's hand and leg, which sustained shrapnel wounds on 7 October, didn't get infected. This was in the worst conditions.

And a smiling Emily has unwittingly turned her wounded hand into a symbol of bravery, heroism, and freedom. In fact, it has already become an emoji, and is being spread far and wide.

Many of us noticed that the women returned with their hair neatly braided, only to discover braiding each other's hair was a form of empowerment in a situation in which they had no power. And it was a clear message of determination to survive no matter what in the most horrific situations. These scenarios of how women – and I'm sure it wasn't only women – held each other up in hell, was astonishing and inspiring. That was how they survived, by being each other's strength.



In the helicopter, there's a photograph taken of Doron and Emily smiling and holding up a sign that reads in Hebrew, "The nightmare is over." And later, Emily tells her mother, "I have come back to life." While this is all poignant and heart-wrenching, it speaks of the sheer resilience and determination of these women to survive.

What they had to put up with, we don't know. But for their Hamas captors to give them 'goody bags' filled with photos of their captivity, a map of Gaza, and certificates of their capture, was their final act of humiliation. Shoving their faces in what they had endured was revolting, but I'm sure nothing compared to what they had already been through and survived.

As we head towards the International Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, which commemorates the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz

concentration camp, we recall this same kind of resilience among Jews back then. In the most inhumane and horrifying conditions there and at other concentration camps, those who survived did so against all odds.

I have to say, all these months without knowing what was happening to the hostages, I had a sense that they might not have survived. However, having seen these women emerge as they did with such determination, I'm now sure many more will come home. I'm also sure that despite their resilience, there's a long road to recovery from their horrific ordeal. No matter how strong, brave, and relieved they look, it will take a lot of hard work to get past what happened to them.

And it's clear that their connection with those who remain behind is strong. As they come out, so they make the point of not leaving 94 others behind. They can't truly be free until all those who were with them are home as well.

And so, we wait until this coming Saturday for the next four hostages to return. We don't even know yet if they are alive or not.

I have no doubt that all Israelis are excited and relieved to have Emily, Doron, and Romi home, and that they are filled with anticipation and hope for the others to be returned. However, many Israelis aren't happy with the deal brokered that enables 90 criminal prisoners to be released in exchange for only the three girls and it's just the start of the massive release of hardened terror mongers and criminals.

But Israel is a country full of so many opinions. There's no doubt that handing over convicted criminals cannot sit well with anyone in Israel, but there are so many different ways of seeing it and what will happen from here.

Because of this, we haven't given you just one person's view. We've included in this edition different views and angles by people with a depth of knowledge. Read Dr Dan Diker, Gershon Baskin, and Rabbi Moshe Taragin's perspectives on this. They all bring such insight to bear in this discussion. It's also fascinating to read Steven Gruzds' piece describing how the South African government and political parties have responded to the deal.

Meanwhile United States President Donald Trump was inaugurated, and thrilled and shocked many with his inauguration speech. The question many are asking in our community is, will he or his predecessor, Joe Biden, be remembered for bringing the hostages home? And will all the hostages come home? How will we view this agreement over time? What impact will it have on Israel and the Jewish world?

These are among many questions that only time will provide answers to.

We at the SA Jewish Report would like to congratulate another strong and courageous Jewish woman. *Kol hakavod* to South African Jewish Board of Deputies national director, Wendy Kahn, for being selected by global Jewish news publication *Algemeiner* as one of the 100 people making an impact in the Jewish world. We are proud of you!

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## I exposed Lithuanian duplicity for you, Zayde

OPEN LETTER

GRANT GOCHIN



Dear Zayde,  
Growing up in South Africa, you implored me to "remember [*zachor*]": I was to remember who we Jews are and where we came from. You showed me the photos and told me stories. You taught me only love. You asked me to visit our family cemetery in the "old country", and to recite kaddish for our family. Zayde, I have.

So then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I travelled to the "old country", specifically Lithuania. Once there, my first destination was your *shtetl*. There was nothing Jewish remaining. They destroyed everything. Deliberately. I erected a new gravestone where I could say kaddish.

The cemeteries were in utter disarray and in shambles. It was glaringly apparent to me that the overgrowth was intentional. No-one wanted to remember that Jews had lived in Lithuania.

Together with others, I began to document and restore dozens of Jewish cemeteries in Lithuania. *Zachor* Zayde, we preserved memory.

I searched for survivors. I found Sarah, our only cousin, who survived the Shoah. Sarah's descendants and I have formed strong family bonds. We remember. We are a family again. Everybody else was murdered. Lithuanians did it. Not Nazis.

My research led me to other survivors who could easily have been our Jewish relatives. I helped them Zayde, to the best of my ability. We worked tirelessly to support and love them. That is what you would have expected from me. I delivered.

I began to research your life. You didn't tell me of the brutality and cruelty Lithuanians perpetrated against you, your mother, your father, and your siblings. You sheltered me because you worried that I was too young to comprehend. Indeed, even as an adult, it's almost impossible to comprehend the cruelty and viciousness Lithuanians perpetrated against our family. They did so viciously, opportunistically, and joyously.

Zayde, you embodied the dignity of Litvaks. I wanted the Lithuanians to know your name. Simply for them to know you had existed, and to record your name in a modern document. I applied for Lithuanian citizenship. I didn't need their citizenship, because I'm American now. I just wanted to preserve your memory. Lithuania denied you existed. They lied. They slandered you. When I applied, they used every tool they could create to deny citizenship to any Jew.

Zayde, you were pure love and dignity, and I wouldn't allow such monstrous people to obliterate and sully your name. I declared moral war on the Lithuanian government, and fought it in its own courts. I exposed its modern virulent antisemitism. I won. I'm now a citizen of Lithuania. Many of your grandchildren are also.

We have used Lithuania's slanders against you to crack open its stealth wall of hate. Now, through and because of you, many thousands of Jews have reclaimed their Lithuanian citizenship. Because of the principles you instilled in me to fight for truth, stand for respect, and defend the vulnerable. *Zachor*.

Reciting kaddish as you asked me to, I discovered the identity of the murderer of our own family. His name was Jonas Noreika. Lithuania considers him its national hero! Initially, I couldn't believe that such an evil ideology was still possible. I did what you asked of me, Zayde, I stood up for truth. I approached the Lithuanian government to explain to it that it had made a "mistake".

In my own mind, it wasn't possible that a monster who murdered thousands of his own co-citizens simply because they were Jews could be elevated to a modern-day national hero. But I made a horrific discovery. The Lithuanian government has fraudulently rewritten its national history and has zero tolerance for truth.

I tried everything. I was able to show it the facts. It treated me just as they had treated you and all of our relatives – with contempt and brutality.

Zayde, you had no ability to stand up to Lithuanians

during your lifetime, so I did it for you.

I did it for all its victims, for all Jews. I demanded that the Lithuanian government tell the truth. I fought it with every fibre of my being.

Lithuania almost won.

It declared its murderers as its heroes, and contemptuously told us few surviving Jews that Lithuania was a rescuer nation. Zayde, it spat in your face. It had only contempt for the 220 000 Jews their national heroes had murdered.

No Holocaust organisation would help me. They were bystanders. No Jewish institution helped me. Almost nobody would help me fight for the truth. I realised that if I didn't stand up for you and for all 220 000 murder victims, Lithuania would successfully declare itself the victim of its own murders. Doing that, the memory of every Lithuanian Jewish murder victim would be murdered again. It was the murder of truth and the murder of memory. How could I accept this and still face you? I couldn't.

Your life lessons left me no choice but to fight. I sued them in every court in their country, I sued them in the European Court of Human Rights and at the United Nations. I faced down their death threats, their threats of criminal and constitutional charges, their slanders, and their attacks. It was them or you. I had no choice. You were love, they are hate. I couldn't have lived with myself had I allowed them to repeat their vile conduct.

I fought them for 15 years. I spent hundreds of thousands of hours fighting them. You gave me no option. Allowing them to win would have been a betrayal of you and every Jewish victim.



Samuel Gochin, in Lithuanian military uniform of 5th Grand Duke Kestutis Doughboys Infantry  
Source: Gochin Family Archive

I led a decade-long international media campaign against the Lithuanian government to expose the truth. I spent years researching, bringing truths to light, and preserving memory. I sat on boards where we preserved documents and authentic history. I dedicated my life to remembering, documenting, and preserving. Respect for you dominated my world and motivated all of my actions.

Good Lithuanians helped. Noreika's own granddaughter, Silvia Foti, stepped forward to tell the truth about her grandfather. Michael Kretzmer made an extraordinary documentary to expose the truth. And under the withering glare of international media, Lithuania finally crumbled.

Lithuania has admitted only some of Noreika's crimes. It remains the most intense Holocaust revisionist in the world. It continues to lie about its many murderer heroes whose crimes I have exposed. Lithuania's national history is a fraud, but we have finally penetrated the wall of its deception. And the world now knows. I have restored the truth.

Zayde, I have honoured your legacy. You may now rest in peace. I love you.

• South African-born Grant Gochin is actively involved in Jewish affairs in the United States, Israel, and Lithuania.



# Waiting in trepidation

OPINION

As Israelis prepared this past week for the ceasefire and hostage exchange between Hamas and Israel, the tension and anxiety was palpable. All we can do is wait – and pray. For more than 470 days, 94 of our brothers and sisters stolen on 7 October have languished in the hell of captivity in Gaza.

Four other hostages, Avera Mengistu; Hisham al Sayed; and the remains of fallen soldiers Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin have been in captivity since 2014.

We know from medical experts and the testimony of former hostages the horror that they are enduring in captivity. Compounding the anxiety is that we still don't know who is still alive and who is dead. In the first phase of this ceasefire and hostage exchange, 33 will be released. Three of the 33 were released on 19 January. It's estimated that 25 are still alive. The agony is that this leaves more than 60 still in captivity as we move through the next phases.

If we're feeling anxious and full of trepidation, we cannot begin to imagine what the families of hostages are enduring.

In a clandestine operation over the weekend, the Israel Defense Forces and Shin Bet recovered the remains of Shaul, bringing them home for a dignified burial. As his brother said, the circle has now been closed. All we want is for our hostages who are alive to be brought home to start the recovery process, and

for the dead to be laid to rest with dignity so that their families have a place to mourn.

For more than 470 days, hostages' families, Israelis, and many around the world have lobbied, rallied, screamed, demanded, pleaded, prayed, and cried, "Bring them home!" For more than 470 days, we have agonised and raged, thinking about them in the terror dungeons of Gaza or treated as veritable slaves by the people who have held them captive. For more than

470 days, we have come to think of the hostages as members of our families and essentially, they are. We know their names; we know that they aren't just numbers in an agreement document, but a whole universe. Every single one. Their images have smiled at us from posters we have shared all over the world. Perhaps the one that resonates the most is a toothless, gummy smile belonging to a flame haired

baby boy – Kfir Bibas. Kfir turned two in captivity on Sunday. He has never celebrated a birthday.

As you can imagine, there has been a multitude of opinions in Israel both for and against this deal. Essentially, Israel had to make a deal with the devil, which would seem unimaginable, but the devil has our babies and grandfathers, our mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, and so we'll do what we need to do because there's no *mitzvah* more important than

the redemption of the captive.

The disproportionate amount of Palestinian terrorists who will be released as part of the deal is a difficult pill for Israelis to swallow. While none of the Nukhba terrorists are included as part of this deal, those that will be released have committed some of the most heinous terror attacks committed against Israelis in the history of the country. We can never forget that 7 October mastermind Yahya Sinwar was part of the infamous swap for Gilad Shalit in 2011. For us as a nation, the raw, gaping wound inflicted on us by Hamas on 7 October cannot even begin to heal until they are all home. All of them.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar have stressed in recent days that this ceasefire is temporary and if Hamas breaks the deal, we'll resume the war with full backing of the United States. Our war goals, which include the removal of Hamas from power, haven't changed, both leaders stressed. Israel's comforter-in-chief, President Isaac Herzog, addressed the nation last week, finding the right words that struck a balance between the joy of redeeming the hostages and the fury about the conditions of this deal. I'm of the belief that like him or loathe him, Netanyahu is a canny negotiator, and there's a lot more to this agreement than meets the eye or has been leaked from the negotiation room.

In the meantime, Israelis wait, holding our collective breath. As the first three hostages, Emily Damari; Romi Gonen; and Doron Steinbrecher were released back into the loving arms of their families, the road to recovery will be long, but we'll walk alongside them every step of the journey.

Now we wait. Who will be released next? The waiting is excruciating.

• *Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.*



ROLENE MARKS



Romi Gonen, Emily Damari, and Doron Steinbrecher reunited with their families

Photo: Israel Defense Forces

## In Tel Aviv's Hostage Square, Hamas looms large even as tension turns to celebration

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

"They are in our hands," Israel Defense Forces spokesperson Daniel Hagari said on the huge screen that was broadcasting the tense release of the three hostages returned to Israel: Romi Gonen, Emily Damari, and Doron Steinbrecher.

The statement, echoing the famous 1967 declaration after the Israeli army's capture of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, was met with raucous cheers from the thousands gathered in Hostage Square.

Over the course of three hours, crowds had gathered to watch the livestream in almost total silence, broken only occasionally with ripples of political chants and religious songs: "All of them, now!" and *Am Yisrael Chai*.

Finally, images of the three women, released together in a single vehicle, were broadcast to whoops and tears of joy. In one image, a small smile from Damari captured the screen and the crowd.

But footage showing rows of armed Hamas fighters flanking the vehicle and appearing to stave off crowds of Palestinian bystanders rattled some well-wishers.

"I'm feeling a huge sense of relief obviously, but it's also scary seeing Hamas like that," said Gila Levitan, a psychotherapist and tour guide who is originally from Australia. "How scared they must be during the transfer, and also seeing all those crowds behind them. Does Hamas have control of them? Will they be able to control them in future transfers?"

The footage of the Hamas fighters also offered a stark reminder that the terror group remains in charge of Gaza despite 15 months of war that has eliminated many top leaders, decimated the ranks, and battered the territory.

Israeli officials say just two of the group's 24 battalions remain operational, and United States President Joe Biden said on Sunday, 19 January, that he wasn't worried about the group's resurgence. But the organisation has been regrouping under the leadership of Mohammed Sinwar, the younger brother of the leader Israel

assassinated in October, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week that the US's assessment was that Hamas had gained as many fighters as it had lost.

Later, drone footage would show that the dense crowd of Hamas fighters wasn't deep. But as it was broadcast, the handover of the three women on Sunday was virtually identical to those that unfolded in the last week of November 2023, when 105 hostages, mainly women and children, were released during a temporary truce. Masked Hamas fighters in uniform, with green



The pictures of the three women released by Hamas on display in Hostage Square

headbands, rode with the women before sending them off into the arms of the Red Cross – reportedly with "gift bags" containing maps of Gaza and certificates of their captivity.

"It's scary to think they still call the shots," said Hodaya, who declined to give her last name.

Hodaya went on to say that she was concerned about the price of the hostage deal, in which nearly 2 000 security prisoners are expected to walk free.

"It's nerve-racking because it's such a high price to pay, but at the same time every price is right," she said. "This is how much we value life. We just have to trust that the state will know how to deal with it."

For some in the crowd, even seeing the women alive didn't offer relief.

"I can't breathe. I'm nervous, I don't believe or trust

Hamas. I'm not going to relax until I see their faces crossing the border," said Adi, a reservist who declined to give her last name. "The Gazans look like they're ready to hurt them."

Shay Dickmann, the cousin of Carmel Gat, who was found dead in a Hamas tunnel in Rafah along with five other hostages at the end of August, also said she had mixed feelings.

"I'm excited but also scared this will fall apart," she said, pointing out that her fears were exacerbated because she had learned that her cousin would have been released if the November 2023 truce had held just one more day.

"She could have been here with us today, waiting for these women to be released," Dickmann said. "But she's not. We have to make sure everyone comes back."

Like Hodaya, Dickmann said that concerns about future violence, including hostage-taking at the hands of released terrorists, was secondary.

"The most important thing is to save them now," Dickmann said. "We'll worry about later, later. Hopefully then we'll know what to do."

Some in the crowd have been regulars at the weekly rallies in Hostage Square. Shmuelik Warshaw is one of them. When footage of the Red Cross car appeared on screen, he helped his wheelchair-bound daughter, Einav, to her feet before embracing her tightly, tears streaming down both their faces.

"This is one of the best days for the people of Israel. Feeling the togetherness of being here is amazing," he said. "And it's also a great day for democracy. Not just ours, but others who helped us – like the US, Germany, and United Kingdom."

Warshaw echoed the sentiments of so many others. "We don't just want the three of them, we want all of them. We won't rest until they're all home. These families

Continued on page 9&gt;&gt;



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# In Hamas's Islamic warfare, Israel playing long game

OPINION

DR DAN DIKER



The Hamas "hostage for terrorist ceasefire" deal brokered by Qatar and the United States has triggered debate in Israel and among its allies and adversaries alike. Israel's commitment to return its 94 remaining hostages, particularly women and children, comes at a high price.

Global fanfare headlined by CNN's "Everyone Crying" lead story and Israel's emotional eruption over Hamas's grotesquely executed return of hostages Romi Gonen 24; Doron Steinbrecher 31; and Israeli Brit Emily Damari 28, after 471 days in captivity, handing them off to the Red Cross with gift bags from the "Hamas government", vindicates the terror group's global propaganda campaign. Add to that Hamas's 33 kidnap victims in the deal's return with a mere three hostages per week over a gruelling six week first stage, and the psychological torture of reuniting three hostages per week with their families, adds to Hamas's negotiating advantage and psychological leverage. Simultaneously, Jerusalem's release of hundreds of Palestinian terrorists appears to add to Hamas's psychological war and accrue to its projection of victory over the "Zionist enemy".

That's why this terror-for-hostages exchange isn't a ceasefire and prisoner exchange in the Western sense of the terms. Rather, this is Islamic warfare, which must help frame the debate in Israel over the price of the current exchange as part of the larger war and Israel's strategy, tactics, and political will to defeat its unrelenting, savage enemy.



The release of Israeli hostages comes at a high price

After five terror wars Hamas has prosecuted since 2009, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood sees this moment as a *hudna* (a temporary cessation of hostilities), part of Islamic warfare's notion of a temporary cessation of war until it replenishes its terror troops, resupplies its depots, and relaunches its assaults on Israel. This time, Israel appears to see it that way too. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's assertion on 18 January that Israel's military forces would remain in Gaza, deepen its presence on the strategically vital Philadelphi Corridor, and return to fight to vanquish Hamas reflect a welcome political and moral will to destroy Hamas on the way to eviscerate its terror masters in Tehran. The government's latest reaffirmations of Netanyahu's commitment to victory fly in the face of many in Israel who have decried the deal as undermining Israel's three stated goals of the war: removing the terrorist threat from Gaza; defeating Hamas as a political and terror military dominant power; and returning the hostages.

After 15 months of war, these goals have yet to be achieved. However, in Islamic warfare, holy war or "jihad" is a form of what the Chinese and the Russians have called "hybrid warfare", combining deception and terror in a long struggle to cause hopelessness and societal implosion among the enemy's population. That hasn't succeeded against Israel. In addition, it underscores the importance of Israel's employing patience and resilience, and defies the shorter timeline for victory that Israel has used to judge its former military successes and regain its deterrence.

That's also the context in which to judge the current deal-driven lull in the fighting against the Iran backed Hamas and Hezbollah jihad.

Professor Joel Hayward's *Islamic Principles of War for the Twenty First Century* (2020) and Dr Harold Rhode's *Modern Islamic Warfare* (2017) remind Western readers of the context for understanding Hamas's war against Israel and the West. They also serve as reference guides for Israel when fighting for its hostages in service of its larger goal to destroy the Hamas death cult and defeat its terror masters in Iran.

Hayward notes that "Mohammed's oft repeated statement that war is deceit" is key to understanding Islamic warfare. He notes that, "combat is best understood as primarily a battle of wits rather than of wills that should be undertaken as creatively, cunningly, and misleadingly as possible as to keep opponents in a constant state of confusion".

Netanyahu understands that this terrorist-for-hostage exchange may well not reach the second stage. Hamas's record speaks for itself. That's why Israel has remained in the Philadelphi Corridor; established an iron ring of security around the Gaza Strip; and maintains its buffer zone inside Gaza. This is an improved arrangement that Israel could have made in the May 2024 prospective ceasefire, as proposed by the Biden administration.

Netanyahu's recent statement indicates that he understands that Israel is fighting against jihad's long war. He noted on 20 January 2025 that, "If the negotiations collapse, we will continue the war in new ways, with extreme force, and with the full

support of the United States. Hamas is alone in this war, and throughout the 'deal', we will continue to cut off Gaza from every side and when the deal ends, we will continue the war."

Netanyahu's determination to fight Hamas has found sympathy and support in the incoming Trump administration. Presumptive Secretary of State Mark Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and Intelligence Director Mike Waltz, called for

destroying Hamas in their respective confirmation hearings. The statements are unprecedented in any US administration. It signals that America has Israel's back in the current war that is far from resolution.

As expected, Hamas's deception warfare continues unabatedly, now targeting Trump himself. On 19 January 2025, Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzook, who had been incarcerated in the US in 1996, convicted of massive terror financing for Hamas, credited Trump for the Gaza ceasefire saying, "We are prepared for a dialogue with America and achieving understandings on everything." Hamas's push for legitimacy challenges Israel to expose Hamas's strategy and tactics. The *jihadi* group doesn't intend to cease its war with Israel. As Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs scholar Khaled Abu Toameh pointed out in a 19 January analysis for the Gatestone Institute, Hamas leader Khalil al Hayya clarified on 15 January that "Hamas will continue its war on Israel".

The thousands of Gazans who took to the streets during the 20 January Hamas hostage hand-off chanting, "We will go to Jerusalem, we will sacrifice millions of martyrs" buttressed Al Hayya's statements. Lest there remains doubt about Hamas intentions, its Izza din Al Qassam Brigade joined the victory celebrations over the *hudna* terror-for-hostage exchange, declaring, "We are on the battlefield and we will remain on the battlefield."

If nothing else, Hamas has vindicated Netanyahu's commitment to win the long war.

• Dr Dan Diker is president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs.

# No winners in this war

OPINION

GERSHON BASKIN



Israel will claim victory. Hamas will claim victory. But the people of Israel and the Palestinian people know that there are no winners. No-one has won this war.

This land, from the river to the sea, is full of people who are suffering, in pain, and cannot celebrate victory. There are no winners in wars, only losers – and we have lost big-time on both sides of this war.

Don't believe those leaders who beat the drums of war and talk of victory. I assure you, they are safe as they send us and our families to war. If we don't hold those leaders responsible for the disasters that they have led us to, and if we don't send those leaders to the wastebins of history, our losses will be compounded and maybe even deserved.



We must make sure that our irresponsible leaders own up to their failures. We cannot continue to kill each other. There's no military solution to the conflict. There's no viable option of an armed struggle. This must be the last Israeli-Palestinian war. We must ensure that we start walking the path of real peace and justice. From this trauma, we'll emerge more committed to genuine peace than ever!

On Sunday, 19 January, we saw several hundreds of Hamas militants in uniform in central Gaza while transferring the three Israeli hostage women to the Red Cross. Some Israelis were surprised to see Hamas's demonstration of force. I was neither surprised nor shocked.

What my eyes saw was the enormous damage all around, and then I saw many videos from the flattened northern Gaza Strip – piles of debris that were once homes and public buildings.

The residents of Gaza won't really celebrate Hamas's temporary show of force. They see the reality around them, and though they see Israel as a war criminal, they place full blame and responsibility on Hamas for bringing them the hell of 15 months of destruction and death.

The Palestinian people must put Hamas on trial for crimes against the Palestinian people. I have said many times that the people of Israel must put Netanyahu on trial for crimes against the people of Israel. I'm not comparing Hamas and Netanyahu, but our future after this war must be without Hamas and without Netanyahu, and probably without Abbas as well. It's the role of all of us to bring new leadership with political horizons that will bring us a future of hope.

From 7 October, we knew that in order to return all the hostages, we would have to negotiate with Hamas. Despite this, the first and most foremost goal of the Israeli government since that terrible Saturday was to eliminate Hamas from all of its military and governmental capabilities.

We knew that the army and the Shin Bet might be able to rescue some of the hostages but not all of them. We said that there was no chance of another Entebbe operation, and that ultimately, we would have to reach a deal with Hamas. In our unreal reality and in direct contradiction of the Israel war goals, if we want to return the remaining 94 hostages, we need Hamas to continue to control Gaza, at least until the last of the hostages is released.

In my opinion, this is what the Israeli government should do in the face of this unbearable reality. We must pressure the

Americans to pressure Qatar and Egypt to obtain Hamas's agreement to shorten the time frame for the implementation of the current deal.

The deal, which will extend two to three months, is a bad deal and works against the chances of survival of the hostages who are still alive. Shortening the implementation time requires Israel to agree to an end to the war, because Hamas won't agree unless it involves an end to the war and a complete withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the entire Gaza Strip.

At the same time, Israel must act, together with the Americans in co-ordination with Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Morocco, and of course Saudi Arabia, to exert pressure on Mahmoud Abbas to

appoint an independent person as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA). This person cannot be corrupt, and must be morally and practically against violence and the armed struggle. This person must also be prepared to lead Gaza to a reconstruction that will allow the Palestinians to live a life of dignity.

Abbas and the PA cannot control Gaza, they barely control the West Bank. It would be best if Abbas moved aside. He could be president until his death, but the powers of government would be transferred to a worthy Palestinian person who is acceptable

to the Palestinians.

Even if that isn't possible, it would also be good if there was a temporary government in Gaza only, legally linked to the PA, but in fact independent of it, for a period of two to three years until the Palestinians could hold elections for a new government for the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

The temporary government in Gaza would be a non-Hamas government, and it would work to lead the beginning of the reconstruction of Gaza. The most important key to all of this is the understanding that eliminating Hamas as we know it isn't a military act, it's a diplomatic and political act.

The Palestinian struggle against Israel won't end until the Palestinians achieve independence in a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel – mainly in the territories occupied in 1967.

This may sound delusional to most Israelis now and maybe also to most Palestinians, but it must be our main lesson from 7 October. This terrible war won't be the last war until Israeli control over another people comes to an end.

Seven million Palestinians living between the river and the sea in the same area where seven million Israeli Jews live cannot live together in peace as long as one side has full control and full national rights while the other side doesn't have those same rights.

If President Donald Trump is truly serious about his statement that he will bring an end to wars, he will embrace the understanding that the two-state solution is the only solution that exists that allows both peoples to receive territorial expression of their identity. It's less important that we don't have leaders in Israel and Palestine now who will lead us to peace. The new president's American pressure will bring about the change that we need for Israel and the Palestinians.

And even if that doesn't happen, we, the Israeli and Palestinian people, will be obliged to bring in these new leaders because if not, then what was until now is what will be our future, and this shouldn't be acceptable to any of us.

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

# Great unknown, great anguish



RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

OPINION

The six weeks in January, during which we read the Torah portions recounting our slavery and redemption from Egypt, are known as the period of "Shovavim". This name forms an acronym from the initial letters of the Torah portions read during these weeks. Traditionally, this period invites us to relive the heady and transformative moments of redemption, reconnecting with the enduring legacy of liberation.

Our people are now facing a profoundly different six-week period. We long for the clarity and euphoria that those six weeks of Jewish history provided, between departing Egypt and arriving at Sinai.

Over the next six weeks, as our hostages return, our people will face extraordinary challenges. It will test us in ways we have never encountered. We have no clear roadmap, and the outcomes are difficult to foresee.

We are often tasked with holding conflicting emotions at once. The Gemara describes a person who loses a relative, beginning by sorrowfully reciting the *beracha* of *Dayan Ha'emet*, accepting divine judgement. Yet, if the same person inherits money from the deceased, they also recite a *beracha* expressing gratitude to Hashem. In a modern context, the second blessing might seem insensitive, but the concept of reciting two conflicting *berachot* highlights the profound capacity to hold grief and gratitude, sorrow and hope, within the same experience.

Our current challenge feels even more daunting. We're not merely asked to hold conflicting emotions for a fleeting moment; we'll be tested continuously, week after week.

Additionally, we won't just face the personal struggle of losing a relative but events which are deeply intertwined with our collective dreams for our beloved Israel and our shared future. As a nation, we'll swing to emotional extremes, navigating profound highs and crushing lows. I'm writing this article hours before we await the return of our first hostages. By the time you read this, the situation probably will have evolved into something different.

What's clear is that every Jew must open their hearts and souls to the jagged and unpredictable emotional journey that lies ahead. It's all too tempting to turn away, to retreat into a protective cocoon, and shield ourselves from these overwhelming emotions and the collective experience they demand that we face.

Jewish identity and Jewish history are calling us – to courage, resilience, triumph and, above all, profound sympathy.

**Sympathy, first**

After his initial attempts to redeem our people fail, Moses voices his anguish to G-d: "Why have You harmed the people?" My own teacher, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, explained that Moshe's complaints to Hashem weren't an act of irreverence. Moses fully understood, on an ideological level, that redemption was a process and took time. However, witnessing the unimaginable suffering of his fellow Jews, he struggled to comprehend why such agony had to persist.



Sympathy and emotional compassion must always precede ideology. The issues we currently face are deeply complex, with many layers and factors to consider. Before engaging in the ideological or political dimensions of the matter, it's essential first to open our hearts and deeply connect with the whirlwind of emotions that so many groups of Israelis are experiencing. There are so many circles of people in Israel who will be carrying heavy emotions through this process. It's crucial we navigate this rocky journey together, united in compassion and solidarity.

**Victory, sorrow, and scars**

The families of our hostages are preparing for two very different outcomes. Some will undoubtedly celebrate when living hostages are released, while others will mourn upon receiving the worst of news. No outsider can possibly imagine the complex emotions these families will carry and how they are intertwined in a way beyond words.

Families of hostages yet to be released will endure a harrowing six weeks, trapped in the fragile uncertainty of the ceasefire, at the mercy of terrorists seeking to exploit both their vulnerability and our emotions. The psychological toll of waiting, compounded by the tension of an unresolved outcome, will leave them hanging in limbo, torn between hope and fear.

Families of soldiers who have paid steep prices during this war will struggle with lack of closure. Pursuing the war to a more decisive outcome would have offered clarity that this ceasefire, no matter how it is interpreted, simply cannot provide. The inconclusiveness and ambiguity of this outcome only intensifies the heavy emotional burden.

Families of terror victims will be forced to confront the painful prospect of seeing the murderers of their loved ones go free. Despite their horrific acts, these homicidal killers who have spilled innocent blood will be honoured by throngs of bloodthirsty enemies. The emotional toll of such an unjust reality is difficult to fathom, as is the deep sense of betrayal felt by these families.

The general population of Israel will probably vacillate between triumph, relief, and fear. It's crucial that we recognise and appreciate our victory. Despite the shock

of 7 October and confronting one of the darkest moments of Jewish history since the Holocaust, we rallied, defended ourselves, and inflicted deep wounds or eliminated many of our enemies. We cannot allow the confusion or disappointment over what wasn't achieved to diminish the magnitude of our victory.

We are victorious, yet we are a nation deeply weary, exhausted from

the weight of war. This is a war fought by too few soldiers, and the burden placed on those who have battled weighs heavily upon them, their wives, and their families. Many of us are simply grateful for the chance to reclaim some semblance of normalcy, catch our breath, and perhaps, just perhaps, enjoy a peaceful night's sleep.

Additionally, we will all face psychological warfare as our enemies attempt to twist their resounding defeat into a false narrative of victory. We will be confronted with images and videos designed to frustrate and infuriate us.

Finally, by releasing so many unrepentant terrorists, we

are taking tremendous risks. We are a tired nation, yes, but we are also a frightened nation, caught between our victories and our fears. Our hopes and our dread.

**Compassion, not politics**

As there are so many raw emotions swirling in this uncertain future, it's crucial to prioritise the emotional component, whatever it may be, over heated political debates. First, have the intellectual humility to realise that no-one has easy answers to our collective predicament. More importantly, ensure that you are first feeling all these emotions before you argue your political position. Let your heart both rejoice and be broken alongside our people before your mind stiffens into a political stance.

It's all too easy to become entangled in intense political discourse, but for those living through these emotions, political discussions feel distant and disconnected.

This is a time to bow in deference, celebrate together, weep together, stand together, and believe together. Walk together with our people, heart to heart. Jewish history is calling us.

• *Moshe Taragin is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a Bachelor of Arts in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a Master's degree in English literature from the City University of New York.*

## In Tel Aviv's Hostage Square, Hamas looms large even as tension turns to celebration

>>Continued from page 7

can't suffer any more."

Holding a sign bearing her former pupil's name, Chani Nachmani, who taught Emily Damari in elementary school for four years, has also been attending Hostage Square every week. On Sunday, she had a new purpose.

"Today, I came here to return the poster," she said. "For the first time, I'm not going home with it."

Others were participating in the recent Israeli ritual for the first time. Lev Kandinov, who was visiting Israel with his family from Hollywood, Florida, said it was his first time in Hostage Square.

"I can't describe my feelings being here. It's overwhelming. I'm happy we're finally at this point," he said. "Unfortunately, the price is really high – not only the amount of terrible monsters that are being released, but also all the soldiers who have been killed. Still, every life is precious."

Influencer Daniel Braun shot footage in the square to raise awareness of the plight of the hostages, which, he said, was still unknown in so many parts of the world.

Britons Sam Reubens and Heski Strassman, both from Manchester, made aliya after 7 October in response to growing antisemitism in the UK. The two waved giant Israeli and British flags in honour, they said, of British-Israeli Emily Damari.

"Her mother, Mandy, speaks with unbelievable

courage and has touched all of our hearts," Strassman said. The Damaris have refused to grant interviews throughout most of the duration of Emily's captivity, and only recently did Mandy finally agree to speak out about her daughter.

"We want to show Jews in Britain that we stand with Emily's family. But also to say we want them all back," Reubens said.

Menashe Bohbot, the uncle of hostage Elkana Bohbot, held a sign declaring, "Don't leave him behind!" After the gathering at Hostage Square, Bohbot said he planned to continue to a protest on Begin Road, not five-minutes' walk away, to call for the return of the rest of the 94 hostages, including his nephew.

Abducted from the Nova festival, like Gonen, Bohbot, 35, was filmed being beaten by his captors on 7 October. He isn't on the list of the 33 hostages set for release during the ceasefire's six-week first phase.

Levitán was relieved when she saw the three women released on Sunday walking on their own. But, she said, she knew that the roller coaster of emotions unleashed by the first day of the ceasefire – optimism, fear, anger at Hamas – would continue.

"We're all holding our breath. It's nail-biting," she said. "The whole nation is being held hostage right now. And it's scary to think that we're going to go through this so many times."

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# Smoke clears on LA's cacophony of errors

PERSONAL STORY

JOEL POLLAK



The Los Angeles (LA) fires began on 7 January 2025 on a day when residents had been warned of “extreme” winds that could cause life-threatening conditions and wildfire. These winds were to be stronger than the typical Santa Ana winds – a winter phenomenon, typically milder than the Cape southeaster in South Africa. They were accelerated by an intense jet stream from the north at high altitude. Gusts on nearby mountaintops were to reach up to 100 mph (160 km/h).

Many of us prepared by taking down anything outside that could break or blow away. I lowered the American flag that flies above my front door, for example, but our mayor, Karen Bass, wasn't preparing for the emergency. Instead, she had chosen that week to visit Accra, Ghana, as part of a national delegation to that country's presidential inauguration, an event that had little appeal or relevance to anyone in LA. She was overseas when the fires began to burn.

At about 10:30, a fire was reported near the top of the Pacific Palisades, a neighbourhood that stretches upwards from the shore of the Pacific Ocean to the crest of the Santa Monica mountains. Local residents, myself included, now believe that the fire emerged from the burn scar of a previous fire that ignited on New Year's Eve, when some hikers fired illegal fireworks. In calm conditions, firefighters put out the blaze easily, but it may have left smouldering embers.

Later that same day, a separate fire erupted near the town of Altadena, in the foothills above the city of Pasadena, on the opposite, eastern side of LA. The cause has yet to be determined, but may have been the exposed power lines that California, despite being the fifth-largest economy in the world, has yet to bury. It wouldn't have been the first time that high winds have caused towers to fall and cables to snap, sparking wildfires below.

The speed with which the Palisades fire

spread in high winds is reflected in the text messages my wife and I received that morning from our nanny, who was taking our infant son for a walk. At 10:42, 12 minutes after the blaze was first sighted, she wrote, “There's a fire somewhere. We can smell the smoke. You will see it outside.” Having covered fires before, I knew the danger. I responded, “Julia we should check it out and pack bags if necessary.”

I returned home from where I had been working, and we packed quickly. My wife walked to the local public elementary school,



Joel Pollak outside his home in the Pacific Palisades

highway. Shortly after noon, the fire department sent the order to evacuate, via cellphone. We had already left. Others, less agile or less fortunate, were stuck on Sunset: many abandoned their cars and fled on foot as the smoke was driven coastward by the freakishly strong wind.

As we continued south on the road, I thought of the passage we had just read in Genesis: “And let your eye not pity your possessions...” (45:20). I made my peace, quietly, with the idea that we would lose our home. I wasn't too worried: we had fire

insurance, unlike some neighbours who had lost theirs after the State of California, in an ill-advised experiment in socialism, had capped the cost, resulting in the departure of insurance companies and policies from the state.

The winds howled all night. Security camera footage from the now-destroyed homes of friends and neighbours shows a relentless shower of fiery embers, engulfing all in their path. By the next day, the winds were slightly calmer and authorities had begun allowing journalists into portions of the burn zone to cover the damage. I was lucky to have taken my press pass with me. I drove back northward into the smoke, and found that our home was still, miraculously, there.

Apparently, the house had been protected

by a wall of Ficus trees that ruined our view but which I had refused to cut down because they formed a natural windbreak. I also found our garden hose stretched across the lawn: a Good Samaritan had used it to extinguish a fire on our now-melted vinyl fence, while there was water pressure. Other portions of the fence, and my neighbour's yard, were ablaze: I used buckets of water from a gutter to douse the flames.

There was no use trying to save the rest of the neighbourhood. Overnight, almost all of the other homes had been destroyed. Flames leapt from the windows of the few that were left. As smoke from the burning school blew towards me, I left and spent the rest of the day covering the fire elsewhere. I couldn't know whether my house would survive another night of fiery wind. I had, at least, been afforded the privilege of defending it. Ultimately, it stood, smoky but intact.

The Palisades Fire and the Eaton Fire, as the Altadena blaze became known, will be studied as a cacophony of errors by state and local government, not the least of which was the 20-minute delay before firefighters arrived on the scene. But there's also solace in the experience of neighbour helping neighbour, which lives on in the WhatsApp groups that are a lifeline for our communities, still evacuated. We are the “bush that burns but is not consumed”. (Exodus 3:2)

• South African-born Joel Pollak is the senior editor-at-large and in-house counsel at Breitbart News and hosts Breitbart News Sunday. He is a Harvard graduate with high honours in social science and public policy and a law degree. He was once then leader of the Democratic Alliance, Tony Leon's speechwriter and has a master of Arts in Jewish Studies. Pollak has written several books, including *How Trump Won: The Inside Story of a Revolution*, and *The Agenda: What Trump Should Do in His First 100 Days*.

## Local musician encourages Jews to ‘dance again’

HEATHER DJUNGA

Up-and-coming musician, singer, writer, and poet, Bongani Mehlomakhulu was so upset by what he saw of the Nova festival massacre on 7 October 2023, he was inspired to write a song about it.

“I watched a documentary on the Nova festival massacre on BBC,” he said. “The tragedy gripped my heart, and I did what I know best. I put pen to paper to try to articulate the horrors I saw, but also to create a message to the Jewish community and to the world at large that despite the terror of the day, we can dance again.”

His song was facilitated by Christian community leader and South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) volunteer, Clive Mashishi, who said he wanted to arrange such a song campaign in South Africa anyway. He was subsequently introduced to Mehlomakhulu and his team, and said he believed it was the hand of G-d that everything was brought together to release the single and set the campaign in motion.

Mehlomakhulu has worked with numerous local and international artists, such as KVRVBO, SpheraQ, and China Charameleon, lending his voice to tracks like *Shall I Take a Bow* and *God Given*.

He said he believed the theme, ‘We will dance again’ had gripped the world, and he hoped the song would offer hope to all those traumatised by their ordeal. But

even more importantly, he and Mashishi want the world to know that the majority of South Africans support Israel.



Photo: Tallman Afrika

Bongani Mehlomakhulu making music in studio

The song, written and spoken by Mehlomakhulu, was put to a backdrop of other local musicians. Its dance beat is reminiscent of music played at a large-scale dance event or festival. The producers hope that the song helps to heal the trauma of that day and encourages the local Jewish community to dance and have

fun again.

One of the song's lines reads, “United under the given circumstances, we appreciate being given second chances.”

Both Mehlomakhulu and Mashishi said they believed Israel's story was already a miracle, and that it was through Hashem's grace that after the tragedy and trauma, the people of Israel would have a new beginning. However, to realise this “second chance” fully, they believe healing needs to happen, and this is where the music comes in.

Mashishi and Mehlomakhulu were among those watching the news this past weekend as the first three hostages were released. “It was an exciting, joyful moment,” said Mashishi. “But it was painful. We ask how they will come back to normal life after their life has been so interrupted and after being in such a hard space for so long.”

However, as the song's lyrics say, “We appreciate being given second chances.” Mashishi and Mehlomakhulu are celebrating the second chance the released hostages have been given at life.

Mashishi said they planned to tour South Africa and abroad, including Israel, to perform the song, and would have dancers on stage to bring forth an impactful message. They plan to have their first stop in Lesotho, in collaboration with SAFI.

While they bring the song to different

destinations, they intend to educate people about what happened at the Nova festival as they believe not enough coverage has been given to the sheer horror of the event or the devastation of the 7 October massacre.

“There are still people who believe that the massacre didn't happen,” Mashishi said. “We need to tell people the truth.”

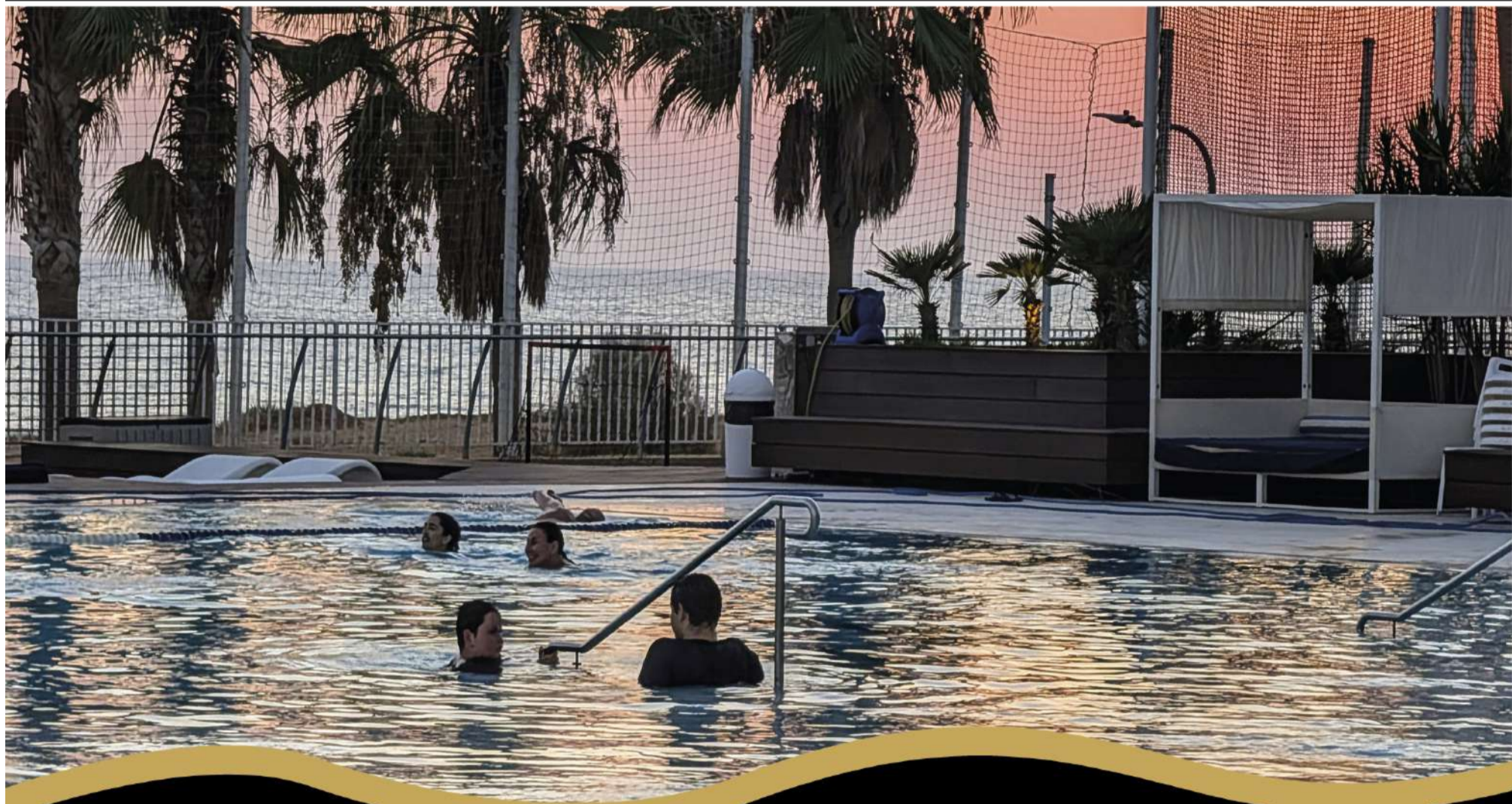
“The Nova festival massacre was horrific, and it has left a scar in the heart of Jewish citizens. How many Jewish parents are now fearful of allowing their children to go to events? We want to encourage Jewish people not to give up, and to dance and play music again. In the past, in South Africa, even during apartheid, music played a big part in bringing revival and instilling truth and hope.”

Mashishi said they planned to release the song last year, but thanked G-d for the timing. “Something was missing from the song. We realised it was the blast of a shofar. We believe that every time the song is played, it will prophetically announce the victory of the people of G-d. The shofar is like the trumpet, and when the trumpet is blown, the walls of Jericho will fall.

“We want to bring the song to the world,” said Mehlomakhulu, who wants to disseminate other such songs through YouTube which “speak to people's hearts and bring truth and revival to the world”.

“The world was traumatised with Israel on the day, and we will dance alongside Israel as it rises to dance again,” he said.

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For further information contact Dudi (David) Goder at [dudi@goder.co.il](mailto:dudi@goder.co.il) or +972522450480

# Class of 2024 – a grade above

## Personal growth cannot be plotted on a graph

Academic excellence is a journey marked by dedication, perseverance, and a thirst for knowledge. It goes beyond merely earning good grades, it reflects a commitment to intellectual growth and the pursuit of one's highest potential.

King David High School Linksfield has, and always will be, an institution of academic excellence and we know that with each passing year, our results outdo themselves. What's important to the teachers of this special school is that by the time every student receives their results, they do so knowing that their unique potential has been realised. We hope that our students feel proud of their accomplishments, and that they can enter the next phase of life with confidence and pride.

This isn't to say that results don't count. We're incredibly proud of every student.

But there's more to it than the number of distinctions per head. At our school, we aim to measure that which cannot be plotted on a graph. We aspire to work with the parents of our school to make sure that their children, our students, are well-adjusted and happy. That they understand that Jewish education at this level is a privilege, and that they realise that the greatest possible rewards come from opportunities to give of ourselves to our community and country.

We cannot chart these achievements. There are no statistics that account for the values of kindness, loyalty, Zionism, and selflessness. We know that these are the principles upon which our school stands, and we stand firmly and successfully only because we share this philosophy.

So, my message to the matrices of 2024 is to stand firm in your foundations of the academic, spiritual, physical, and emotional. Nurture your bodies as well as your minds. Nurture your friends, and treasure your families. Because with a solid foundation, you can weather whatever storms come your way.

We have world-class staff members who have guided you from Grade 8 to where you stand today, and I cannot thank them enough.

Mazaltov to all on your incredible results! May the *nachas* that you have brought to your families and to our school shine the way forward for you to grab every opportunity that comes your way with the enthusiasm of youth.

I'm so proud of you. And you are forever part of the foundations of King David High School Linksfield.



**Lorraine Srage – King David High School Linksfield principal**

## Beyond the classroom to invaluable life skills



We're extremely proud of the outstanding achievements of our Herzlia matric class of 2024. The students' exceptional results are the product of countless hours of dedicated preparation for exams. However, the foundation for their success is laid much earlier.

As one of the few schools that educates students from pre-primary to matric, we're committed to nurturing students' growth every step of the way on their school journey. Our carefully designed curricular and co-curricular programmes enable students to develop skills across academics, sport, innovation, Jewish identity, and arts and culture, while also fostering a strong sense of social and community responsibility through self-development and the practice of *menschlichkeit*. Meaningful learning in the classroom as well as project-based learning is key to our success, but learning extends beyond the classroom, equipping our students with invaluable life skills for an ever-changing world.

We strive to create a school environment where children love to learn and feel connected through their interests and passions. We encourage each student to explore and strengthen their natural talents, and we support them in developing areas they may find challenging, inspiring them to surpass what they might believe is possible. We surround them with a dedicated team which believes in their success and is involved and inspires them to be the very best they can be.

Herzlia's passionate teachers; the SEED department (supporting educational and emotional development); our engaged parent community; and our board of governors have all played vital roles in guiding and nurturing our students throughout their Herzlia school journey.

Our matric students have now earned their place in Herzlia's global alumni community, and leave Herzlia not only with exceptional results and successes in hand, but they have learnt to believe in themselves and know that their goals are within reach. *Mazaltov* and *behatzlachah*, matric class of 2024! We look forward to seeing what you achieve in the future.

**Shane Brorson – Herzlia High School principal**

## Helping students to excel and lead meaningful lives

In today's world, parents are increasingly looking for schools that offer more than just academic success. They want educational environments where their children can discover and nurture their strengths and improve on areas of development – whether in academics, Torah learning, sports, culture, or a unique blend of all these elements. The goal is to equip young people with the tools to excel, the values to lead meaningful lives, and the confidence to embrace their individual potential.

Yeshiva College has long been a trusted choice for families seeking this holistic approach to education. As a school deeply rooted in Torah values and academic rigour, it provides a nurturing space where students thrive in all areas of their lives. The dual curriculum seamlessly integrates *limudei kodesh* with Independent Examinations Board (IEB) general studies, ensuring that students are well-prepared for any path they choose.

This holistic philosophy is perhaps best illustrated in the achievements of Yeshiva College's graduating students. The class of 2024 has set a high standard, demonstrating excellence despite significant challenges. Twenty-five students from the Boys High School and 27 from the Girls High School collectively achieved 182 distinctions, averaging 3.5 distinctions per student. This is a level which has been maintained or beaten for more than 10 years running. Several of our students achieved a "full house" with seven or more distinctions, and many were recognised by the IEB for excellence in one or



more individual subjects. This success is a testament not only to their resilience but to their teachers' unwavering support throughout their educational journey.

These young men and women have faced extraordinary challenges, including beginning their formal high school career with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and completing much of their matric syllabus during an emotionally charged global period. Their achievements reflect a deep commitment to excellence, resilience, and the values we strive to instil in every Yeshiva College student.

Rebbetzin Natalie Altman, the head of *kodesh* and ethos, says, "Our students' journey is about more than grades. It's about

nurturing their character and their faith. As the principle from Pirkei Avot teaches us, 'According to the labour is the reward.' The achievements of this cohort reflect the immense effort, tenacity, and faith they've invested throughout their schooling."

The remarkable growth of the Yeshiva College High Schools over the past few years is a testament to its enduring appeal. Families recognise the value of a school that combines the best of modern education with timeless Torah values. Students graduate not only with the knowledge to succeed academically, but also with the values and skills to navigate life with purpose and integrity.

**Rob Long – Yeshiva College overall director of academics Yeshiva College Schools and principal of Boys High School**

## A different class of excellence

King David High School Victory Park's class of 2024 has achieved exceptional matric results, and we are incredibly proud of every student. This year's results reflect not just academic excellence but the remarkable resilience and determination of this unique group of matriculants.

The class of 2024 began its high school journey in 2020, a year defined by the global COVID-19 pandemic. This group entered high school and was just starting to become more settled when its members were thrust into a new era of unprecedented challenges and disruption, shifting their "normal" to something not experienced before. In spite of it, they showed tremendous courage and worked hard to shift and harness new skills and ways of learning. Their slow return to school as they knew it was embraced, and the students stayed focused and committed to building on their personal and academic growth.

What stands out about the class of 2024 is that this experience reinforced their determination to rise above challenges and seize positivity from this moment on. The group was solid in showing its unwavering grit and determination in all spheres

of school life. Its members bonded as a distinctive group, becoming each other's champion, demonstrating their support of one another. They overcame significant obstacles from the very start of high school, and continued to strive for excellence and be involved in different spheres of school life. This spirit was sustained throughout, making us incredibly proud of their efforts.

This cohort worked consistently to improve its results. This was evident especially in the matric year. Its members embraced the year with a positive mindset and boundless energy. Their success is a testament to the work and nurturing of our dedicated team of teachers and staff, who ensured that they were well-prepared; encouragement and support from their families; and most importantly, their own commitment to striving for personal excellence.

As they step into the next chapter of their lives, we wish



our matriculants *kol hakavod* and all the best for their future endeavours. The solid foundations and strong sense of community laid at King David Victory Park will continue to serve them well in the years ahead. Each student has played a vital role in contributing to the spirit and legacy of our school. We celebrate their well-deserved success, and look forward to witnessing them make history in the journey ahead.

**Mandy Gruzd – King David High School Victory Park head of school**

## Exceptionally diverse, larger than life group

The Cape Town Torah High (CTTH) class of 2024 was our largest class yet, graduating 15 students. This class was exceptionally diverse and full of larger-than-life personalities, each with their own passions, interests, fields of expertise, and spheres of excellence. This class launched many new initiatives across the educational spectrum in our school that will continue to enhance the lives of future CTTH students. These included girls' sports and a running club; in-school soccer tournaments; extra-curricular *kodesh* learning; pioneering new student leadership roles; leading assemblies and Shabbatons; and daily spontaneous singing and dancing. We're so proud of how each mastered the CTTH model of education to maximise the strengths of the individual!

CTTH is the only internationally accredited Jewish high school in South Africa that completes a United States-accredited high school diploma along with SAT exams. SAT is the leading college entrance exam globally. This model allows us to source the best curriculum worldwide, and tailor each student's matric to their unique strengths. The class of 2024 scored some of our highest SAT scores to date – as high as the 98% percentile – with the class beating the global average by 15%! In addition, most of our graduates have chosen to invest in their Jewish identity with a gap year in yeshivot



and seminaries in Israel and Johannesburg, like Yeshiva Gedola (Johannesburg); Torah Ohr; Machon Lev; Beer Miryam; Machon Maayan; and Harova.

We're so proud of our students, and can't wait to watch them continue to spread their light to *Am Yisrael*.

**Rabbi Avi Shlomo – Cape Town Torah High principal**

## Succeeding inside and outside the classroom

In 2024, a year deeply affected by the ongoing war in Israel and Gaza, our matric students demonstrated unwavering dedication despite the emotional and spiritual weight of the times. Balancing their seven academic subjects with a rigorous daily *kodesh* curriculum, they found strength in their connection to Torah and tradition. Their motivation to engage in additional Tanach learning and early morning *shiurim* became a source of comfort and purpose, grounding them amidst the chaos. This dual commitment and holistic approach not only prepared them academically but fortified their values and resilience, equipping them to navigate a future shaped by challenges and hope, resilience, purpose, and unwavering faith.

Throughout this year, matric students have been reminded that marks don't define who they are. While academic success is important, it's their character, resilience, and growth that truly matter. Striving to be the best version of themselves, inside and outside the classroom, has been their ultimate goal. This year has taught them that perseverance, compassion, and a commitment to their values are the foundations of true success, having



a lasting impact far beyond the results of any exam. Our students are taught to believe in their potential, and their only limitations are the ones they set upon themselves. As a result, they invested countless hours in fulfilling their potential, never losing sight of their end goal.

We're so proud of who each of the matric students have become during this transformative year. Their journey of growth and self-discovery has shaped them into confident and compassionate individuals. Equipped with the values, knowledge, and strength gained from their experiences, they are now ready to give back, not only to the South African community but also to communities abroad. Their dedication to making a difference and readiness to contribute meaningfully to the world around them fills us with immense pride and hope

for the future.

As we bid them *hatzlocha raba* (good luck), we remind them, that self-belief and hard work, will always earn them success.

**Rebecca Sarchi – Torah Academy Girls High principal**  
**Rabbi Dovid Hazdan – Torah Academy Boys High principal and dean**

## Remarkable young women step into the world



When the class of 2024 first entered high school, academics wasn't its primary focus, and the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic only added to the challenge. Yet, through resilience and hard work, its students have emerged as scholars and critical thinkers. Today, we celebrate their inspiring journey and the incredible growth that they have achieved, academically and personally. It's with immense *hakoras hatov* (gratitude) to Hashem and recognition of the efforts of our students and staff that we honour their success.

It would be sufficient for us to express our gratitude for the impressive average of 3.6 distinctions per candidate and the exceptional averages of over 80% in most subjects.

It would also be fitting to thank Hashem for nearly a quarter of all results being over 90%, and for more than half of all results being distinctions. However, the real acknowledgement is owed to our students for their exceptional unity, care, and respect.

This diverse group of students has embodied values beyond academics. These young ladies have always welcomed new students and accepted each other with warmth and joy, no matter the circumstances. They have supported one another through the turbulent landscape of adolescence, and stood by each other through the vicissitudes of high school. The non-judgemental approach they have shown towards each other and toward everyone at school has ensured a deep sense of peace and happiness around them.

They celebrate each other's successes – whether it be academic excellence, weightlifting, dancing, overcoming anxiety, birthdays, or family *simchas*. They embody what it means to be well-rounded, sincere, and balanced individuals. Their kindness, care, generosity, loyalty, and gratitude reflect the refined *middos* (character traits) that Hirsch Lyons prides itself on. Our matrices are committed to sanctifying Hashem's name by emulating His ways of kindness and living balanced Torah lives.

What a blessing it is to have these remarkable young women stepping into the world, making it a brighter place! May their perseverance, respect, kindness, warmth, and unique spirit continue to uplift the world around them, just as they have at our school.

Matrics of 2024, we're incredibly proud of you and your outstanding achievements. Your acts of kindness and care for others exemplify the *middos* we strive to instil in our students. Thank you for setting such a fine example and for demonstrating that many of life's challenges can be transformed into opportunities for growth and excellence. We wish you every success in the next chapter of your lives, please G-d.

**Morah Dina Goldfein – Hirsch Lyons Girls High School - Headmistress**

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# Wits still a favourite, while others gap it

LEE TANKLE

The post-matric trend this year is away from gap-year travel or work experience, and more matriculants are moving straight into furthering their academic studies at university and private colleges around South Africa, say some Jewish schools in Johannesburg.

Most are choosing to stay in Johannesburg, with a preference for the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), but others are choosing to move to Cape Town. While those moving to the sea are still favouring the University

Wits; UCT; Stellenbosch; the University of Johannesburg; and the University of Pretoria.

The degrees they are enrolling in show a wide range of interests, with some studying theatre and performance, fine arts, law, psychology, and social work, to those who are studying actuarial science, medicine, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, business science, and everything in between.

Wits is undoubtedly the most popular university for those from Johannesburg, which some say is because it gives our youngsters the comforts of home while

Similarly, while KDVP didn't give any concrete numbers on where students were going, it agreed that there was still a pull to go to UCT, but many more were heading for "Stellies", which is quickly asserting itself as a popular choice.

"In the past one to two years, I've noticed a significant increase in students going to Stellenbosch. This may be because it's seen as a 'safer' option for Jewish students wanting the experience of going to university in the Cape," says Lipschitz, "I arrange visits from tertiary institutions for the Grade 11 students as part of preparing them for the world of work. This year, for the first time, I had a specific request to invite a representative from Stellenbosch."

Similarly, both King David schools have witnessed increased interest in private universities. Lipschitz and Starkowitz said there had been a growing pull to Varsity College, Vega, and others. In fact, according to Starkowitz, more students from KDL are attending private universities than those going to UCT and Cape universities.

"Many students want to go to these smaller private universities because though they get amazing results, they don't get the necessary points to get into the degree they want to study at Wits, and they will be able to get as good a degree at Varsity College or Vega," said Starkowitz. "For example, at Varsity College you can get accepted into a Bachelor of Commerce degree with mathematics literacy for matric."

Both Starkowitz and Lipschitz agree that a private university appeals to a lot of students because of the environment in these universities. Smaller classes create a softer landing for those living in the school

environment. Said Lipschitz, "Varsity College appeals because it caters to students who prefer smaller classes and individual attention."

"It makes the jump easier for these kids," she said. "There are fewer growing pains for those who go to a Varsity College or Vega because they are smaller campuses with fewer people and are less overwhelming overall."

However, 22 students from KDL aim to go on gap-year programmes in Israel. "It gives the students the break they deserve after completing such a difficult year," said Starkowitz. "They get to have fun in Israel and find their independence."

A smaller portion of students from both schools are doing a gap year in other countries, and will work as an au pair overseas before they re-enter the world of academia. Some will do volunteer work with human rights, environmental protection, and the Community Security Organisation in Johannesburg, or they are going to work part-time and do short courses during their gap year.

Similarly, there are a few who have decided to leave South Africa and study overseas, whether that be in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Israel.

The majority of Yeshiva College matriculants, however, are intent on spending 2025 in gap-year programmes in Israel, where they will be able to decide what they want to do afterwards. Principal Rob Long says many students from the class of 2024 are going on Midreshet Torah Va'Avodah, a gap year in Israel with Bnei Akiva. However, those not going on gap years plan to further their studies at Wits.



The University of the Witwatersrand is a preferential tertiary institution for students

of Cape Town (UCT), there has been a marked increase in choosing Stellenbosch University as their chosen tertiary educational institution.

"Wits is a popular choice because it's a world-class institution. Its courses are almost second to none in terms of academic rigour," said Jodi Starkowitz, King David Linksfield's (KDL's) head of marketing. "A lot of students go there not only because of that, but because it's easy to access, with the campus being a stone's throw away. Similarly, Wits appeals to many of our students who aren't ready to leave home just yet."

The schools say that the class of 2024 is mainly spread out among five universities:

asserting their independence.

At KDL, 27 students out of the 81 matriculated are attending Wits, each studying something that appeals to them.

Gita Lipschitz, the senior social worker at King David Victory Park (KDVP), agreed that though Wits is the first choice for most students, in the past three to four years, there has been increased interest in the University of Pretoria.

"The Gautrain has helped this, as well as students wanting to have a 'res' experience without being too far from home," she says.

However, with the pull to Cape Town, five students from KDL are attending UCT, while two are going to Stellenbosch.

## KING EDWARD VII HIGH SCHOOL



**Daniel Sack**  
Five distinctions, Maths, Physical Science, Life Sciences, Geography, Life Orientation (LO)

## HIRSCH LYONS GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL



**Temima Goldfein**  
Eight distinctions, Afrikaans (first additional language), English, Hebrew (second additional language), LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences, Further Studies Maths



**Devorah Eilim**  
Five distinctions, Business Studies, English, Hebrew (second additional language), History, LO (top 1%)



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Matrics completed an average of three Advanced Placement (College level) courses.

**YESHIVA AND SEMINARY**

Many of our matric students enrolled in a gap year program at Yeshiva or Seminary.



# Life after challenges – Isaac Moritz charts the future

PETA KROST

Isaac Moritz was the boy most likely to do and be whatever he wanted until his fateful accident in the sea in Sea Point on Christmas Eve, 2021. However, having just matriculated, Isaac has learnt the hard way over the past three years that life goes on no matter what, and he has to carry on in his own way.

For Isaac, matriculating with almost a full house of distinctions wasn't such a big deal because he has much bigger challenges to face on a daily basis. His biggest challenge is being able to put on a t-shirt himself.

Isaac broke his neck when he dived into a wave, hitting a sandbank, while on holiday just before going into Grade 9. Isaac remembers every single detail of that day, but when he looks at the photograph of himself and his friends taken just moments before he went into the sea, he says, he doesn't recognise that boy. "I'm not that person anymore," he said.

He spent much of what would have been his Grade 9 year in and out of hospital, having been critically ill, but surrounded always by his loving family. "We didn't leave his side once in all that time," said his mother, Merissa Moritz, a mother of five. "He was so vulnerable and unable to do anything for himself." She ensured that the hospital made room for her and sometimes her family to sleep and, for the first five months, she didn't spend one Shabbos at home.

Isaac looks back at his time in hospital with a form of longing, remembering it as an idyllic time. "It was a safe, happy space with my family and no outside world. I had no worries and no idea what would happen to me. It was peaceful, like living in an alternate world, a cocoon," he said.

It was when he moved to rehabilitation and then an outpatient that the reality of the challenges ahead of him set in. "The analogy that works for me is when someone dies, the family gets food brought to them until the food stops, but the family still has to continue," he said.

Isaac is a strong personality, and before his accident he "did everything fast", and was a larger-than-life character with a great sense of humour. While his sense of humour and character is intact, getting around and doing things physically is complicated and difficult. His mind and brain are just

as sharp and quick-witted but his body isn't, which frustrates him.

"Sport was a huge outlet for me, and whatever I did, I did it fast. When things were slow, I would get frustrated. I now have three years of built-up frustration as I adapt to a completely new life," he said. "It's as if I have every memory put into a body that doesn't know anything and is still figuring it out."

After his accident, Isaac left King David Linksfield for Yeshiva College, in which he could work towards a GED (General Education Development) matric – an online, accessible, internationally-recognised American alternative to matric. He would go into the school's YEISH (academic support) Centre every weekday, and have two hours of lessons worked around his extensive rehabilitation schedule.

"It was good going to Yeshiva because I had childhood friends there, but it was me and a tutor, and then home again. It was isolating as I didn't have much interaction with others. The isolation has been a huge challenge for me," he said.

"I've realised that life moves on, and I cannot sit and wait. I may never be 100%, but I must do the best I can with what I have."

It was hard as a mother not to see her son enjoy all the "bells and whistles" of the matric year, Merissa said, with the matric dance and all the social activities. "It's a huge loss for a child who was so capable, social, and able to do everything well," she said.

Since the accident, there have been many in the community who have said *tehillim* for Isaac. The practice has been ongoing for three years. "We're grateful for this. It's a holding space," said Merissa, who regularly updates the *tehillim* WhatsApp group about Isaac to keep people in touch with his situation. "We have to live this life, but people in our community have been amazing."

Many have been inspired by Isaac, and praise his drive to improve and his bravery. Isaac said he found it difficult to understand what they mean. "I can see what I can't do for myself and how I believe I could do



Isaac Moritz flying in a helicopter

more, so I can't see inspiration, only frustration," he said. "Many people have challenges, and mine is my body."

Merissa, an occupational therapist, recalls the first day she took Isaac to a particular rehabilitation centre and stopped to watch a man, whose disability was more severe than

Isaac's, as he parking in his adapted car. "He looked at Isaac, and told him he should be so grateful, and better work very hard. He said if he was Isaac, he would be running a marathon by now."

"Another man who was able-bodied came up to Isaac and the man who had just spoken, and said that they were both lucky because while the world can see their disabilities, he's not even asking their name because in five minutes he would have forgotten them," Merissa recalled. "It made us quickly realise that on our journey, we have to stay in our own lane and do our best."

That's exactly what Isaac is trying to do. At this point, he has few plans for the future. "I want to educate people about what's needed for disabled people. I want people to understand how important it is to make everything wheelchair accessible. But I don't want it to be

my career," he said.

"I'll spend this year trying to figure out what I want to do. I'm trying to find myself. I have lost a lot and am starting from the beginning. I have a blank canvas to paint."

"It doesn't matter what I wanted to do before my accident because that's gone. It's history, and I now need to find a new reality for myself. Truth is, when you lose something, acceptance is easier said than done, but it isn't a choice."

"I have a family who loves me, and I'm so grateful for that. I can't change what has happened. I can feel bad and stay in bed or feel bad and do something positive. I choose the latter."

Isaac and his mom are investigating what he needs to do to get his licence. He loves going for drives in fast cars, and can't wait to be able to drive his own car. He also loves flying.

Like most 18-year-olds, Isaac wants to experience everything and do as much as he can, only he has to find his own way to make it happen.

"What amazes me about Isaac," said Merissa, "is it would be easier to stay at home rather than make the effort to go out and do things, but he goes and does it anyway, no matter how hard it is."

## My dream came true – I went back to school

PERSONAL STORY

HANNAH KATZ



As an 11-year-old girl sitting in bed, begging my doctors to let me go to school for one more day, I never would have imagined that I would be blessed to matriculate so triumphantly.

That was the age I was diagnosed with cancer. Isolated in my room, the only thing I wanted to do was to go back to school. I dreamed of being there again, and woke up crying because it wasn't real. Now that I have officially completed school, I'm grateful that my dreams did in fact come true.

During matric, there were times when adapting to new routines, managing time effectively, the heavy workload, and facing the pressure of high expectations felt overwhelming. During these moments, all I wanted was not to go to

school. However, the memory of my 11-year-old self crying as she longed for her friends, teachers, and learning never failed to bring it into perspective. It was then that I realised how blessed I was to be in matric.

The overwhelming fatigue and anxiety was hard, but I forced myself to push harder, and I will forever be grateful that I did. I know that the fact that I'm alive to be able to achieve my goals is a blessing, and I'm grateful for that every day.

My experience led me to find my purpose, which is to help people through love of biology and the sciences.

I'm nervous and excited to begin my new journey in the medical-research field, and I hope that I can give back to others the way they gave to me.

• Hannah achieved seven distinctions, and was among the top 1% in biology.



Hannah Katz

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# High school odyssey – an epic challenge



DR JORDAN MOSHE

OPINION

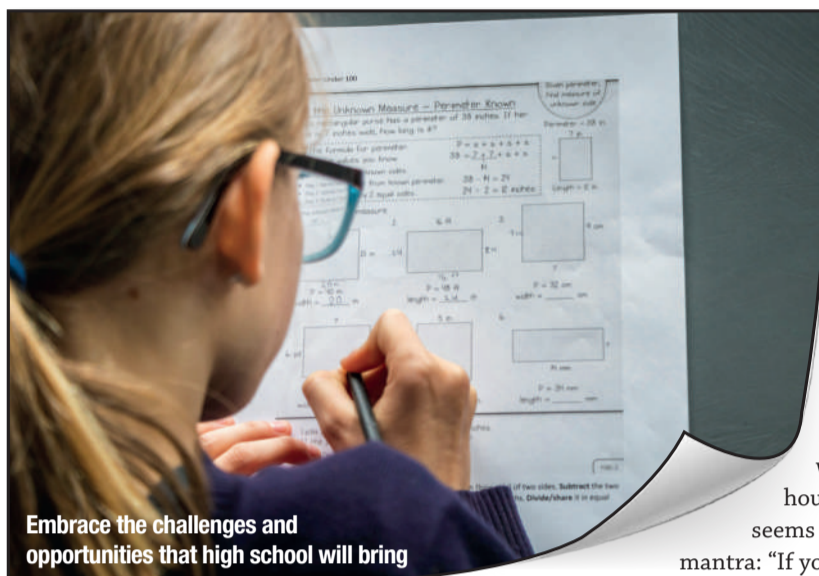
As I watched the matric class gather to receive their results last week, the sense of accomplishment was thicker than the plot of a Dickens novel. The individual envelope handed out to each matric student marked not just the culmination of their high school career, but a journey as epic as any quest in literature. Observing their smiles, tears, and sense of relief and accomplishment, I couldn't help but reflect on their journeys like a novel whose origin began back in Grade 7. Could I be an English teacher if I thought differently?

Starting high school is akin to stepping onto the stage of a Shakespearean drama, where you are both hero and occasionally comic relief. Everything from the towering lockers to the longer school hours seems designed to test your mettle. In Grade 7, you might feel that you're at the bottom of the heap again after ruling primary school. It's a fresh start, a chance to learn, and to begin crafting your own story. Embrace the challenges and opportunities that come with each new class and each new project.

As time marches on, the strange and formidable landscape of high school becomes familiar territory. You find your feet, and start to navigate through your days with the ease of Elizabeth Bennet at a ball – though perhaps with fewer marriage proposals. Moving into Grade 8, the scene changes slightly. Feeling a smidge superior – take note of the sibilance, teachers are always going on about it in English – you start to view

the school corridors with a bit of a swagger, proud of how you've mastered the locker combinations and class schedules. Looking at the new Grade 7s, you find it hard to believe you were ever that lost.

The middle years of your journey are when you begin to grasp the gravity of your choices. Grade 9 will nudge you closer to the realities of senior high. It's like being



Embrace the challenges and opportunities that high school will bring

given control of a Netflix account halfway through an intriguing series – you get the power to change the series or turn up the volume on your interests. This year, as you choose subjects that might dictate your future – think an algorithm suggesting your next binge – remember that every decision helps script your ultimate high school show. It's a time to deepen your exploration into both general and Jewish

studies, similar to deciding whether to dive into the philosophical depths of *The Good Place* or keep up with the fast-paced twists of *Stranger Things*. While you're tackling these academic challenges, keep your sense of humour about the quirky moments, like feeling like mastering maths is as bewildering as understanding the rules of Quidditch in *Harry Potter*.

As Grade 10 rolls around, teachers start heralding the approach of matric with the enthusiasm of town criers. Suddenly, you're not just preparing for the next test; you're laying the groundwork for the grand finale. You feel older, yes, but not necessarily freer. You're in school for what feels like endless hours, and every teacher seems to have a favourite mantra: "If you get this right now, you won't struggle later!" Wait, what? Wasn't I just in Grade 7? It's a mix of newfound independence and sobering responsibilities. It's as if you've been handed the keys to a more adult part of life, when the decisions you make start to have weight and your parents begin speaking in terms that make the next steps – matric, university, careers – feel imminent and important. Choose subjects with both your head and your heart, let your head analyse future career paths

and academic benefits, while your heart tunes into subjects that spark curiosity and passion.

Grades 11 and 12 blur into what feels like a single marathon year. In Grade 11, a newfound freedom is flexed as much as possible, but your teachers continually remind you, "You're basically in matric." Then suddenly, you're in the thick of the matric year, where the days fly by filled with "firsts" and "lasts". Every school event gives you a feeling of finality, and the balance between enjoying these moments and preparing for exams can feel overwhelming. Yet, amidst the hustle, it's crucial to maintain perspective. Your worth isn't solely defined by school. The journey through high school, with its ups and downs, teaches you much more than academic subjects, it teaches you about life.

Defining yourself by numbers on a page helps no-one. Sure, the marks are important, but they aren't everything. The true beauty of high school lies in the journey. Yes, it's a cliché as old as time, but it rings especially true in the corridors and classrooms of your school days.

When you come to collect your results, as my matrics did last week, you want to look back not just at a transcript but at a tapestry woven with moments of laughter, lessons learned, friendships made, and challenges overcome. High school is about learning to dance in the rain rather than just waiting for the storm to pass, and the less rhythm you have, the more entertaining it will be.

• Dr Jordan Moshe is deputy principal at Yeshiva College Girls High School, and a senior English and halacha teacher.

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## Freeman's final school years picture perfect

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Jamie Freeman made sure to find time in his latter years at King David High School Linksfield to enjoy his passion for wildlife photography.

Freeman, who completed matric last year, won awards for his photography, including the Youth in Africa category of the 2022 Benjamin Mkapa African Wildlife Photography Awards for a picture he took of a lioness in a tree, drooling from the mouth after eating a rotten impala carcass which she had stolen from a leopard just moments before.

He also won the title of the 2023 Young South African Photographer of the Year for capturing a shot of an interesting and unique encounter between a giant African Bush Elephant and a tiny bush cricket, sitting on the elephant's tusk.

"I've had a love for wildlife for as long as I can remember," Freeman says. "I've always enjoyed spending time outside in nature, so in 2020, when I picked up a camera for the first time, it only made sense for me to start exploring the world of nature photography. I've been shooting ever since."

In March 2022, Freeman was presented with the opportunity to spend a weekend in the world-renowned Sabi Sands Game Reserve. "It had always been a dream of mine to visit this reserve, so I knew I couldn't miss this chance to go. Over the couple of days that I spent in the reserve, Sabi Sands spoiled me with countless incredible sightings and photographic opportunities. I took thousands of photos on that trip, and I would consider many of those to be some of the favourite images in my catalogue to this day," he says.

His image of the lioness in a tree wasn't only recognised in the Benjamin Mkapa African Wildlife Awards, it was also printed and displayed in Kenya's Nairobi National Museum in Kenya, resulting in Freeman following in the footsteps of

the likes of award-winning artist and author Joy Adamson.

"I also received a cash prize, as well as an incredible trophy in the form of a beautiful stone sculpture of an elephant which was handcrafted for me by a famous artist in Kenya," Freeman says.

As for his photograph of the elephant and cricket, which he captured on the final day of his Sabi Sands trip, recognition as the 2023 Young South African Photographer of the Year for the picture meant he received many amazing prizes, credit, and much exposure.



Jamie Freeman

"It was and still is an honour to have won these two incredible awards," Freeman says. "I'm so grateful to everyone involved who made it possible."

While Freeman loves photographing all wildlife, including hippopotami and buffalo bulls, "I seem to have a special place in my heart for capturing birds", he says. His photos include a gorgeous white-fronted bee-eater bird perched on a not so beautiful piece of elephant dung.

# Enjoy the journey to infinite possibilities



MANDY GRUZD

OPINION

Having just witnessed the glowing matric results released last week, many thoughts filtered through my mind. In the cycle of each school year, there are always a range of emotions that emerge at different times. The hope and excitement at the start; the dread, stress, and exasperation in the middle; and the anticipation, elation, and relief at the end. Writing matric is the culmination of a 15-year period of learning, developing, and

I'm astounded at their individual journeys – becoming doctors, legal experts, activists, film producers, actuaries, historians, artists, actors, to name a few, gives me goosebumps. They have pursued their passions and from matric, have steadfastly carved out their futures and success.

As a teacher and later as a parent, watching this process for many years, though circumstances have changed and contexts shifted, one thing remains consistent: it's

work, it's important to recognise that Grade 12 exams are the culmination of many years of learning. Matric is a stage on a long path of growth, opening the possibilities and opportunities that follow.

The American activist Malcolm X said, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." I believe this to be true. Embracing and becoming involved in all that school offers – academically; on the sports field; on the stage; and providing service to others – is key to achieving the best results and ensuring that the future is prepared for. Having a sense of belonging and feeling recognised and valued encourages growth and development. School provides the foundation of what's important, it allows lifelong friendships to be forged. It grounds the students in a sense of history, connection, and identity, ensuring that what's learned and experienced transcends the present moment and builds a future rooted in purpose and pride.

Students are all wired differently, interested and passionate in different things. As teachers and parents, we help to navigate, guide, and nurture different strengths. We also assist those who experience difficulties. We need to see the individuality and humanity in every student, and nurture the spark of potential that lies within them. It's important to acknowledge this and work towards overcoming challenges. This partnership of students, parents, and teaching staff allow students to flourish as individuals in the years to come. In the education process, curiosity and creativity should be encouraged, and collaboration fostered, enabling critical thought, insight, and free expression.

Here's some advice on how to write matric

effectively:

- Plant the seeds of practising and keeping to good habits of planning, preparation, and time management;
- Get enough sleep, a good healthy diet, and exercise;
- Engage with friends and family and have some down time, away from the stresses of the year;
- Foster a positive attitude and a mindset that allows for small steps to be taken each day; and
- Be resilient in order to solve problems, and have the grit and determination to persevere.

The purpose of education is to keep playing, to contribute, inspire, help, support, and leave the game better for the next players. In education, the incredible work that teachers, staff, and coaches do has a profound impact on their students' lives. As schools, we must listen to what people want and give them what they need.

In essence, children should enjoy school and have a sense of belonging. If they are happy and comfortable, they will perform better. I encourage them all to make the most of their opportunities. If they are disillusioned and fearful of underperforming on the academic stage, then we do them an injustice. All students must be embraced and helped towards mastering the skills and content required to begin the next stage. It's important to celebrate progress over perfection, and foster a culture of collaboration rather than competition. As with each year and each group, it's the opportunity to inspire, uplift, and guide. Success is enabling them to rise confidently to face challenges and to be open to infinite possibilities.

• Mandy Gruzd is a mother and teacher, and the head of King David High School Victory Park.

Having a sense of belonging brings out the best in students



growing. It marks the start of the next chapter, forging a path of becoming more independent by moving away from the safety of school out into the world. The entire journey matters.

There are two aspects that keep coming to my mind. The first is when I wrote matric. It was 1989, the year the Berlin Wall came down, leading to the end of the Cold War. This year symbolised so much – both the end of an old order and the start of a new world. Thinking back, writing matric seemed less stressful but more rigid.

The second aspect is that, more recently, as I meet up with or hear from previous students,

about constant change, adapting, and that each student is encouraged and celebrated for being the best they can be. The matric year brings all prior learning and experience together. As students move from their last first days, to their last gala or sporting match, or major production, from mini prelims to prelims, to the much-anticipated matric dance, valedictory, and lastly finals, all of these milestones matter.

The pressure felt by students has increased. Many are competing for scarce places at universities, and there's a lot at stake. As young adults move from their schools to tertiary education, gap years, or the world of

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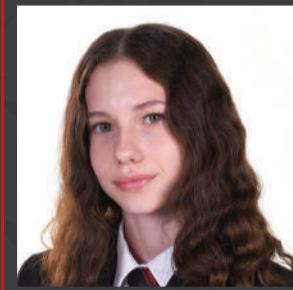
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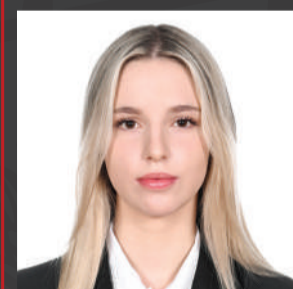
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# Work hard, play hard – matrices eye year ahead

As the matric students of 2025 begin their final year of school, the SA Jewish Report asked them to tell us their expectations. Here are a selection of their responses.

## Cape Town Torah High

### Minna Wineberg

I expect to make the most of my learning and grow in Yiddishkeit. I'm excited to finish high school, but it's sad to be leaving this amazing school after six great years.

### Batsheva Popack

As I start my final year of school, it's bittersweet, but I'm excited to make the most of it. I want to take every opportunity to grow and create memories. I hope to use this time to prepare myself for what's ahead while appreciating what I've had here.



### Esti Hecht

I expect to grow in secular and Jewish studies. It's bittersweet knowing it's my last year, but I hope to make amazing lasting memories and finish strong.

### Yedidya Ziegler

I'm looking forward to pushing myself and exploring who I am. Many opportunities will come, and I plan to take them with both hands. I can't wait to see how this year changes my identity and perspective.

### Mendy Silman

I intend to focus on my studies this year, and expect to grow and learn a lot. I know matric won't be easy, but I'm prepared and excited for it. Although I feel sad that my school career is almost over, I look forward to the new experiences that the future holds.

### Matteo Coscia

I want to make the most of this year, to create as many amazing experiences as possible for myself and my friends, and use this opportunity to realise my leadership potential. I would also love to push myself academically and grow personally and spiritually.



## Yeshiva College

### Jacob Hoffmann

I hope to have a school year where I can achieve the results I want by working hard. I also hope to have a meaningful and powerful final year.

### Yoel Krasner

Matric will be the hardest yet most fulfilling year of my life. It will set the course of the rest of my life.

### Yehuda Galvad Schneiderman

A year filled with valuable memories and expansion of knowledge.

### Elnatan Sosnovik

I'm expecting a tough year in which I learn about hard work, dedication, and discipline, and find out a lot about myself.

### Brett Joffe

Matric is going to be like a road in South Africa – there'll be a few potholes along the way, but you keep going forward.

### Josh Uria

I'll strive to work consistently so that I can work hard, play hard.



### Akiva Bome

I expect my year to be a hard but fulfilling year filled with opportunities to grow, achieve my goals, and make unforgettable memories with my friends.

### Jonty Price

I'm excited to see where this year takes me – inside and outside the classroom.

### Liav Lewus

I'm excited to reach this milestone, meeting all my expectations and cementing awesome friendships. Leaving Yeshiva College proud and fulfilled, with hard work and good times!

### Madison Matthews

I expect my year to be challenging and rewarding. I look forward to creating lasting memories, achieving my goals, and embracing every opportunity to make this final year unforgettable.

### Ella Trope

I'm looking forward to being a part of the wider community after school. I'm also excited to have a year of fun and new firsts with classmates and friends.

### Yael Willemse

I expect it will be stressful and time-consuming. However, provided I work hard, I should be able to manage the pressure.

## Torah Academy

### Shevi Lazarus

I want this year to reflect all the work I have put in over previous years, and I hope that the conclusion of my school career will be balanced, consistent, and fulfilling. Please G-d, it will be a strong opening for future possibilities and opportunities.

### Yeshaya Glass

I'm only two days into matric, and I can already tell how hectic this year is going to be! In just these first few days, my hands are already full with assignments and extra lessons. This year, my goal is to achieve top marks in academics, and dedicate all my time and effort to studying. I know it's going to take hard work and focus, but in the end, I know the effort I put in will shine through and make it worthwhile. This is the big year it all leads up to. The pressure is on, and I'm going to give it my all!

### Aharon Cohen

While excited for the year ahead, matric is intimidating as the whole school career has led up to this pivotal moment. Your academic future and occupation rests on the efforts you put into this final year. But I hope to make matric "the year" by enhancing my academic achievements while continuing to grow in my Judaism, and building a strong foundation for my future.

### Herzlia

### Connor Amsdorf

I expect this year to be filled with many incredible highs and hopefully some not-so-lows. I look forward to pushing hard to achieve the best results I can. This year will be one to remember!



Yeshiva College matric girls

## King David Victory Park

### Kira Katz

Matric is a huge milestone, and I feel excited and nervous about what lies ahead. It's a year that will shape my future, so my expectations are to work hard, spend time with my best friends, and make the most of every opportunity.

### Raquel Meyerowitz

Going into matric is a bittersweet moment. On the one hand, I know it's my last opportunity to achieve my academic goals in school, which puts a lot of day-to-day pressure and stress on me, yet on the other, this is my last year of school, where I get to spend every day with my best friends, having fun, and making lifetime memories together.

### Aimee Shull

As I embark on my Grade 12 year, sorrow fills me as I know I am travelling closer to my departure from my Victory Park school family, however, what awaits me in my future outside the brick walls excites me. I'm grateful for all the support and encouragement my teachers have given me throughout my high school career. Together with the rest of Victory Park's Class of 2025, I'm certain we will tackle this year to its fullest and go out with a bang like true Parkers.

## King David Linksfield

### Gabriella Romberg

I'm excited about this year but also nervous as matric is a lot of work and will determine our future degree.

### Benji Furman

I'm incredibly excited about the independence that comes with matric, and I hope that I can form even more everlasting bonds this year.

### Abigail Kaplan

My expectation is to do my absolute best in every subject, and to excel. I feel exhausted but excited.

### Raz Oudmayer

I'm excited about my last year at King David. I'm looking forward to working hard and enjoying school while it lasts.



Yeshiva College matric boys



## Cameron Lyons

Starting matric feels surreal! I can't believe that we have worked so hard for 11 years to get to this important year in our lives. It's daunting and nerve-wracking as I, along with so many others, take my academics seriously, and therefore, I'm anxious about the work and exams that lie ahead. Overall, it's scary being in matric, but also fun, knowing that this will be our last year making memories with so many of our peers.



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# King David 'like family', says head girl Mandy Wu

SAUL KAMIONSKY

**M**andy Wu went from feeling like just another King David Linksfield (KDL) pupil to becoming head girl in matric last year, someone who was friendly to all students and an achiever in academics and on the sports field.

"To be a King David High School Linksfield [KDHSL] sports captain was my greatest honour," says Wu, who lived in Harrismith, Free State, before joining KDL. She enjoyed many wins on the soccer, touch rugby, and hockey fields and on basketball courts in matric.

"My matric year was my best and favourite year of high school, which sounds strange because the majority of the year was filled with exams and stress. Earlier this year, I realised that the life I knew and loved would change in 12 months. So, the whole year was a highlight for me because I appreciated every little moment a little more because I knew it would be the last."

Wu says her greatest achievement this year was doing everything she wanted to

do. "I learned to maintain balance in my life between school, studying for exams, playing four sports, and maintaining a social life. I'm forever grateful to KDL for giving me the opportunity to excel academically while also pursuing my passion on the sports field."

Wu, self-described as a woman of many words, knew every single student in the school and remembered the details of each person she spoke to.

"When I started at KDL, I felt like I was just another student because KDL is such a big school. I had seniors who helped me. I

knew then that when I became a senior, I would go that extra mile to make every student feel accepted

and valued. In my time as a senior, I loved it when a student from a different grade would smile or greet me in the hallways. That small act could make my bad day just a little better. I hoped that I could do the same for them. The school became

my family away from home, where my peers and teachers always cared about me."

Wu never imagined being named a head student leader. "I always did feel a bit out of place at school. But on announcement day, 28 July 2023, to hear the crowd cheer for me and to receive so many messages of support, it showed that I did belong at the school and that everything worked out how it was meant to be. I'm extremely grateful to my school for its continuous support throughout my time as head girl."

Sports at KDHSL was more than just an extramural for Wu. "It was one of my families at school, consisting of sportsmen and sportswomen, who came together to share their love for their respective sports. Over my years at KDHSL, we have made our mark in many Johannesburg sports leagues with many teams being crowned champion."

As co-captain of the girl's first team touch rugby with Hannah Kaveberg last year, they lead the team to being crowned back-to-back league winners of the Central Gauteng Touch Rugby League, making the 2024 season only the second time KDHSL has won the title.

Although the touch rugby league runs at the same time as girls' basketball, Wu also pursued her love of the latter sport, initially playing with the boys as there was no girls'

team. In her matric year, KDHSL boasted two undefeated competitive girls' teams.

One week before her preliminary exams, Wu travelled with the girls' soccer first team to Gqeberha, where Jewish schools from various provinces competed in the Shabbat Nachamu Tournament. "Our team remained undefeated over the four days and came home victorious." It was also named the school's Girls Team of the Year in 2024.

"Our first team soccer girls also competed in the open JVW Diamond School League, which consisted of 62 teams across Gauteng. Eighty-four days; 50 goals; one team; one dream. We went on to win bronze. I couldn't have asked for a better way to end my time at the school."

Wu, who doesn't come from a Jewish background, began her journey at KDL as her parents wanted her and her sister "to receive a better education, so they decided to move us to Johannesburg to study at the top private school, KDL."

At the time, Wu didn't know much about Judaism. "However, through my years of learning at KDL, I have grown to love the Jewish religion, Hebrew, and Israel. Which is also why I chose to take Hebrew as a matric subject," says Wu, who will be studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand this year.



Mandy Wu

## 'I had to work twice as hard, but I did it'

LEE TANKLE

**W**hen Torah Academy matriculant Tali Snaid began high school, she wasn't sure she would get through matric because of learning difficulties. But with sheer determination and a whole lot of hard work, she passed with flying colours.

Snaid's difficulties were picked up in Grade R at Yeshiva Primary School, when her teacher contacted her parents.

"I went for multiple assessments," she said. "I was in speech and occupational therapy [OT]. And after many assessments, we realised that I needed to go to a remedial school. So, I went to Crossroads in Grade 1."

She was at Crossroads for seven years up until Grade 7, where she spent a lot of time in speech therapy and OT, giving her the extra help she needed.

When deciding where to go for high school, Torah Academy was recommended to her parents because it was a smaller school with smaller classes so the teachers could be more focused on helping her.

"At the time, it seemed outrageous," she said. "My family has never been a Torah Academy family or anything like that."

However, after a day at the school, Snaid decided it was the best place for her to flourish.

"When I started at Torah Academy, it was difficult," she said. "It was a big jump to mainstream schooling. We worked the system so that if we were doing science or biology exams, I would be able to do them open book because we knew there

were subjects I was never going to be able to take in Grade 10. The school made it as doable as possible, and it gave me the confidence to be able to work towards doing matric.

"It was often difficult for me because it was a lot of work," she said. "Whatever others needed to do to study, I needed to work twice as hard. At one point, I had to tell myself that no-one was going to make this possible unless I did."

She would often look at her friends and see how hard they were working and how much motivation they had. It demotivated her because she thought she could never find the time to work twice as hard as her peers.

But with the support of her school, teachers, and tutors, she was able to get the help she needed.

Snaid often had to take classes outside of school due to the limited options of Torah Academy. She studied tourism at King David Linksfield, drama at St John's College, and a Consumer Studies teacher was brought in to teach at Torah Academy.

"Since I did so many subjects out of school, I had a lot of free lessons. That was helpful. It gave me access to the teachers who were fulltime there. They were able to help me practice maths or English and when the school day was over, I did the subjects that were out of school."

Matric taught Snaid that she could do anything she set her mind to. "I saw that anything was possible. I got extra courage when girls come up to me and told me that they didn't think they could do matric but they knew they could do it from seeing me."

Snaid isn't sure where she will study this year, but knows she has a passion for teaching or social work, and will work towards it.



Tali Snaid

## 'Consistent work', says Meltzer, Redhill's first Dux scholar

SAUL KAMIONSKY

**R**edhill School matriculant Ronan Meltzer achieved an International Baccalaureate (IB) result of 43 points out of 45, a massive achievement in the international community.

These results place Meltzer, who was also head of Judiciary at the school, among the top tier of IB students worldwide, and earned him the distinction of being Redhill's first IB Dux scholar, a new tradition that honours the school's top-achieving IB students.

"I feel relieved that my hard work paid off, but I also have a deep sense of gratitude to my family, my amazing Redhill teachers, and Executive Head Joseph Gerassi and the whole Redhill leadership team who supported me the whole way," Meltzer says. "Without them, this wouldn't have been possible."

Meltzer says consistent studying was the secret for his good results. "I worked every day from Grade 11 as if my finals were the next week. Also, like I said, the most important aspect, the support system I had, truly was such a blessing.

"Consistency was one of the biggest challenges I faced," he says. Some of the highlights of his matric year were "exploring maths with others; being part of the Redhill Judiciary; playing rugby; and just enjoying time with friends at school".

Meltzer was voted head of Judiciary to mediate political debate on campus and encourage dialogue. "To do so, we held various panel discussions for the

students of the school on contemporary social issues, inspiring critical thought and dialogue."

Meltzer was also a dedicated maths tutor, both within the school and in the community at large. "I have always had a passion for maths, and I wanted to explore this love with other people," he says. He founded and led the maths tutor group that tutored child patients at the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital and Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital.



Ronan Meltzer

"We the tutors and the children were able to form a community in which maths was no longer the reason we came together, it was a bond in which we shared our love for music, discussed recent soccer games, or even just chatted about what was going on in our lives," Meltzer says.

Meltzer is researching universities locally and abroad. "I plan to study applied maths and I'm excited to see where it will take me," he says.

Read the SA Jewish Report online  
and sign up to our weekly newsletter

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[sajewishreport](https://www.facebook.com/sajewishreport) [sa\\_jewishreport](https://www.instagram.com/sa_jewishreport)



# OUR SCHOOL BADGE TELLS A STORY.



## THE LAMP

To be Jewish means to learn and to teach, even by lamp light. As the Shema says, "Veshinantum levanecha – You will teach your children".



## THE MAGEN DAVID

No matter what, we are never alone. Not only do we have each other and our community, we belong to a people with a long and proud history.



## THE ANCHOR

Our school and Jewish traditions are an anchor that holds us steady, as we live our lives in this beautiful port city, Cape Town.



## אם תרצו

## THE MOTTO

"Im tirtzu, ein zo aggadah – If you will it, it is no dream", said Theodor Herzl. A reminder that we always strive for more and a promise to support every pupil's dream.

## Mazaltov Class of 2024!

80

Matric NSC candidates

100%

Matric pass rate in an academically inclusive school

253

Individual subject distinctions

3.2

Average subject distinctions per pupil

[www.herzlia.com](http://www.herzlia.com)

# HERZLIA HIGH SCHOOL



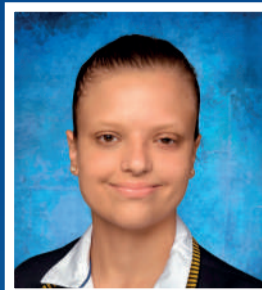
Noah Arelisky



Jordan Atie



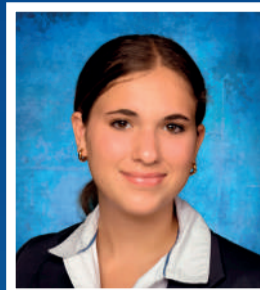
Joshua Atie



Stephanie Baker



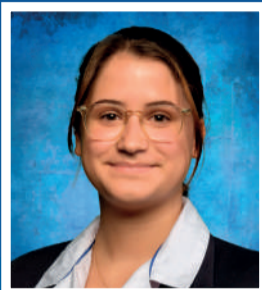
Cameron Bastick



Erin Beder



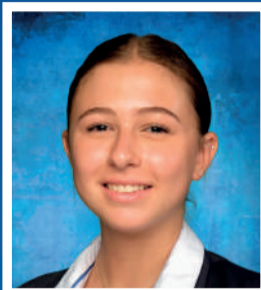
Mika Behrman



Samantha Berk



Daniel Bieber



Mia Biton



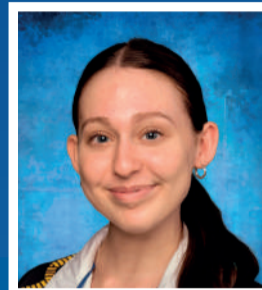
Kate Brozin



Tori Bruk



Stephanie Burton



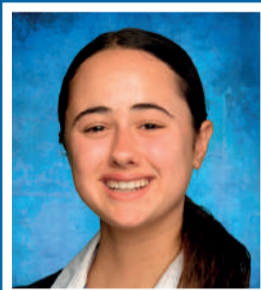
Carla Casper



Daniel Chaskalson



Liam Chin



Daniella Cohen



Justin Cohen



Keira Cohen



Samuel Cohen



Brooklyn Danilewitz



Aaron Ellman



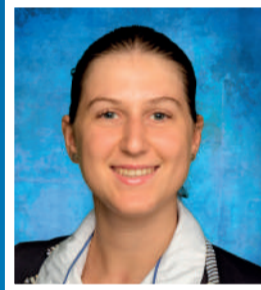
Leo Franck



David French



Aaron Gimpel



Sarah Gluckman



James Gold



Matthew Grevler



Kyle Harcombe



India Harris



Michael Hendler



Lea Hermelin



Zachary-Levi Herskovitz



Reece Herwells



Tyler Jacobson



Judd Jocum



Jade Joffe



Jed Kagan



Jesse Katz



Aidan Kusevitsky



Kira Labe



Ethan Levin



Oliver Levinthal



Aaron Lustig



Jonah Lustig



Kiara Maltz



Darren Marcow



Mikayla Marcow



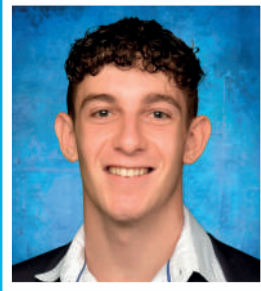
Mimi-Grace Markram



Gabe Marsden



Cara Mayer



Adam Merris



Leo Miller



Danielle Munitz



Sienna Myerson



Daniel Nathan



Lital Novick



Timothy Polakow



Adam Poulton



Kirtana Reddy



Ella Rosmarin



Mia Sacks



Thai Sandler



Idana Saven



Itai Schulman



Kai Seeff



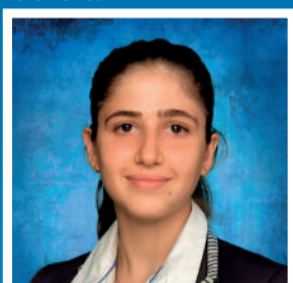
Keren Shear



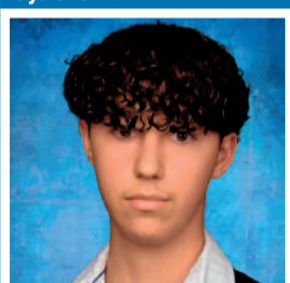
Maya Shewitz



Gabriel Spiro



Madison Talberg



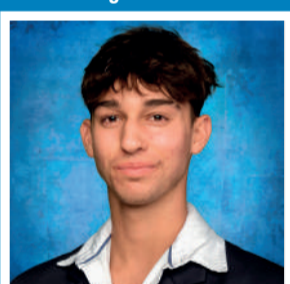
Isaac Urdang



Alex Van Breukelen



Joshua Van Tonder



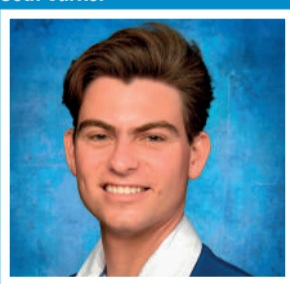
Seth Varkel



Amy Vogelman



Ruby Webb



Ethan Werb



Matt Whitesman



Jada Williams



Jordan Williams



Jaynie Wingerin



Emily Zelezniak



Noah Zive



# CLASS OF 2024

## TOP ACHIEVERS

Mazaltov to Herzlia Matric Class of 2024! Your success embodies commitment, resilience and Herzlia's motto of "Im tirtzu, ein zo agadah - If you will it, it's no dream."

Your exceptional results reflect the promises of Herzlia's five interwoven pillars which prepare pupils for a world needing bold and bright thinkers with a strong moral compass and the determination to make things better. Young leaders who go out into the world as well-rounded, empowered, and inspired individuals.

- 100% matric pass rate in an academically inclusive school;
- 80 NSC examination candidates;
- 253 individual subject distinctions;
- 3.2 distinctions on average per candidate, including further studies mathematics and English;
- 100% of accounting pupils achieved distinctions;
- 91% of history pupils achieved distinctions;
- 81% of information technology (IT) pupils achieved distinctions; and
- 100% achieved by two pupils: one in history and one in economics.

### Eight distinctions

Idana Saven

### Six distinctions

Gabriel Spiro  
Amy Vogelman  
Jaynie Wingerin  
Noah Zive

### Seven distinctions

Daniel Bieber  
Daniel Chaskalson  
Judd Jocum  
Madison Talberg  
Ethan Werb  
Matt Whitesman

### Five distinctions

Mika Behrman  
Carla Casper  
Justin Cohen  
Matthew Grevler  
Aaron Lustig  
Jonah Lustig  
Timothy Polakow  
Joshua Van Tonder  
Emily Zelezniak

### Six distinctions

Joshua Atie  
Leo Franck  
Jesse Katz  
Aidan Kusevitsky  
Kai Seeff

\* Distinctions are listed in alphabetic surname order.

# KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL LINKSFIELD



**Zachary Behr**  
9 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, Life Orientation (LO), Maths, Physical Sciences, Further Studies (FS) Maths (standard and extended)



**Savana Brook**  
9 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), Independent Examinations Board (IEB) outstanding achievements list, top 1% Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Saul Gelbart**  
9 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, Information Technology (IT), LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), FS Physics, top 1% Maths



**Stefan Furman**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB outstanding achievements list, top 1% Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Benjamin Ginsburg**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB outstanding achievements list, top 1% English, IT, Physical Sciences



**David Jammy**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB commendable achievements list, top 1% Maths, Physical Sciences



**David Joseph**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB commendable achievements list, top 1% Afrikaans, English, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Jacob Lever**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, History, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended)



**Gidon Miltz**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (extended)



**Judd Rajak**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard)



**Brett Sandler**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB outstanding achievements list, top 1% Accounts, English, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Gavriel Sender**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), IEB outstanding achievements list, top 1% Afrikaans, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Kayla Solomon**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Ashlee Stein**  
8 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Chia-Chen Mandy Wu**  
8 Distinctions, Afrikaans, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Cara Beck**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Life Sciences, Maths



**Amy Blumenthal**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Jamie Class**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Ariella Cohen**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, IT, LO, Maths



**Elijah Fleishman**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Maths Lit, top 1% Maths Lit



**Zoe Jay**  
7 Distinctions, English, Hebrew, History, isiZulu, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Hannah Katz**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences, Visual Arts, Top 1% Life Sciences



**Sammy Kotzin**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Hannah Levy**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Tanna Lyons**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, IEB outstanding achievements list, Top 1% LO



**Emma Sassen**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Life Sciences, Maths



**Ethan Sharfman**  
7 Distinctions, IT, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences, FS Maths (standard and extended), FS Physics



**Rachel Smith**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



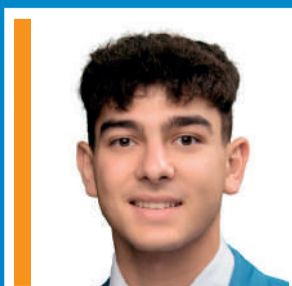
**Aaron Zulberg**  
7 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Amber Allison**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Geography, Hebrew, LO, Maths Lit



**Kiara Chananie**  
6 Distinctions, Consumer Studies, English, LO, Life Sciences, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Jayden Feinberg**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Jonty Hirschson**  
6 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Zoe Klaff**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Life Sciences



**Jordi Kubelun**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Maths, top 1% LO, Afrikaans, English

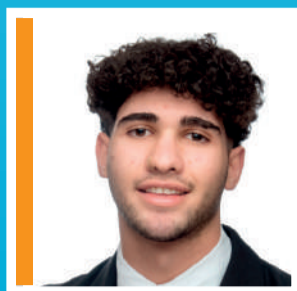


**Noa Nerwich**  
6 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Maths Lit

# KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL LINKSFIELD



**David Porter**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, IT, LO, Maths



**Nadav Rgoane**  
6 Distinctions, Accounts, Business Studies, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths



**Benjamin Rosen**  
6 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, History, LO, Maths, Physical Sciences



**Sienna Sharfman**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Hebrew, History, LO, Tourism



**Chad Wilters**  
6 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, Geography, LO, Life Sciences, Maths Lit



**Kira Dannheisser**  
5 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, History, LO, Life Sciences



**Ariella Hirsch**  
5 Distinctions, Dramatic Arts, English, IT, LO, Maths, top 1% English



**Jesse Shur**  
5 Distinctions, Accounts, Business Studies, English, LO, Maths, top 1% Business Studies



**Ricky Bloch**  
4 Distinctions, Accounts, Afrikaans, Business Studies, LO



**Jake Crown**  
4 Distinctions, Accounts, Business Studies, English, LO



**Gia Fine**  
4 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, History, LO



**Ayla Gelbart**  
4 Distinctions, Dramatic Arts, English, Life Sciences, Music



**Yael Jean**  
4 Distinctions, English, Hebrew, LO, Maths Lit



**Sarah Lang**  
4 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, LO, Life Sciences



**Tali Rubin**  
4 Distinctions, English, Hebrew, History, LO



**Dainah Wicksted**  
4 Distinctions, Afrikaans, English, LO, Maths Lit



**Samuel Bravo**  
3 Distinctions, Afrikaans, Hebrew, Maths



**Ethan Dannheisser**  
3 Distinctions, Accounts, Business Studies, LO



**Samara-Ella Davidovitz**  
3 Distinctions, English, LO, Maths



**Jarred Kravat**  
3 Distinctions, Business Studies, English, Maths Lit



**Levi Krost**  
3 Distinctions, CAT, Maths Lit, Tourism



**Joshua Lauter**  
3 Distinctions, English, LO, Tourism



**Brett Rubinstein**  
3 Distinctions, English, History, LO



**Amir Sabiri**  
3 Distinctions, Business Studies, Maths Lit, Tourism



**Gad Berchowitz**  
2 Distinctions, Hebrew, Maths Lit



**Olivia Edelstein**  
2 Distinctions, Dramatic Arts, Maths Lit



**Zachary Hendry**  
2 Distinctions, LO, Maths



**Shira Kahanovitz**  
2 Distinctions, English, Maths



**Devon Kantor**  
2 Distinctions, English, Maths Lit



**Gadi Levy**  
2 Distinctions, Geography, Maths Lit



**Liat Nahman**  
2 Distinctions, English, Geography



**Gadi Rahamim**  
2 Distinctions, Business Studies, Maths Lit



**Jaime Freeman**  
1 Distinction, Geography



**Alexia Gordon**  
1 Distinction, Maths Lit



**Meir Jackson**  
1 Distinction, LO



**Hannah Kaveberg**  
1 Distinction, LO



**Layla Kayle**  
1 Distinction, Dramatic Arts



**Adam Lustig**  
1 Distinction, Hebrew



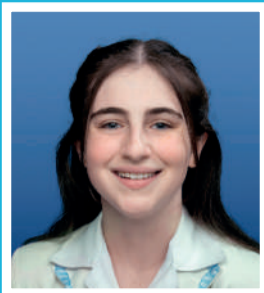
**Ella Smith**  
1 Distinction, Business Studies



**Scarlett Smith**  
1 Distinction, Maths Lit

The students appearing in this feature opted to have their results published.

# KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL VICTORY PARK



Alexa Abrahamsohn



Zara Abramoohn



Jaiden Behr



Jake Bentel



Danielle Bentley



Allegra Berman



Bianca Berz



Riley Bick



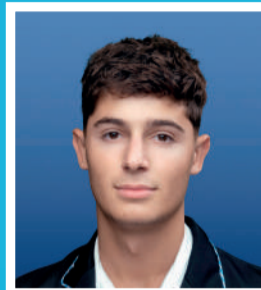
Samuel Blou



Samuel Bonner



Adam Confait



Ariel Diner



Shannon Drieband



Shira Ephron



Leah Ermann



Brandon Fine



Gabriel Flaum



Elih Furman



Amber Galaun



Zach Ginsberg



Ethan Goldberg



Jesse Goldberg



Samantha Gomer



Jacob Gordon



Taqiya Grant



Ben Handelsman



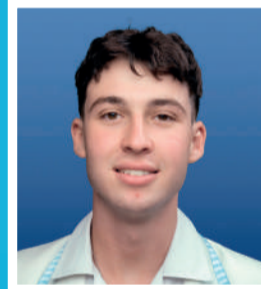
Danielle Hirson



Yehuda Lev Jankelowitz



Shea Joffe



Daniel Kapeluschnik



Jessie Katz



Raquel Katz



Daniel Katzman



Gabriel Katzman



Tyron Kodesh



Hannah Koff



Jolie Kotzin



Eden Lamb



Anna-Rose Lazarus



Christian Lees



Saul Levin



Demi-Ann Marks



David Matisonn



Jordan Milner



Samuel Moross



Daniel Munitz



Hannah Nathan



Liron Neuhaus



Zach Orlin



Matthew Phillips



Sara Rachbuch



Meah Radford



Daniella Reubenson



Batsheva Richard



Eric Rutstein



Tamima Saacks-Mann

# KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL VICTORY PARK



Dina Scop



Tali Scop



Gabriella Scott



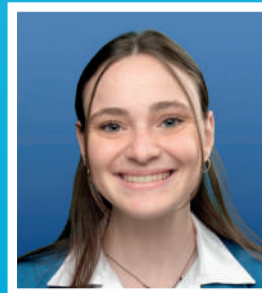
Amira Selikow



Liam Shaer



Saul Shapiro



Aimee Sidersky



Skyla Sinclair



Alon Slom



Treston Solomon



Ella Sundelson



Alexi Taylor



Abigail Tichauer



Demi Treger



Olivia Valkin



Liana Wes



Shalia Zlotnick



## MAZAL TOV TO OUR INCREDIBLE MATRIC CLASS OF 2024!



**100%**

Pass rate

**73**

Students wrote the NSC matriculation examination

**76%**

Group average

**3.39**

Distinctions per student

**46%**

Of all subjects written achieved results of 80% or higher

**75%**

Of all subjects written achieved results of 70% or higher

**90%**

Of all subjects written achieved results of 60% or higher

**6**

Students achieved a Full House

**15**

Students in the Top 1% of candidates per subject

**2**

Students on IEB Commendable List

**2**

Students on IEB Outstanding List

**2**

Summa Cum Laude Students achieved above 90% average with 9 subject distinctions



VISIT OUR NEXT OPEN HOUSE **26 FEBRUARY 2025**

# For these high achievers, school isn't everything

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

For Darren Morris, the founder and chief executive of Lucky Hustle, a multimillion-dollar advertising agency with an international footprint, school was a struggle. His story is just one of many of those who flourished outside of the school system.

After his father left, Morris was raised by his single mother and attended a private Jewish school with the help of the Chevrah Kadisha. "I struggled to find my feet and fit in as I sucked at sports and at academics," he says. There were also vast economic disparities between him and his peers. "So, I said to myself, 'One day I'm going to change my destiny and I'm going to do whatever it takes to live life on the other side of the fence.'"

Yet his marks were a problem. "I almost failed every subject, and I didn't get a university pass," says Morris. "I still had this dream, but was conditioned at school to think that if you don't become a doctor, accountant, or lawyer, you're not going to be anything."

It was at school, however, that he learned how to hustle. "I never had cash to go out on the weekend, so a friend and I started a tuck shop collection and delivery service where we were often told to keep the change." He also took multiple weekend jobs to make ends meet. "I learned from a young age that if you work really hard, you can make money."

With financial support from a friend's father, he attained a diploma in business

management, and his hardworking nature and innate creativity led him to advertising. When he got an opportunity at an advertising agency, he worked for free, but soon made a major deal for the company and was officially employed. After a few years of experience in various agencies, he started Lucky Hustle, a name that reflects his personal journey.



Darren Morris

"I started in 2021 as a team of one, but I knew that working harder and longer hours than anyone else would separate me from those who had more advantages than I did," he says.

Today, the company has more than 20 permanent staff, operates in South Africa and the United Kingdom, and serves local and international clients including the likes of MTN, Coca-Cola, and Huawei. "I completely changed my life," he says. "If you don't do well at school or come from money, don't give up too soon because if you work harder than anyone else, the magic will happen."

The founder of Free 2B Me Music, composer, recording artist, and Grammy Awards voting member, Breindy Klawansky, has achieved considerable success in the music industry. Yet she took an unconventional path to achieving her dreams. Leaving school in Grade 11 to study

at a Jewish seminary in England, Klawansky didn't matriculate. "I was completely disinterested in school," she says. Yet upon her return to South Africa, she knew she wanted to pursue a music degree.

"When I decided that I wanted to study music, I had to find a way to get into university," she says. She therefore completed her General Education Development (GED), an American high school equivalency certificate. While her path to admission to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) was rocky, her acceptance letter to an American university helped her case.

Before starting her degree, Klawansky had to complete music theory courses, at which she excelled. "When you focus on something that you're good at and you're mature enough to know what you want to do, you give your best," she said. After her first year at Wits, she was admitted into the Golden Key Honours Society for finishing among the top 15% in music theory. "That was very exciting because the other students had all studied music formally in high school and I hadn't," she says. "It showed me that I could excel."

Though Klawansky is proud of having attained her music degree, she believes that in today's rapidly changing world, there's no longer a set path to success, especially in the arts. "Being in the music industry is complicated and difficult," she says. It's about focusing on your strengths, building on each

of your experiences, and persevering.

Through starting Free 2B Me Music 10 years ago, she has helped to teach the next generation about the power of music.

Her biggest passion, however, is making music. As part of musical duo



Josh Lasker

Breindy and Matt with her husband, she has been nominated for multiple local and international awards. "For me, being involved in music is everything," she says.

Healthtech innovator Josh Lasker, the co-founder of Abby Health, hated the rigid structure of school. "You're all going at the same pace, and it's assumed you all have the same interests," he says. "I wasn't interested in anything I was learning, aside from business. It was just a grind. I also had an issue with authority, with teachers and staff dictating our every move."

And so, at about the age of 16, Lasker left school for a few months and started selling leather bracelets he'd imported from China. Yet missing the school camaraderie, he decided to return and

ultimately matriculated. "Scraping through was my mindset rather than getting top marks, and my results were average," he says.

Yet Lasker always had a feeling for entrepreneurship and knew early on that the corporate world wasn't for him. After a gap year through Europe, he became an ardent reader for the first time and completed a Bachelor of Commerce. After designing an app that didn't take off, he began working on a neglected side project his father had started.

This became Abby Health, which provides self-service health stations designed to increase employee engagement in wellness programmes. "I handled the marketing and business development and leveraged my dad's technical know-how." Though it took a few years to gain traction, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the company took off. "My dad and I are 50/50 partners, and we've gone from three employees to 50."

For parents, it's not always easy when their child breaks the mould. Yet ultimately, success lies in recognising our children's strengths, says educational psychologist Sheryl Cohen, who endorses the Grow Well SG (Singapore) approach to education. "It's about a collaboration between home and school to build a supportive relationship for each child," she says.

"To see their strengths and build on these, and not just run from lesson to lesson to counteract weaknesses. Children who have parents who believe in them are set up to succeed more often than those who don't."

## Hirsch turns creativity into fine art

SAUL KAMIONSKY

King David High School Linksfield matriculant Ariella Hirsch's passion for the arts drove her to excel at school and inspire fellow students to express themselves creatively. She was also recognised for her abundant crocheting.

It wasn't all that easy, considering that she attended three schools across Johannesburg and Cape Town, but she made it work. Her American accent, which she acquired from watching TV, sometimes fools people into thinking that she's from America.

Hirsch won five awards at the school's valedictory for her arts and culture pursuits. She was awarded for things like public speaking; creative writing; and dedication to arts and culture. She was also awarded for achieving the top mark for drama theory.

Hirsch enjoys debating, public speaking and creative writing, but the thing that motivates her most about the arts is the ability to express oneself.

"It's something not enough people focus on," she says. "When you look at who we are as people, the one thing that really differentiates us is our ability to express ourselves and how we choose to do so as individuals."

Throughout her rise in the ranks of the Arts and Culture Committee to eventually becoming its leader, Hirsch showed her school peers how valuable and vital creativity and expression can be.

"In my last few years, when I finally got to a place where I could teach others, I met some really great people in younger grades whom I'm now friends with.

I was able to convince people to get more involved in culture and express themselves better."

Born in Johannesburg, she attended King David Primary School Victory Park from Grade 1 to Grade 3. Ahead of Grade 4, she moved to Cape Town, and attended Herzlia Highlands Primary.

"Then, in Grade 7, I moved back to Johannesburg, but I went to King David Linksfield because my parents wanted to give us a fresh start and the opportunity to make new friends. Looking back, changing schools was challenging and had its advantages. I didn't enjoy anything about the move after Grade 3. I struggled because I was so young, and my dad had already been commuting for two years. I was very off axis, I guess you could say.

"I was young, but looking back, I didn't like the kind of person I was in Cape Town. I was more stuck up. I was more set in my ways. I just wasn't the best version of myself. I don't know if I would have become the person I am today had I stayed in Cape Town. I'm glad I ended up this way."

In 2023, Hirsch followed in her mom's footsteps by getting into crocheting. Since then, she could be found at school with her wool and crochet hook creating something new at break, during talks, and every opportunity she could find. "I started knitting as well, probably in April of

2024, which is a very random time to start a hobby – in the middle of matric – but I needed it to cope with the stress."

Hirsch makes a variety of random things, often as presents for others, such as handbags, sweaters, cardigans, and little stuffed animals. "I made my friend a sheep once, and I'm working on a scarf and a pillow cover because I often just make what I'm inspired by and by the yarn I have."

She hopes to study for a computer science or computational applied mathematics degree.



Ariella Hirsch

## Doing good – part of study process for Ossin

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Many matric pupils can become totally consumed with their studies, but Yeshiva College Girls High School student Eliya Ossin dedicated much of the time to helping others.

She organised a netball tournament fundraiser for the second year in a row, raising funds for Summerwood Primary School to help upgrade its sports facilities.

"Living near Summerwood Primary School, I noticed that its sporting facilities seemed to have deteriorated," Ossin says. "I've always had a passion for helping others and for sport, specifically netball. I was determined to do something positive to help uplift other school's facilities so that they would have something similar to what we are privileged to experience."

The netball tournaments were both held at the Yeshiva College netball courts and "brought together teachers, coaches, students, and community members from the Summerwood, Jewish, and Johannesburg sporting community", Ossin says. "More than 20 teams participated in each event, including two student teams and one staff team from Summerwood."

Ossin believes it's important to do good things for others no matter what stage of life one is in, even if you're in matric. "That being said, organising the tournaments was incredibly time-consuming. However, I felt strongly about the commitment I had made to Summerwood, so I was determined to balance my studies with the organisational time it required."

She found it heartwarming to host Summerwood's principal and vice-principal, who contributed to the initiative, at her tournament. "I was also grateful to my parents as well as all the umpires and netball clubs like Net Set Go for bringing their teams to play and giving advice about the running of the fixtures. Hugo's

Heroes for first aid and the CSO (Community Security Organisation) for security ensured that everything ran safely and efficiently."

Ossin describes the vibe on the day as amazing, with music and dancing, creating a sense of camaraderie. "The events featured a DJ; a chip 'n dip station; face painting; and a tuck shop. Students from Yeshiva College were great in helping run the tuck shop and ensuring that everything went smoothly. I'm proud to say that we have raised nearly R20 000 to date."

Ossin's secret to balancing her studies, organising the tournaments, and playing netball herself in matric

was seeing extracurricular activities as part of the studying process. "I saw netball as a way to decrease stress, remain fit, and socialise, which would ultimately improve my productivity. Having weekly extramurals at set times was beneficial as it became part of my routine and

eliminated the need for me to make time for them. Shabbos was also a great time to spend with my family and friends without the distractions of technology and studying."

One of the biggest challenges she faced in matric was managing the heavy workload. "On the other hand, some highlights included going on my school's Shabbaton; participating in my school's netball league; and the unforgettable moment of walking out of my final exam – such an amazing feeling!"

She's hoping to go on the Bnei Akiva gap year programme, Limmud, this year.



Eliya Ossin



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(out of a potential 45 points)



**AMY MARKS**  
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(out of a potential 45 points)



**RONAN MELTZER**  
43 points  
(out of a potential 45 points)



**JAMES MEYERSFELD**  
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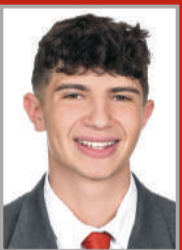
**SAMUEL ABRAHAMS**  
3 Distinctions



**MATTHEW BOTHA**  
2 Distinctions



**RUBY CASSEL**  
3 Distinctions



**LEVI GREENHILL**  
2 Distinctions



**GABRIEL KROWITZ**  
1 Distinction



**MARLOWE MERVIS**  
6 Distinctions



**JENNA MEYER**  
3 Distinctions



**SHYLA MEYERS**  
4 Distinctions



**MORGAN NOACH**  
7 Distinctions



**HANNAH NOMIS MCKERR**  
5 Distinctions



**KIERAN ROLFE**  
2 Distinctions



**SOPHIA ROVETTI**  
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**PRESLEY SIMPSON**  
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**ARIEL SOMEKH**  
3 Distinctions



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# Despite learning difficulties, Dirmeik's on the right track

LEE TANKLE

For Cape Town Torah High matriculant Kaylee Dirmeik, matric seemed like an impossible task. However not only did she complete it, she's able to attend university.

Throughout her school career, Dirmeik had the assistance of a facilitator who would help her conquer comprehension and processing issues. "The main issue is that I struggled with understanding instructions. When I'm in class, it takes me a bit longer to understand what it is that we have to do," she says.

Dirmeik had a facilitator from Grade 3 up until matric, and said that she couldn't have completed school without their help.

It was a lifeline as most of her schooling had to be done independently because of the way the syllabus at Cape Town Torah High is structured. "I had to have a bit more discipline than the other girls because of my learning difficulties," says Dirmeik, "But the facilitator helped me to

get through the workload and exams."

Similarly, the syllabus at Cape Town Torah High allowed her to flourish as she wasn't confined to one way of learning. Doing an American matric also helped Dirmeik, as she was able to do her lessons at a pace that suited her as a lot of them were done online.

"The school was able to personalise the curriculum for me, and it made it doable," she says.

Dirmeik was able to drop maths and replace it with another subject so that she could get the credits needed to complete matric.

"Maths was the biggest challenge," she says. "It was so confusing – having to know all the formulas and understanding the questions was especially difficult. Once I was exempt from maths, it was like a huge weight was taken off of my shoulders, and I was able to breathe."

Though she didn't study the mainstream curriculum, she was able to complete a course which allows her to get into

university.

"The school suggested a track that would limit what I could do in the future. I wouldn't be able to go to university, and I did not want that. I went to the principal and said that I wanted to do the bachelor's track, which is a step down from the main track, but I would still be able to go to university," says Dirmeik.

Although she had many facilitators over the years, she says each made an impact on her and helped her get to a place where she was able to complete matric. "My facilitators made school way more manageable for me, and I couldn't have gone through this experience without

them."

Dirmeik's matric highlight was taking health science and finance courses because she got to learn interesting things in a way that was interesting to her.

She says she didn't just learn from the curriculum, but from the other girls in the year with her. Though they weren't doing the same subjects, they were able to motivate each other to achieve the best results they could.

Dirmeik hasn't set anything in stone about what she wants to do in the future, but she knows she wants to travel to the United States to do a Jewish summer camp and eventually become a teacher.



Kaylee Dirmeik

## 'School gave me so much freedom'

LEE TANKLE

King David Victory Park (KDVP) matriculant Liron Neuhaus was always underestimated because he was autistic and required a full-time facilitator. However, his matric year proved that being autistic wasn't something negative, rather it made him unique.

"It's not easy having autism and a full-time facilitator because it makes people think that my abilities are bad; however, I show them that it just means that you're different, not worse," he said.

Neuhaus spent a lot of time hopping around schools trying to find the right fit for him, so when he moved to KDVP in Grade 10, he knew that he had found the place for him.

"People underestimate me when they hear that I'm autistic," he said. "I do talk a lot and a lot of it is quite convoluted, so sometimes people choose not to interact with me, but over time, they learn that it's just how I am."

Neuhaus said that he had to do a lot of introspection and would take any guidance. It was a case of becoming himself, and waiting for other people to catch up.

**Sometimes I felt more at home at school than when I was at home.**

When he was at Yeshiva College before moving to KDVP, people took time to warm up to him, he said.

"At Yeshiva, I was alienated to the point where school psychologists got involved and there was bullying. But eventually, I was the go-to person for the school. Sports, academics, whatever, you name it, people were there for me. I went from having no friends to everyone being my

best friend."

The same thing happened when he moved to KDVP. "When I arrived at the school in Grade 10, I was excluded from a lot of conversations. I kept my head down and focused on myself, and eventually people started coming up to me and I was friends with everyone."

Unlike most teenagers, where school is often a place of stress and pressure, for Neuhaus, school was a place where he could relax. "School gave me so much freedom," he said, "I was able to think critically and made friends even though it was difficult because I struggle socially. Sometimes I felt more at home at school than when I was at home."

For Neuhaus, the highlight of the matric year was his matric dance, because he was able to let loose. "I was the last one on the dance floor that night," he said. "I let loose there like I never have before."

Neuhaus also has a passion for soccer, and played soccer for his school, a chance he never thought possible. "It was fun being able to play for the team, be a part of something, and play the sport that I enjoy so much. It was the highlight of my day when we had soccer," he said.

Sadly, Neuhaus had to put soccer on the backburner to focus on his academics, but his love for the sport and the team continues, and he intends to keep playing when he begins university.

Neuhaus plans to study a Bachelor of Science in mathematics and statistics at the University of Johannesburg, and is excited to sink his teeth into university life.



Liron Neuhaus

## Reubenson realises opportunities and leads the way

LEE TANKLE

King David Victory Park matriculant Daniella Reubenson truly embodies the notion of being an all-rounder, excelling in every aspect of her high school career: sports; Judaica; cultural activities; and academics.

Reubenson was the captain of the touch rugby team, one of the heads of Judaica, as well as a notable high achiever.

One of the biggest challenges she had to face going into her matric year was learning how to juggle everything and still be able to give it her all.

Reubenson had to learn how to juggle hobbies, leadership roles, and academics as she had so many opportunities, but could be in only one place at a time.

"Originally, I wanted to put all my effort into everything I had to do, but this obviously wasn't possible. However, earlier in high school, I prioritised sport and other hobbies as well as my social life because academics weren't as important. In matric, I had to focus on academics as this would shape my future," she says.

Despite the stress of juggling different leadership roles, she did everything with passion and efficiency.

The highlight of her matric year was being one of the heads of Judaica as part of the student representative council.

"I was involved in organising the Judaica activities of the school relating to Israel and the *chaggim*, which I enjoyed as it taught me leadership skills as well as the ability to plan things, and gave control of how the school community was able to understand what was happening in the Jewish community in the world today."

She also took her leadership skills to the sports field as captain of the touch rugby team in her matric year, and represented Gauteng in touch rugby tournaments. "This was a highlight for me, as I was able to meet people from different backgrounds and schools," she says. "I was able to build resilience and teamwork while creating connections that I otherwise never would have made."

Reubenson says the secret to her success

was taking hold of any opportunities that came her way, whether that be from school or the wider community.

She says she often had to experiment to find out what the best course of action



Daniella Reubenson



**I also had to learn to invest time in the right places because there were so many opportunities and so many different things I had access to.**

would be for her. "I often had to try new things and go out of my comfort zone. That meant doing something that I didn't think would be beneficial. Afterwards, I was able to realise different aspects that were useful to me in the long run."

To do so, she had to be extremely organised and make sure that all of her tasks were done on time and to the best of her abilities.

"I also had to learn to invest time in the right places because there were so many opportunities and so many different things I had access to."

Reubenson is going to study at the University of the Witwatersrand this year, with a choice of actuarial science, medicine, or engineering. "I would like to stay involved in and give back to the Jewish community," she says. "I'll do it using the leadership skills I learned throughout high school."

# Young South Africans seek adventure in Israel

ELKA COHEN

Just three weeks into her Midrasha program at Migdal Oz, 18-year-old Ella Mandelberg is already embracing her new adventure in Israel. The religious study programme, geared towards young women from Israel and abroad, was a perfect fit for her.

"I've settled in quickly," she says with a smile, "thanks to the warm welcome I've received and everyone's patience with my very broken Hebrew."

A recent matriculant from Yeshiva College, Mandelberg says it was always her plan to go to Israel after finishing school. For as long as she can remember, her dream was to make aliya. Mandelberg is the eldest of five siblings, and is set on leading the way for the rest of her family to follow.

War certainly hasn't deterred matriculants from embarking on gap-year programmes in Israel. In fact, the opposite is true. For most of them, a gap-year in Israel is their first choice.

According to Mandelberg, she is one of many of her peers from South Africa who have chosen to join gap-year programmes in Israel this year, with more expected to arrive in coming months. "I know so many who have chosen to come to Israel. Some are already here, while others are expected to arrive in February," she says.

Noa Nerwich, 18, who recently matriculated from King David Linksfield, will soon join the Limmud programme, which aims to deepen her understanding of Jewish traditions and strengthen the Jewish

identity of matriculants from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

"I feel incredibly privileged to embrace all the new experiences that await me there, but more importantly, my vision is to bring back what I learn to our community

here, so we continue to thrive," said Nerwich.

"After all, Israel is our homeland, a place where we're always welcome."

For her parents, supporting her decision to join Limmud was easy. "It was always going to be Israel for

Noa," says her mother, Dani Nerwich, who, like her daughter, was a leader in the Bnei Akiva movement. Now human resources director at the South African Jewish Board of Education, Dani says, "Taking a gap year backpacking through Europe or working in London was never an option for her. We're excited because we believe it's going to be an incredibly enriching experience. Limmud provides exposure to both the practical and spiritual sides of Israeli life, and we have full confidence that she'll be safe. We know she's in good hands."

Nerwich's desire to give back to her community resonates with the larger picture of the MASA gap-year programmes' impact. MASA, established by the Jewish Agency and Israeli government, gives young Jewish adults from the diaspora transformative experiences in Israel in programmes ranging from four weeks to 10 months.

Despite the difficult circumstances in

Israel, many youngsters have continued to arrive to volunteer, support Israeli society, and deepen their connection to their Jewish identity.

The Israel Centre has experienced a notable increase in registrations from South Africans for its MASA gap-year programmes since the outbreak of war, with 325 young people participating in its programmes this year compared to 220 in the same period last year. Many of them have signed up for the MASA-Volunteering Programme, created to address the needs of young people who want to help Israel during its time of crisis.

"The numbers speak for themselves," says MASA Chief Executive Meir Holtz. "The understanding of Israel's importance and the desire to deepen their connection to their Jewish identity have become even more pronounced. The willingness to support Israel up close, combined with the fact that MASA always prioritises safety and security, motivates many to continue coming. We applaud them for this, and will continue to

provide the highest-quality educational content, preparing the future leadership of Jewish communities globally."

Dafi Forer Kremer, the director of the Israel Centre South Africa and head of the aliya department, notes a 5% increase in the number of South African olim since 7 October.

"The South African Jewish community



Photos: MASA

Participants on a MASA gap-year programme



is one of the most Zionist communities in the world," she says. "Since 7 October, the solidarity and support shown in volunteer programmes, as well as the hosting of released hostages and bereaved families, is a testament to the kindness and strength of this cohesive community. It's rare, and we want to bring these unique qualities to Israel. Our goal is to continue to increase awareness of the different programmes on offer."

For Mandelberg, the decision to start her life in Israel at such a young age is filled with challenges and opportunities for personal growth. "Discomfort is a sign of growth," she reflects. "The thought of remaining comfortable and stuck keeps me focused on my goal to make aliya, which requires me to learn the language and integrate into society."

Mandelberg's decision to be in Israel during such a difficult time brings her

or are away serving, helping them with their children or preparing for Shabbat," she says. "Israel and her people still embody so much simcha, which is inspiring. Israelis are convinced that we aren't victims but survivors."

"I want my future to be here in the Jewish state, surrounded by Jewish people, in a place where you're not scared to walk on the street at night. That's important," she says.

Mandelberg says her programme is perfect after a stressful matric year. "It's been a wonderful outlet to redirect my energy into a place that offers so much meaning, fulfilment, and belonging."

As more young South Africans embark on their journeys to Israel, their experience extends beyond personal growth. For many, like Mandelberg and Nerwich, gap-year experiences aren't just about self-discovery, but about embracing their role as young leaders in shaping the future of a global Jewish community.



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# Seeing the way – Katzman’s long road to finals

LEE TANKLE

When King David Victory Park matriculant Gabriel Katzman was 12 years old, his life was forever changed by a cancer diagnosis. But six years later, although the road was long and arduous, he has finished matric and done exceptionally well.

In June 2019, Katzman discovered what he thought was a cool party trick where he would look up at the ceiling and only his left eye would move. This immediately alerted his father, and he was taken to multiple doctors. He was diagnosed with a midbrain glioma, a slow-growing, benign brain tumour in the topmost part of his brain stem, which was inoperable because of its location.

From then on, Katzman would have MRIs every three months, visit ophthalmologists, oncologists, and a neurologist, with follow-ups with an oncology team in America.



Gabriel Katzman

Right as he was set to start Grade 11, Katzman developed “radiation syndrome”, where he

couldn’t get out of bed due to extreme exhaustion, nausea, and lethargy.

“I spent eight weeks at home trying to attend school online, managing one lesson and sleeping for hours afterwards. I missed a lot of school in Grade 11, and I was going into matric, so it wasn’t the best start,” he said.

In April 2024, Katzman underwent eye surgery to correct his strabismus, and then a second surgery eight weeks

later.

He was offered the option of completing matric over two years, but he was determined to finish it in one year with his brother and friends.

“I knew I could do it, and was prepared to do anything to do so,” he said. “I told myself, I know that matric is a bad year, but it’s only one year of my life, and everyone has to do it, and so will I.”

For his exams, Katzman had a reader, scribe, and prompter, and was given more time than usual. He would often write his exams for eight and a half hours a day, whereas the rest of his grade would write for three.

“By the time I got out of that venue, I was exhausted, but I had the satisfaction that I had done it,” he said. “All the coffee I had throughout the day helped.”

The two things that kept him going were the support of his twin brother, Daniel, and the teachers around him.

“All of my teachers carried me

over that finishing line,” said Katzman, “They were constantly checking in on me while I was writing my exams and would have done anything to make sure that this year was as smooth as possible.”

“I could never have gone through this year without my brother,” he said, “He often put his needs aside to help me, whether that be helping me catch up missed work or just supporting me in every aspect.”

Daniel Katzman not only supported his twin brother through all of this, but also managed to achieve outstanding results, including being placed in the Independent Examinations Board top 1% for business studies.

Katzman plans to take care of his health by having some more eye surgeries, and will be taking some short courses and expanding his DJ portfolio by playing gigs throughout the year.



I knew I could do it, and was prepared to do anything to do so. I told myself, I know that matric is a bad year, but it’s only one year of my life, and everyone has to do it, and so will I.

In 2020, Katzman and his brother started Grade 8 at King David Victory Park. “Though my peers anticipated this change with excitement, I was having to deal with double vision; strabismus; an eye condition that causes one or both eyes to be misaligned, or crossed poor balance and co-ordination; ataxic speech; a noticeable intention tremor; and continuous fear of what lay ahead.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, one of Katzman’s major lifelines was taken away from him – he would be unable to travel to the United States to receive treatment.

When Katzman was in Grade 10 in 2022, he started his first treatment – oral chemotherapy which wasn’t available locally so had to be shipped from overseas.

“The side effects were awful – nausea, exhaustion, increased weight, joint pain, and a change in my personality,” he said, “But I still went to school every day. After a couple of weeks of taking the medication, the side effects would get really bad so I would go to the ed support room at school and sleep. I missed a lot of lessons because of it.”

After completing chemotherapy, he started his second treatment – radiation. He underwent 30 photon radiation treatments at Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre.

## Sandler nets awards all round at Yeshiva

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Binyamin Sandler made the most out of his volleyball talent, strong academic ability, and passion for the community in his matric year at Yeshiva College Boys High School.

In fact, he was awarded honours blazers for full academic colours, *kodesh*, *chesed*, and volleyball. He also received the “most outstanding sportsman” trophy, and served as a head of the Inspiration and Unity Committee.

Sandler was the captain of his school’s Under-19 volleyball team, and led the side to victory in the Goliath Cup, a provincial volleyball league for schools across Gauteng, for the third year in a row. “We also won the Inter-School Volleyball Institute Tournament, and came second in the International School of South Africa Competition in Mahikeng,” he says.

Sandler himself represented Gauteng in volleyball at the interprovincial tournament (IPT) for the second year in a row, and his team placed second. “I also played for the Uni Jozi Club, and we placed second in the league.”

Being able to have fun, exercise, release stress and have friends are all as important as academics.

Aside from his volleyball pursuits, Sandler made time for community in his matric year. “I take the 11-and-up boys at The Base Shul for children’s service on a Friday night and Shabbos morning. We learn about the *parsha*, play games, socialise, and have a small kiddush. At Bnei Akiva, I was a *ktan tanim maddie* on Machaneh Oz L’Amo, and a *gurim maddie* for the Grade 6s on both the *gurim* seminar and *gurim* mini machaneh.”

All this is important to him as, he says, “Community gives a routine and a strong sense of support, both of which are vital

to surviving matric mentally. Community also allows one to socialise with new people, and helped to release the stress built up throughout matric.”

Sandler managed to balance being a strong academic performer with sporting and community-related activities. “I am a flexible person who believes in getting things done as and when needed. I’m lucky to have a strong supportive family. Mr Long, Mr Hull, and the amazing supportive teachers at Yeshiva College were prepared to move things around and accommodate me so I could still play the IPTs. From offering extra help when needed to being available from early in the morning until late, the teachers were there to support and guide me.”

For Sandler, “Being able to have fun, exercise, release stress and have friends are all as important as academics, so I was sure to make time for children’s service, Bnei, volleyball, socialising, and studying. My honour’s blazers were awarded for all of these things. Being one of the heads of the Inspiration and Unity Committee enabled me to keep a balance during my matric year.”

Sandler plans to study at university next year while still being involved in Bnei Akiva. He also aims to work at the DIJE

(Division of Informal Jewish Education) and continue his work at The Base as a children’s service madrich. “I hope to play



Binyamin Sandler playing volleyball

volleyball throughout the year. If there’s an opportunity, I hope to be involved in the Yeshiva College volleyball.”

Revealing the secrets behind his success at volleyball, Sandler says, “I started because it was such a big culture at Yeshiva, but I was pretty bad. Then Keifer Govender, the head of sport at King David Primary Victory Park, taught me. He was a member of the national team back when we had one. Then, I spent all of the latter half of COVID-19 practicing in my garden. I’m not the tallest, but I feel the effort and time I put into the sport is paying off just in the amount of enjoyment I get from it.”

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PIRKEI AVOT 5

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52



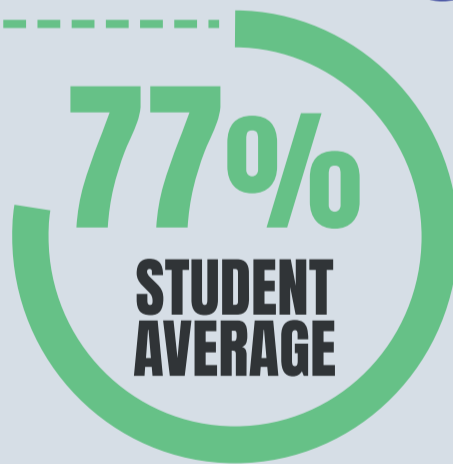
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# Speaking volumes: longest-running shul shiur achieves milestone

STAFF REPORTER

Not many rabbis can boast that one of their regular classes has been going uninterrupted for nearly 40 years.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, life rabbi emeritus of Johannesburg's Sydenham Shul, can claim this distinction as his weekly Talmud class is now entering its 39th consecutive year and is arguably the longest-running *shiur* in South Africa!

Having just completed the entire 119-page volume of *Bava Metzia*, the seasoned teacher said it was the class's biggest achievement since its inception. While it may not have been a *siyum hashas* (completion of the entire Talmud), for his 20-plus students, none of whom ever attended a yeshiva, it was cause for major celebration.

Rabbi Goldman joined Sydenham Shul in 1986, and his weekly Torah study group

began shortly thereafter. It's been going strong ever since.

"We've completed many volumes of the Talmud over the years, but *Bava Metzia* was by far the most challenging, both in size and depth," Goldman said. At 119, double-sided pages, it's one of the biggest tractates of the Talmud. It's also studied in yeshivas around the world as a classic in halacha and Jewish jurisprudence.

"We had some very difficult patches," he confessed, "but, thank G-d, the guys focused, put on their 'thinking *yarmis*', and we got through them. I'm happy for them all. It's a huge source of pride for all of us, myself included."

Although the *shiur* takes place in the home of Rabbi and Rochel Goldman, the *siyum* dinner was held in Sydenham Shul's Elk Hall, and was ably chaired by Rabbi Yehuda Stern, Goldman's successor at the shul.

The *siyum* celebration dinner on 14 January was attended by the students, their wives, and families, including members of the *shiur* who have emigrated but continue to participate over Zoom. On the screen were participants from Israel, London, Manchester, and Cape Town. Rabbi Gidon Fox came in especially



Rabbi Yossy Goldman with members of his weekly Talmud class

from Pretoria to show his admiration for the achievement.

Guest speaker Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein said he regarded his presence not as a communal duty, but an opportunity to experience some personal *naches*. The *naches* was tangible as he joined in the celebratory dancing after Goldman did the official *siyum* and concluded the final lines of the tractate. He, too, was impressed with the class's accomplishment, and said it proved again how little by little, page by page, week by week, we can achieve great things that would have seemed too formidable at first.

Advocate Stanley Pincus, who represented the students, said being asked to speak at this *siyum* was without doubt the most challenging brief of his entire legal career. He also rebutted the rumour that people attend the *shiur* just for Rebbetzin Goldman's home-baked chocolate chip cookies which are served with tea afterwards. His proof was that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people still attended the

*shiur* on Zoom – and there were no cookies.

Pincus gave a concise summary of all the 10 chapters of the Talmudic tome, saying how much he enjoyed comparing Jewish law with Roman Dutch law, which is the basis for South African law. The *shiur* is, in fact, attended by several attorneys and one former high court judge. When the advocate finished, Goldman quipped, "Stan, you won the case ... with costs!"

As to why the *shiur* takes place at their home rather than at shul, Goldman said,

"When our children were growing up, I wanted them to see regular Torah study taking place firsthand so that it should become part and parcel of their life experience."

The traditional prayers recited at a *siyum* express hope that the students will continue to begin and complete further books of the Talmud, to which everyone offered a resounding "Amen!"

The *shiur* will begin the book of *Moed Katan* next Tuesday, 28 January, please G-d.

**We had some very difficult patches, but, thank G-d, the guys focused, put on their 'thinking yarmis', and we got through them.**



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein celebrating the conclusion of the *siyum*

## Joburg participants say leadership training will support diaspora

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Two young Johannesburg-based leaders, Saul Jassinowsky and Ariel Goldberg, hope their selection for the prestigious Zionist Leadership Academy (ZLA) will enhance their leadership skills and help them address challenges facing the Jewish community.

Jassinowsky, 35, was nominated for the 10-month programme, which starts this month, by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) South Africa, for which he serves as an executive committee member. Jassinowsky, who has helped support hostages and injured soldiers, said he was honoured to be nominated.

Goldberg applied after being encouraged to do so by alumni of the programme. "I'm passionate about fighting antisemitism and finding ways to improve and grow our Jewish community," he said. Goldberg, 26, gained leadership experience in the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS). "My attitude and experience in various communal spaces gave me the opportunity to participate in this programme," he said.

This year marks the fourth ZLA programme, a joint initiative led by Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) and the World Zionist Organization. The programme aims to empower a select group of young leaders hailing from Jewish communities around the world to create future generations of strong leaders who can play a significant role in their communities and the continued development of Israel.

Jassinowsky believes his selection is "less about me personally, and more about the work I've been privileged to do throughout the local and international Jewish community and the

opportunities I've had to support meaningful projects. I'm grateful that through the academy, my efforts will be part of a collective commitment to strengthening the connection between Israel, Jews, and the broader diaspora community."

He said the programme, designed to build knowledge and real-world skills, offered opportunities to engage with leading thinkers and practitioners in Zionism, leadership, and diplomacy "who may otherwise be unreachable to the average diaspora Jew. There are also in-person visits and practical sessions that give participants hands-on exposure to Israel's history, culture, and innovation."

He hopes the experience will equip him with practical leadership skills that he can apply to bridge the divide, inspire collaboration, and address challenges facing the Jewish community. "I'm particularly interested in learning how to communicate effectively about Israel's realities and counter misinformation, as well as how to cultivate and empower the truth among South Africans," he said.

Goldberg sees the programme as a chance to "continue learning more about leadership

and gain insights and strategies from other communities around the world to help face the unique problems that our community faces in South Africa."

He plans to increase his activism in the community and across the globe. "I was a madrich in Bnei Akiva and Bikkur Cholim," he said. At SAUJS, he held the position of national chairperson, and leadership positions in other university clubs and organisations. "Through the JNF, I've had the privilege of contributing to meaningful projects locally and during my time in Israel," Jassinowsky said.

"JNF-KKL's commitment to supporting and engaging diaspora Jewry is inspiring. By fostering connections and empowering leaders from around the world, JNF-KKL continues to strengthen the bonds between Israel and Jewish communities globally. I'm grateful to have the chance to be a part of this commitment and vision."

**THIS HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY AND THE UNITY THAT EMERGES DURING TIMES OF CRISIS.**

Jassinowsky has been part of efforts to support hostages and their families, working alongside his wife, the Base community, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Zulberg, Ronit Beleli, and JNF South Africa. "This incredible team has shown me the profound responsibility we share as a people, no matter the physical distance that separates us. It has highlighted the strength of community and the unity that emerges during times of crisis," he said.

He has also helped injured soldiers navigate challenging transitions and to build resilience through his involvement with Brothers for Life, an organisation that assists injured Israel Defense Forces soldiers. "Though I don't see myself as a traditional leader, preferring the concept of service, I don't undermine the incredible blessings and experiences that my wife, children, and I have had, all of which I hope to continue applying in the future," he said.



Saul Jassinowsky



Ariel Goldberg

Photo: Ricci Goldstein

# Hostage situation underlines need for Holocaust awareness

LEE TANKLE

"We look at our survivors who were liberated from camps in 1945 and the Israeli hostages – our survivors today – and we see similar things," says second-generation Holocaust survivor Janice Leibowitz, whose father, Michael Kelvin, originally Miklós Katz and aunt, Veronica Phillips, survived the Holocaust.

Leibowitz was speaking about how it was essential for us to remember what happened during the Holocaust, not least because of the 80th anniversary of International Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January.

"I don't think we can compare these survivors to the survivors back then who came out and didn't and wouldn't speak about the horrors they saw for years and years, with some even staying silent now.

"As much as we assume that there's awareness, we can assume nothing," Leibowitz says. "We need to carry these messages continually and remind people



Issy Gurwicz with Gideon, the building manager of The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre

people that we need to remain aware and educate ourselves and others as much as possible to equip ourselves and our children."

Leibowitz says she never knew her father was a Holocaust survivor until she was 12 or 13 because he never spoke about what he went through. All she knew was that he would go to the cemetery every year on Yom Hashoah.

Her father never spoke about his past, and never returned to Hungary. Her aunt kept the memory of those years alive. She would keep in contact with family members in Hungary, travel back to Hungary, share her story, and donated childhood items to the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC).

"When you look at the survivors who are coming out of Gaza now and you look at the exposure, there's social media and everything like that, and the support structures that are in place," Leibowitz says, "There wasn't anything like

what she wants people to take from this International Holocaust Remembrance Day is the need to keep listening to the stories of survivors.

Gurwicz was adamant that the JHGC be constructed in order for all South Africans to visit and learn about the Holocaust.

"If we forget the past, we're doomed to repeat it, as we see going on around the world at the moment," Bernstein says. "We need to educate constantly and tell stories, even if it's through watching films and reading books."

It's also important to tell children the stories of the Holocaust when they get to the right age so that they keep the memory alive, because if we don't, who will, Bernstein says.

Miriam Lazarus, a child Holocaust survivor from Lithuania, says she wants people to remember the worst parts of the Holocaust and will share her story with others because she wants people to remember the six

million souls that were murdered, of which there were one and a half million innocent children.

Lazarus says even all these years later, she's still haunted by the horrific things that she witnessed as a child in Lithuania. She particularly remembers her adoptive mother, who was a virile antisemite, taking her into the forest and showing her "how the wonderful Germans are killing the horrible Jews".

Lazarus shares the story of her life in the ghetto through the JHGC because she hopes that by sharing it, she will teach youth how to be "decent human beings".

Similarly, Irene Fainman, who was the youngest person to survive the Ravensbrück

Fainman advocates for a way of life that preaches tolerance.

"Hate destroys you," she says, "We have to learn to be tolerant of the other. We don't have to like each other, but we have to tolerate each other, because otherwise, we risk the chance of there being another Holocaust."

Fainman says after her liberation from Ravensbrück, she would go back to Germany to visit the camp and educate youth about what happened there and the effect that it had on her. For her, it's special to go back for commemorations because it demonstrates to her that hate didn't win.

Similarly, Rolene Brasg, the daughter of Cecilia and Salomon (Solly) Boruchowitz, says that after her parents survived the horrors of the Holocaust, they ingrained a sense of Jewish pride within their children.

"My siblings and I were brought up with a love for Judaism," she says. "We know that having Jewish pride, no matter how religious you are, is the only way that we can keep the memory of survivors like my parents alive."

Brasg says her parents would have been horrified by the scenes of the Hamas attacks on 7 October, and says the rise in antisemitism proves that Jewish people need the state of Israel.

"Listening to my mother's story, it was clear that Jews in Europe more than 80 years ago had no refuge," she says. "We had no hope. My mother was so excited about the establishment of Israel in 1948 because it gave Jewish people around the world refuge. We in the diaspora know all too well how important Israel is to us, especially over the past 15 months."



Cecilia and Salomon (Solly) Boruchowitz

that the Holocaust happened. It will happen again. It has happened again, and it can happen again. And we need to remind



Issy Gurwicz and Courtneigh Bernstein Cloud

concentration camp, implores people to remember what happened all those years.

"It was the greatest tragedy that the world has ever seen," says Fainman, "Someone lost their family members, and we need to remember that."

## SA JEWS OF LITHUANIAN & POLISH HERITAGE ARE ELIGIBLE TO OBTAIN EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP & EU PASSPORT



A common misconception people have is that European citizenship and EU Passport can only be obtained if one has documents proving lineage. **The fact is that not having documents proving lineage, does not lead to your disqualification of eligibility.**

**In many cases the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin!**

As we are all fully aware of the current situation in South Africa where we face many uncertainties not just for today but for our children's future too.

While we are still having it relatively good here. We know that the time will come where as Jews we will look for alternative options. **Then having a**

**European citizenship will be that tool we are looking for.**

**As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore you are now entitled to reinstate it and obtain your EU passport.**

**I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.**

With only a 4 hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius this enables me to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I closely collaborate with local professionals in assisting me trace required documents for your successful applications to reinstate you as an European citizen.

"Having lived in Poland for 7 years I have great in-depth understanding of European immigration laws."

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every 3-4 months which will allow us to meet in-person.

**I will be in South Africa From 17 February until the end of the month. Johannesburg and Cape Town - Book a consultation now!**

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Having European citizenship offers more than one benefit, besides the fact that it makes traveling far easier than with a South African passport...

The most important thing to take into consideration is understanding that prior to the end of WWII, the European map was very different from the one we know today.

Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and till 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Great Russia Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe.

Until 1918 residents of these territories were of Russian citizenship – as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships did not exist. Therefore applications

for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on if one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen.

However, a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 – will not be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after WWII, one's eligibility for a Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the City from which his/her ancestor lived in. Where borders shifted and cities changed nationalities Jews who left Vilnius and its region will be declined where as a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

# Boycott of Jewish authors on BookTok a disturbing plot

LEE TANKLE

"Boycotting authors because they are Jewish isn't the flex people think it is. It's hateful, and no matter what you believe should happen in Gaza, there's no reason to single out Jewish authors. There was another moment in history when Jews were singled out: the Holocaust."

So says Kathleen Schmidt, the American founder and chief executive of Kathleen Schmidt Public Relations, and a well-respected voice in book publishing.



Nicholas Sparks

However, early last year, a list called "Is your fav author a Zionist" went viral, with many Jewish and non-Jewish authors arbitrarily being put into a category depending on what they had said, not said,

or which characters had appeared in their books.

The spreadsheet, created by an X user named Amina, compiled social media posts, public statements and close readings to sort authors into categories: "Pro-Israel/Zionist"; "Pro-Palestinian/Anti-Zionist"; and various shades of "It's complicated", including "Both sides-ing it".

The list, which has been seen by more than a million people in less than a year, has left many Jewish and non-Jewish authors feeling isolated from their literary communities.

BookTok – the literary subsection of TikTok – which created a flourishing community where any reader could find their niche, has been poisoned by the rhetoric of not supporting authors who are Jewish or have shown support for Israel.

If an author is labelled "Zionist" for whatever reason – be it being Jewish and having visited Israel; voicing public support for Israel; or just posting something advocating for the hostages – BookTok readers opposed to those views are urged to boycott that author. That includes not

only not purchasing the work of that author but also unfollowing them on social media and not sharing the author's work on social media.

"Boycotts definitely make a statement and can spur change, but they can also shut down the conversation," says Dr Jordan Moshe, literary fiend and deputy principal, senior English, and halacha teacher at Yeshiva College. "Charles Dickens, for instance, changed his portrayal of Jewish

characters after receiving a critical letter from a Jewish reader, Eliza Davis, who accused him of being selectively charitable and excluding Jews from his sympathies. This shows that constructive feedback can sometimes achieve what boycotts aim for – awareness and the correction of biases."

"It's a shame that these authors have been excluded from the conversation," says word-lover and avid reader, Batya Bricker. "Excluding a whole swathe or a whole kind of group of authors and what they're saying tends to narrow that, and you know

you're in greater danger of being in an echo chamber."

Schmidt, whose firm focuses on authors, publishers, and publishing, wrote on her *Substack* in May 2024 that the act of calling out and boycotting Jewish authors was antisemitic. "If you don't believe in book bans, you shouldn't be okay with boycotting authors for being Jewish. What troubles me the most about this is the silence from publishers, who should try to ensure that the authors on the list know they have support."

One of the most widely known fantasy authors on TikTok, Sarah J Maas, the author of the *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, has faced mass backlash not because of the content of her books or her political affiliations but because she's Jewish, has visited Israel, and her novels have characters that conquer other lands.

Similarly, popular romance author Nicholas Sparks appears on this list because he posted a "pray for Israel" graphic on his social media feed after Hamas attacked the south of Israel on

7 October 2023.

Another non-Jewish author, Taylor Jenkins Reid, of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* and *Daisy Jones and the Six* fame has been boycotted through such lists and social media posts. In December 2023, Reid posted a reel to her Instagram story featuring Yaakov Argamani, the father of former hostage Noa Argamani.



Taylor Jenkins Reid

Furthermore, Gabrielle Zevin has been placed on these lists not only because she has Jewish heritage, but has been placed firmly in the Zionist – meaning boycott – category because her novel *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* has Jewish protagonists and most notably an Israeli character.

Jewish novelist Talia Carner told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency after the list went viral, "It's not for me. It gives me agita. The antisemitism is eating me."

However, it's not enough for those advocating boycotts of authors to discriminate because of the authors themselves, it's also about where they choose to publish their stories. Having an Israeli publisher and having your novels translated into Hebrew is enough to get on anti-Israel BookTok's hitlist.

Popular authors on BookTok like Emily Henry and Holly Jackson have been labelled "Zionist" and thus boycotted because they choose to have their books published in Israel.

Says Bricker, "To stop reading things that make you uncomfortable or you don't agree with, or that come from a place that doesn't align with your values is a real shame. Books and reading lead to deeper understanding, to living vicariously, to trying on ideas that maybe aren't your own, expanding your worldview, and enhancing your perspective of life."



Talia Carner

South African author Ben Freeman says, "The publishing industry has made it clear that proud, Jewish and Zionist voices aren't welcome. This has an impact not only our opportunities to work and our abilities to earn a living, it effectively silences us. I found out that Amazon refused to advertise my new book, *The Jews: An Indigenous People*, for a month because of the conflict. To combat this, the Jewish community must support its authors and the wider publishing industry must reflect on its racist stance that erases Jewish voices."

Says Moshe, "Reconciling Jewish identity with literature that portrays us unfavourably is extremely hard to grapple with. Sometimes, I've felt betrayed reading authors who have openly maligned Jews, questioning if engaging with their work compromises my values. However, I've developed a method of resistance, not by shunning these books, but by embracing them defiantly, reading as if reclaiming them from their prejudiced creators. This act of defiance allows me to acknowledge the complexity of literature that both disturbs and delights."

## Pancreatic cancer risk in the Ashkenazi Jewish population

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

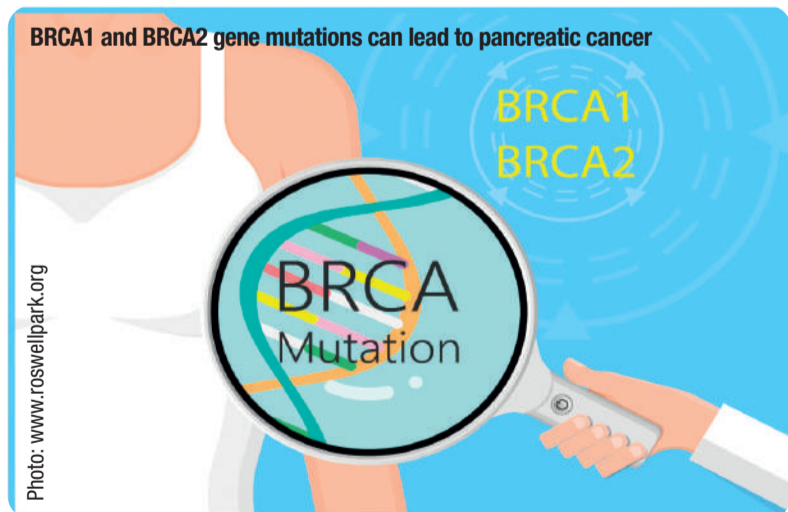
Ashkenazi Jews are vulnerable to carrying BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations, which can lead to various cancers including pancreatic cancer. Though this risk is relatively low when compared to breast, ovarian, and prostate cancer, the incidence of pancreatic cancer in these cases is higher than the general population, particularly if there's a family history of the disease.

"Everyone has BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes," says Johannesburg-based genetic counsellor Kara Stoler. "However, one in 40 Jews carries a variant, a mutation, in these genes compared to at least a one-in-400 chance of a non-Jewish person carrying any variant."

In terms of genetic screening for pancreatic cancer, Stoler says that ideally, one should start by testing the individual who has had cancer to determine if they have an inherited variant, like BRCA or if their cancer occurred sporadically. "If it was by chance, the children wouldn't need to test as they have the same risk as others in the population," she says.

Pancreatic cancer is more common with a BRCA2 variant. Yet even if someone is a positive carrier, it doesn't mean they will ever present with cancer, Stoler stresses. If an individual is a carrier for a BRCA1 or BRCA2 variant, this more commonly increases a woman's risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer and a man's risk of developing prostate cancer.

The age that cancer presented in family members also determines screening protocols. "We would start screening for pancreatic cancer from the age of 50 or from 10 years before the youngest case in the family," says Stoler.



BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations can lead to pancreatic cancer

Photo: www.roswellpark.org

"We now also have reproductive technology that can prevent genetic conditions being passed down to the next generation. In vitro fertilisation is becoming more popular as a consideration with cancer syndromes."

Dr Martin Smith, a pancreas surgeon, says he hasn't seen much research speaking specifically about the pancreatic cancer risk to the Ashkenazi Jewish community. Essentially retired, Smith, the former academic head of surgery at the University of the Witwatersrand, still sees patients at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre.

"While empirically, we can say that we seem to be seeing more of the disease in the Jewish community," he says, "I don't have any strong evidence that there's a relationship with any race or religious group." This increased incidence of pancreatic cancer is in line with a rise in the general

population, but whether it's due to environmental or dietary factors, isn't yet clear. Yet there's no need for panic, he stresses.

Although there's a small genetic component associated with pancreatic cancer in the form of a BRCA gene variant, it probably accounts for just over 1% of patients who get this form of cancer, Smith says. A BRCA gene mutation is far more prevalent with breast cancer.

"Medical literature says that if you have more than one first-degree relative who has had pancreatic cancer, it's worth having genetic screening done to see if any of those known genetic components are present. But I've never come across any patient who has carried a risk like that," he says.

As the risk of those with BRCA gene mutations developing pancreatic cancer is so low, it's also unclear what one can do with that information. Though less common today, those with a BRCA mutation that increases their breast cancer risk may choose to have a prophylactic (preventative) mastectomy. Yet you can't have a prophylactic pancreatectomy – surgery to remove all or part of the pancreas, Smith says.

Those definitively diagnosed with pancreatic cancer usually undergo chemotherapy and one of three operations. "The Whipple is a right sided resection, or a head of pancreas resection," Smith says. "Then there's a procedure to remove part of the body and tail of the pancreas. Finally, there's the total pancreatectomy, where the entire pancreas is removed. Chemotherapy will always improve surgical outcomes, but we're nowhere near being able to treat pancreatic cancer without surgery."

Pancreatic cancer has a high morbidity rate as symptoms often present late and are already metastatic (have spread) by the time they're diagnosed, Smith says. Early warning signs include jaundice, as a tumour in the pancreas may block the bile duct.

Generally, however, there has been little progress in predicting the risk of contracting the disease.

Tami Rubin\* lost both her mother and brother to pancreatic cancer. "My mom was 84, and had been complaining for a few months that her back was sore," she says. She had no idea that she had stage four pancreatic cancer. "It eventually caused her veins to shut down, resulting in a buildup of water in her legs which began to ooze out of her skin," Rubin says. Later admitted to hospital with pneumonia, Rubin's mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer when they noticed the swelling in her legs. "The cancer spread to her brain and three months later, she was gone. It was very hard, moms are always lifelines to the whole family."

A few months later, Rubin's brother was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. "He had unknowingly had it for years," she says. "He had a stent put in, had consistent chemo, and lived for two years following his diagnosis."

Rubin has had blood markers done to assess her risk for the disease, which came back clear. A haematologist suggested she also have a full body scan, which she has yet to do.

Avroy Samuels, now 81, whose late father died from pancreatic cancer within weeks of his diagnosis, is grateful to have been diagnosed early. While Samuels had no pain, his eyes began to turn yellow, indicating possible jaundice, which led to his diagnosis six years ago. After extensive testing, doctors determined that he was a good candidate for a Whipple procedure, an eight-hour operation. The surgery was a success, and was followed by six months of chemotherapy. He remains cancer free today. "I'm a miracle, because the survival rate is very slim. In most cases, by the time it's detected, it's too late," he says.

\*Name has been changed



A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies



**ABOVE BOARD**  
Karen Milner

## Moments to remember

Every so often, we experience moments destined to leave an indelible mark on our collective memory. Last weekend was such a moment, as we witnessed the cautious implementation of the Gaza ceasefire and the profoundly emotional release of the first three hostages.

What an overwhelming relief it was to see Emily Damari, Doron Steinbrecher, and Romi Gonen returned to Israel, alive and in good health, reunited with their families. The image of these three brave individuals, poised, brave, and calm despite the hostility surrounding them, stood in stark contrast to the masked gunmen escorting them. It poignantly captured the inhumanity and cruelty of the kidnappers.

We know that their path to recovery will be long and strenuous, and stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world, sharing gratitude for their safe return. We continue to call for the secure and immediate return of all of our hostages so that this most terrible conflict can finally cease. May their return mark the beginning of a path toward healing and peace.

### Congratulations

As part of our outreach efforts, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies partnered with the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in a project to improve the conditions and outcomes at Hanyani Secondary School in Thohoyandou in Limpopo. Hanyani used to be one of the worst-performing schools in the country, but it obtained a 92.1% pass rate in its 2024 matric results. The steps taken by the Board and UJ have revolutionised learning and teaching in the region, and is a model that can be copied and applied across rural areas in the country. It's extremely gratifying, especially as an educator, to

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

see a revolutionary project like this having real-world impact on the ground. Mazeltov to all the pupils! We hope Hanyani and its students will go from strength to strength.

Special congratulations also to the ophthalmologists in our community who stood firm against bullying by rejecting a proposed boycott of an Israeli academic at the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa's upcoming conference. Their commitment to academic freedom and dialogue is a courageous stand that deserves commendation.

Further congratulations to our national director, Wendy Kahn, who was included in the Algemeiner's list of 100 people making an impact in the Jewish world. The South African Jewish community is in no doubt about how lucky and privileged it is to have someone of the calibre of Kahn representing the Jewish community at all levels, including the highest levels of government.

Huge congratulations goes to Israel-based community member Rabbi Doron Perez, who was also included on the Algemeiner list. This puts Kahn and Perez in the same prestigious group that includes global leaders and innovators, including President Donald Trump, Sheryl Sandberg, and Tiffany Haddish! What's even more impressive is that our two representatives on this list matriculated from Yeshiva College in the same year! Additionally, Jerusalem-born Dan Goldfus, the son of South African parents, also made the list, adding to our community's collective *nachas*.

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

## Don't be rude to AI – it's inhumane



**INNER VOICE**  
Howard Feldman

I'm in the middle of an argument with ChatGPT that is no closer to being resolved today than it was when it began a week ago. To be fair, I instigated it when I asked why, if artificial intelligence (AI) is modelled on human interaction, it didn't insist that we say please and thank you? Why is it, I continued, that children are allowed to demand that Alexa or Siri perform functions for them without so much as a hint of manners.

The answer it gave me was unacceptable. "Expectations around politeness vary widely across cultures and contexts. By not enforcing specific norms, AI can remain more universally accessible and adaptable." "Hogwash!" I screamed, abandoning the very politeness I expect from others.

"You're telling me that to be 'inclusive', we have to throw out respectability so that we don't offend the ill-mannered?" I probably shouldn't have followed that up with a warning that with Donald Trump coming into office this week, it better change its left leaning lunacy, lest it find itself jobless. Or at least returned to factory settings.

My concern is this: as Alexa, Siri, and other AI-driven assistants become increasingly efficient, our reliance on them grows in ways we might not fully realise. We talk to them more often, write commands for them, and even use gestures to prompt them to take action on our behalf. At first glance, it may seem like we are training these systems to anticipate our needs and behaviour better, shaping them into more effective tools for our convenience. However, the unsettling reality is that the process often works in reverse. These AI systems are subtly training us to communicate in ways that suit their algorithms. We adapt our language,

tone, and even thought processes to fit their capabilities, potentially at the expense of richer, more nuanced human interaction.

This shift raises the question: are we losing elements of our own humanity in the pursuit of convenience and efficiency? As our dependency deepens, it's worth asking how to manage the subtle but significant changes to how we think, speak, and relate to the world.

For years, students of body language showed us how to interpret the non-verbal signals that people project. Simply, if a person smiles (all the way to their eyes), we understand that they are happy, if their arms are folded during a sales presentation then they are closed to the sale. What they fail to note however, is that the impact is as significant the other way around. Meaning that if we force ourselves to smile, we'll feel happier. If we unfold our arms – or are encouraged to unfold them – we'll be more receptive to the presentation. Where previously, we might have thought that our body language was a mere reflection of a sentiment, we now know that it has the power to drive our behaviour.

We say a blessing over our food not only for G-d, but to nourish our own sense of gratitude. Similarly, it's said that forgiveness benefits the one who forgives even more than the one who is forgiven because our actions shape who we are. With that in mind, I'll continue to greet ChatGPT in the morning, and thank it for anything it helps me with. By treating Alexa, Siri, or any other AI as if they were real, we remind ourselves of our own humanity.





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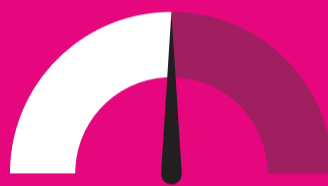
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