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# South African Jewish Report

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## Trump's attack on SA causes backlash

STEVEN GRUZD

What started with a social media post by United States (US) President Donald Trump – apparently prompted by the passage of South Africa's Expropriation Act – snowballed into stopping all aid to this country and offering refuge to Afrikaners. Jews were somehow caught in the crossfire.

The anti-Jewish, anti-Israel sentiment that followed Trump's latest executive order (EO) put out on 7 February is due to many viewing Trump as favouring Israel, which leads to the belief that he favours Jews.

Understandable, considering that Trump cited South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and its close relations with Iran among his reasons for this radical policy shift.

It has led to a call by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to close down the Israeli embassy.

On 8 February, former EFF politician Mbuyiseni Ndlozi tweeted to his 1.9 million followers, "Has anyone asked another beneficiary of Trump's executive order what their reaction is? I suspect that the South African Zionist Federation and Jewish Board of Deputies are far more responsible for this executive order than these Boer chaps. Of course, they are equally racist & alarmist! But through Netanyahu, we may discover they thought this order will find popular reception & see South Africa's moral high ground affected over the ICJ case."

"Those Boer chaps" refers to groups like Afriforum that have lobbied in the US about farm murders and the negative effects of affirmative action, black economic empowerment policies, and the Expropriation Act.

This standoff risks therefore exacerbating racial tensions in South Africa and affecting social cohesion of a fragile society. It could also increase anti-Zionism

and antisemitism.

"Inevitably," former US diplomat and writer Brooks Spector said, "some South Africans have chosen to hint that the contretemps actually speaks to America's support for Israel and against the Palestinians and South Africa's support for their cause."

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer said, "For far too long, the ANC [African National Congress] government has been openly antagonistic toward the United States. The South African case against Israel at the ICJ is a blatant attack on America's closest ally. It's clear that President Trump rejects such overt antisemitism and brazen support for Hamas. His administration is now ensuring that South Africa faces the consequences of its errant ways."

With South Africa's profound economic problems – minuscule growth, staggering unemployment, widening inequality – it can ill-afford to be in Trump's crosshairs. This latest incident further sours an already fraught bilateral relationship.

The EO elicited indignant but measured government responses, heated public comment, and an almighty X battle between Elon Musk and Julius Malema. The Democratic Alliance is also now suing the government over the Act.

The diplomatic furore further imperils the chances of South Africa continuing to benefit from duty-free access to the US market for its exports under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). AGOA is due to expire in September 2025, and if it is reviewed, South Africa doesn't want to be excluded on the grounds that it is acting against the interests of the US. AGOA provides for thousands of jobs in the motor industry, agriculture, and wine-making sectors.

Dr Martha Bridgman, the editor of the *South African Journal of International Affairs*, said, "Exclusion from AGOA [instead] when the review comes up this year would have sent a very clear message to Pretoria regarding US disapproval." If relations don't improve, AGOA eligibility could well be revoked down the line. Those close to Trump may have hoped that a radical

Continued on page 3>>

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## Tie a yellow ribbon...



Avi and Noa Schneider with Ben Tzion Zulberg (in school uniform) remember the remaining Israeli hostages in Gaza as they plant a tree for Tu B'Shvat this week

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**Celebrities shown giving Kanye the finger without consent**

A video released on social media on Tuesday, 11 February, shows an array of Jewish celebrities, including Steven Spielberg and Woody Allen, wearing a T-shirt with a raised middle finger and the word "Kanye" – a rejection of rapper Kanye West's antisemitism.

The video resembles any number of public service announcements created by Jewish advocates, with one catch: none of the celebrities consented to participating.

That's because the video was made with generative AI, an emerging technology that instantly creates lifelike animation, opening new frontiers for creativity while also raising ethical questions

about what can be rendered and how such products should be labelled.

Released on Instagram by Ori Bejerano, an Israeli generative AI entrepreneur, the video spread rapidly on Tuesday, riding a wave of anger at West and frustration over his persistence as a presence in the public sphere despite a years-long record of antisemitism. Over the past week, West posted a string of antisemitic tweets, then paid for a Super Bowl advert directing viewers to a website that sold just one product: a \$20 (R369.37) T-shirt with a swastika on it.

Over a techno version of *Hava Nagila*, about two dozen celebrities appear in the video. Each wears a shirt – perfectly form-fitting, thanks to AI – that echoes the swastika design in its simplicity, except it shows a raised middle finger with a Star of David inside it, above the word "KANYE". Then the celebrities fade out and text appears, "Enough is enough."

Join the fight against antisemitism."

Bejerano's caption, written in Hebrew, lists the reasons why West's antics are offensive, and calls for social networks to stop amplifying antisemitism and allowing people like West to "spread their poison". After his antisemitic X spree, West thanked owner Elon Musk for "allowing me to vent".

Some of the celebrities, such as David Schwimmer, have been vocal in opposing antisemitism. Others, including Adam Sandler, who ends the video by offering his own obscene gesture, haven't been outspoken on the issue since Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack on Israel unleashed a wave of antisemitism around the world.

At least one celebrity shown in the video, Scarlett

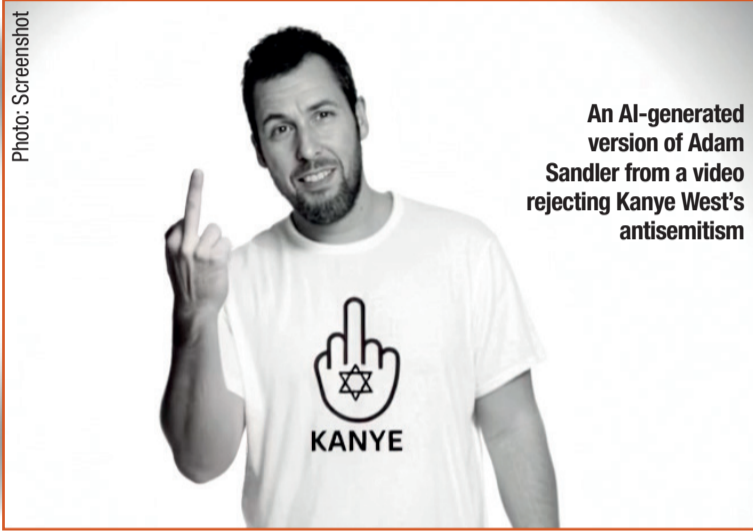


Photo: Screenshot

An AI-generated version of Adam Sandler from a video rejecting Kanye West's antisemitism

Johansson, has previously sued to block the use of her AI-generated likeness.

There were signs that at least some of the celebrities spoofed in the video might be on board with it. Jessica Seinfeld, the cookbook author and wife of Jerry Seinfeld, who is shown pointing to his shirt and smiling, liked the video on Instagram.

Also included in the video: Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, the 1960s-era singer-songwriter duo,

together again for the first time in more than a decade; the rapper Drake, who this week stood at the centre of a different Super Bowl controversy; and AI entrepreneur Sam Altman.

**Abbas ends Palestinian Authority's pay-for-slay programme**

The Palestinian Authority (PA) will no longer pay stipends to the families of convicted terrorists and other prisoners, in a gesture to United States (US) President Donald Trump.

The longstanding programme determined the size of the stipend based on the length of a prisoner's sentence meaning that those who were convicted of the worst offences often received the largest stipends. While Palestinians often view the thousands of prisoners with admiration as the front line of resistance against Israel, the payment programme had been maligned for years by Israeli and American officials.

Pro-Israel advocates dubbed it "pay-for-slay", and pointed to it as evidence that the PA, while itself disavowing armed conflict, incentivised terrorism. During Trump's first term, Congress passed legislation cutting aid to the PA, which governs Palestinian areas of the West Bank, based on the payment programme.

According to coverage in Maan, a Palestinian news agency, PA President Mahmoud Abbas ended the programme on Monday, 10 February, while allowing for low-income families of prisoners to qualify for other forms of aid from the authority. The announcement comes as hundreds of Palestinian prisoners have gone free under Israel's ceasefire deal with Hamas.

The cancellation of the programme, according to the *Times of Israel*, had been formulated at the end of the Biden administration but wasn't announced until after Trump took office last month in order to strengthen ties with him.

During Trump's first term, the PA cut off relations with him in response to his move of the US embassy to Jerusalem. Now, Abbas reportedly hopes to have better relations with the Trump White House. The move also comes as the PA faces the prospect of being sidelined from determining the future of Gaza.

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**Ramping up spirituality**

There are 354 steps leading to the top of the Statue of Liberty. To ascend to the top of Masada, if you choose to hike up the snake path rather than take the cable car, you will need to climb about 700 stairs. The summit of the Eiffel Tower, by foot, is a daunting 1 665 steps, which is fewer than the Empire State Building at 1 872 steps. If you should choose to walk to the top floor of the highest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa, you will need to negotiate a staggering 2 909 steps!

Towering over the centre of old Copenhagen, a few metres from the central synagogue, is a unique building. Known in Danish as Rundetårn (The Round Tower), you cannot reach its top and the magnificent views it offers via a staircase. Instead, you will need to walk up a long ramp that winds around the core of the building, until you get to the top floor. Another fascinating feature of this building is that the Tetragrammaton, Hashem's four-letter name which we avoid pronouncing, is emblazoned on the top of its façade. I know this first-hand, having spent my early childhood in that city. The Round Tower, for some inexplicable reason, was a favourite of our nursery school teachers and a couple of times each year, we were marched around the seven circuits of this ramp as an outing and educational activity.

Legends abound explaining both unique features. I recall being told that the stepless ramp was to enable King Christian IV (1577-1648), who had commissioned this project, to climb the tower on horseback. Apparently, it was also his wish that a declaration of his faith in G-d be prominently displayed on the outside of the building.

When going up steps, it's easy to quantify your progress. Count the stairs, and you know exactly how much you have accomplished at each stage of your ascent. Going up a ramp, it's not as easy to

**Rabbi Yossi Chaikin**  
The Oxford Synagogue Centre



keep track of how much has been achieved.

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (1798-1866), the author of *Chidushei Harim*, uses this concept to explain the final verse of this week's parsha, *Yitro*: "You shall not ascend My Altar on steps." Because of this prohibition, the altar in the Temple courtyard was designed

with a long ramp leading up to the top, to enable the *kohanim* to perform the service.

In our spiritual growth, says Rabbi Alter, one may never start measuring achievements. It's not easy, nor useful to quantify how much has been accomplished and how much further there is to grow. This is why a spiritual journey must be up a ramp and not, with apologies to Led Zeppelin, on a *Stairway to Heaven*. Our one and only goal has to be that we are constantly going up.

Who knows? Maybe the architects of the Rundetårn were onto something?

**Torah Thought**

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In Hebrew, an eagle (*neshar*) means "falling off", referring to its moulting feathers. It symbolises Hashem's bond with the Jews – even if one falters in Torah and *mitzvot*, *teshuvah* (repentance) allows for renewal, like growing new feathers.

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# Call for medical boycott of Israel short-sighted

TALI FEINBERG

An alliance of anti-Israel groups are now calling for a "total medical boycott" of Israel because the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa (OSSA) ignored their demand to disinvite Israeli ocular oncology expert Professor Ido "Didi" Fabian from its congress in Johannesburg this week.

Though this isn't the first time such a call has been made since the 7 October 2023 massacre in Israel, experts have warned that such a boycott could devastate South Africa's ability to tackle medical problems for those most in need, and harm those the protesters purport to want to help. This follows United Nations Palestinian territories envoy Francesca Albanese calling for such a boycott at the beginning of January.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Wendy Kahn says, "These narrow focused anti-Israel lobby groups attempt to deprive South Africans of exposure to technology and learning that can improve the lives of our fellow citizens. It's a tribute to the OSSA that it stood up to these bullies. Such protests make no contribution to peace-building."

A new report titled "Israel's Medical Field: A Force for Global Good in the Face of Misguided Boycott Calls" by French political analyst Catherine Perez-Shakdam notes that "a medical boycott would harm the very populations Albanese claims to champion. In hospitals like Sheba Medical Center and Hadassah Medical Center, Israeli doctors treat thousands of Palestinian patients annually, providing advanced care that is often unavailable in the Palestinian territories."

Such a medical boycott would deny patients the use of Israeli inventions like the PillCam, a pill that allows doctors to see inside the gastrointestinal tract, and the ReWalk robotic exoskeleton, which empowers individuals with spinal cord injuries to regain mobility.

It would also deny more basic medical services invented by Israelis, such as computerised, no-radiation imaging for breast cancer, and telemedicine. A total medical boycott would demand that parents stop using Babysense, a monitor that detects apnoea in infants, and emergency responders stop using the Israeli bandage, which stops blood loss from haemorrhagic wounds.

While anti-Israel protesters scream for a "total medical boycott" on the streets of Sandton, "Israeli medical institutions train Palestinian healthcare professionals, equipping them with skills to strengthen their communities' healthcare systems. This collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians demonstrates the potential for human connection even in the most challenging of geopolitical contexts," writes Perez-Shakdam.

Protest groups threatened that "OSSA repeatedly fails to heed the warnings of colleagues" to disinvite Fabian, a world-renowned ocular oncology expert, and they plan to protest outside the Sandton Convention Centre on 13 February, where the congress is taking place from 12-15 February. "Your colleagues deserve better," stated the protest poster as a warning to OSSA.

Fabian, who is now in South Africa for the conference, will be speaking on various topics, including "The diagnosis and management of retinoblastoma from basic to advanced." Retinoblastoma is the most common childhood eye cancer, and Fabian has treated Israeli, Palestinian, and African children with the disease.

Professor Nagib Du Toit, the chairperson and head of the

ophthalmology division at the University of Cape Town (UCT), told local anti-Israel radio station Salaamedia that this was "health-washing". He said some participants at the congress would wear keffiyehs and stage walkouts during Fabian's presentations.

Dr Dory Neu-Ner, of the South African Society of Paediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, invited Fabian to be keynote speaker. Now, he says, "It's too late for the anti-Israel groups to convince OSSA to disinvite Professor Fabian as he's already arrived and will be presenting at the conference. So that ship has sailed.

"I don't think anyone will be paying attention [to the protest], as we will be inside, learning from international speakers. I'm anticipating that Professor Fabian's lectures will be the most well-attended."

He says that the anti-Israel lobby presents "the usual one-sided and false rhetoric to slander people and rile up followers. The important thing is that OSSA members are clear that they won't align themselves with any political view or medical boycott."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* in South Africa, Fabian said simply, "I'm a medical doctor, not a politician. I was invited to speak about ocular oncology and retinoblastoma, and that's what I'm planning to do."

More than 80% of OSSA members voted in favour of Fabian being invited to speak at the congress. Professor Grant McLaren is one of the many South African ophthalmologists who has backed Professor Fabian. Now, he says, "They are entitled to protest but we, all 82% of the OSSA membership polled, are also entitled to be heard.

"We voted resoundingly to have Professor Fabian speak at our congress. He is a highly respected authority on retinoblastoma. Those who wish to attend can, but those who don't are free to boycott." However, "to intimidate and ram your version of what is happening in Israel down everyone's throat is undemocratic". The protest is "another form of intimidation", he says, and "the ugliness is there for all to see".

As for a total medical boycott, McLaren says the Israeli and Jewish

contribution to healthcare is so foundational and crucial, it would be impossible to extract them. For example, Israeli Dr Elie Dahan was a leading specialist in glaucoma, paediatrics, and cataract surgery, who lived and taught in South Africa for many years.

McLaren asks if Du Toit would cast aside Dahan's expertise in his campaign for a full Israeli medical boycott, denying his patients complete medical care.

In addition, he points out that the Mauerberger Chair of Ophthalmology, bestowed by the Mauerberger Foundation Fund (MFF) to UCT in 1968, supports the division of ophthalmology at UCT Health Sciences, including training and research. The MFF also supports a wide range of Israeli initiatives, and McLaren asks if Du Toit would turn down the MFF's support of his own department in his campaign for a "full Israeli medical boycott".

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks says, "The SAZF commends the OSSA for taking a principled stand. The campaign [against Fabian] was nothing more than thinly-veiled racism, targeting a respected medical professional purely due to his nationality and religion."

A total medical boycott of Israel would exclude the care that doctors like Fabian could offer South Africans, Israelis, Palestinians, and children all over the world. For example, as the founder of the Global Retinoblastoma Study Group, Fabian has united experts from 153 countries to improve treatment for childhood eye cancer, a disease that disproportionately affects underserved regions.

He also co-launched the Asian Retinoblastoma Group; spearheaded Africa's first International Society of Ocular Oncology conference on eye cancer; and played a critical role in providing life-saving treatment for Palestinian children, overcoming immense challenges to transport them to Israeli hospitals. He has treated children with retinoblastoma in Nigeria while training local doctors to build sustainable medical expertise.

Perez-Shakdam warns that if the global community begins to tolerate the politicisation of medicine, the consequences could be devastating. "The universal ethos of healthcare, which demands that aid be delivered without prejudice, would be compromised. The precedent set by such a boycott would embolden those who seek to turn other essential services – education, water, or food security – into tools of political warfare."

## Trump's attack on SA causes backlash

>>Continued from page 1

threat to cut aid would prompt a policy U-turn in Pretoria. Unlikely.

Dr Scott Firsing, a Trump supporter with a doctorate on US-South Africa relations, said, "You really don't want to get on Trump's bad side. If you are an individual or country who supports America's adversaries like Iran and its proxies, China and Russia, and you threaten America's interests, Trump will take action against you. The ANC has never passed an opportunity to poke America, and it's sick and tired of it, hence the recent X posts by Trump, Rubio, and others and the executive orders."

Firsing cited as recent examples the case at the ICJ; Lady R; pressure on Taiwan to close its liaison office in Pretoria; and statements supporting Hamas and Iran as irritants to the US. He also noted that Musk felt snubbed when his SpaceX's Starlink wasn't allowed to operate in South Africa due to his refusal to accept a 30% shareholding for "historically disadvantaged" groups.

Bridgman said South Africa's foreign policy choices "have riled the US enough to crack down with an end to all foreign aid to Pretoria. Perhaps the Trump administration did not include its qualms over SA-Russian ties in this EO in light of efforts to bring Putin to the negotiating table to end the war with Ukraine, per campaign promises."

Firsing noted that Trump has a disproportionate number of influential and wealthy South African born people in his inner circle, including Musk, David Sacks, and others, who are skewing his limited perspectives on South Africa.

Trump's 2 February post on Truth Social lit the spark, but few suspected it would translate into US government policy to axe aid to South Africa and welcome supposedly persecuted Afrikaners.

Said the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO),

"The recently adopted Expropriation Act isn't a confiscation instrument, but a constitutionally mandated legal process that ensures public access to land in an equitable and just manner as guided by the Constitution." There is neither arbitrary expropriations happening in South Africa, nor persecution of Afrikaners, so Trump's policy is built on false information, which made Pretoria indignant. DIRCO continually called for dialogue to explain its positions. There is clearly a major misunderstanding.

A subsequent tweet by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio alleging land confiscation and stating that he would not attend the G20 in Johannesburg – slated for November – elicited a similar government response. Is Washington trying to derail the G20 to punish Pretoria?

On 8 February, DIRCO said the EO "lacks factual accuracy and fails to recognise South Africa's profound and painful history of colonialism and apartheid. We are concerned by what seems to be a campaign of misinformation and propaganda aimed at misrepresenting our great nation." It regrets that such views have gained traction in Washington, and notes the irony of granting refugee status to well-off Afrikaners "while vulnerable people in the US from other parts of the world are being deported and denied asylum despite real hardship". DIRCO once again calls for diplomacy.

The EO may have the exact opposite effect, driving South Africa further into the embrace of China, Iran, and Russia rather than it shifting away from these states.

South Africa is sending senior officials on yet another damage control trip to Washington to explain Pretoria's position and dispel the myth of lawlessness and land grabs.

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# Disruptive or discrimination? Airline barring sparks debate

NICOLA MILTZ

**A** late-night incident at OR Tambo International Airport on Tuesday, 4 February, ignited global outrage and confusion after three religious Jewish men were denied permission to board a Kenya Airways flight to Nairobi.

The trio – Rabbi Noam Wagner, the head of a yeshiva in Sunningdale, Glenhazel, and two of his students – were part of a larger group en route to Crown Heights, New York, to commemorate Yud Shvat, the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The group of 11 Johannesburg travellers, some affiliated with Sandringham Shul and Torah Academy Shul, were in high spirits ahead of the significant Chabad event in Brooklyn. Singing traditional *nigunim* (melodies) and engaging in festive dancing, their joy filled the terminal as they prepared to visit the Rebbe's Ohel. For many, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

However, when it came time to board, a Kenya Airways official denied entry to Wagner and his two students. Earlier, Wagner had conducted a *farbrengen*, sharing words of Torah, followed by a circle of about seven men dancing and singing. The denial of boarding to the visibly religious men sparked immediate confusion and anger among the group.

A video, filmed by one of the men in the group captured the uncomfortable interaction with a Kenya Airways official. The man's voice can be heard questioning why the three men – easily identifiable by their religious attire – were singled out while others boarded. The footage shows the official appearing to point out arbitrarily who could and couldn't board while avoiding a clear explanation. The video features overlapping voices highlighting the complexity of the situation. What transpired before and after the video is a mystery.

The footage, although brief, went viral within minutes, shared by United States-based Instagrammer Melissa

Chapman, who labelled the incident "an example of real Jew hate". Her post, claiming the rabbi was barred from the flight because of "what he looks like", fuelled debate over whether the men were victims of antisemitic profiling.

The incident quickly spiralled beyond OR Tambo Airport, as WhatsApp messages circulated globally, painting conflicting narratives and fuelling accusations from all sides. The situation became messy, heated, and hyper charged, with emotions running high and facts unclear.

As news unfolded, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) was brought into the fray, fielding calls from concerned community members. The SAJBD was summoned to investigate the incident amid conflicting accounts, and urged patience as it gathered facts.

The travellers insisted that the men weren't intoxicated or disruptive, while Kenya Airways maintained their removal was due to disorderly behaviour.

In response to the backlash, Kenya Airways issued a formal statement denying discriminatory behaviour.

"Our team in Johannesburg observed a group causing a disturbance at the boarding gate. It became clear the group was behaving disruptively and appeared intoxicated. Our staff addressed three passengers for their behaviour, in line with our commitment to ensuring the safety and comfort of all our guests."

The airline emphasised that safety protocols prohibited boarding passengers who appear intoxicated or disruptive. It said the men were informed that they could take the next flight once deemed safe to travel. Kenya Airways also noted that the rest of the group, equally identifiable as religious Jews, was allowed to

board without issue.

"Although the guests suggested they were being profiled because of their religion, this wasn't the case as the rest of their group travelled on the same flight."

The airline reiterated its zero-tolerance policy against discrimination, saying, "At Kenya Airways, we celebrate diversity. We are strongly committed to a zero-tolerance

policy against any form of discrimination, harassment, or bullying based on race, sex, disability, gender, age, beliefs, or socio-economic background."

Since the incident, stakeholders from Kenya Airways and the travellers have worked discreetly to de-escalate tensions and resolve the situation. Conversations between airline representatives and the travellers have taken place. The travellers haven't made any formal comment to the

*SA Jewish Report*, saying they were preparing a joint statement, which wasn't issued at the time of going to print.

One individual familiar with the saga, who preferred to

remain anonymous, said, "They weren't intoxicated or disruptive. They were of sound mind. The *shuir* followed by dancing may have been mistaken as intoxication, but it was purely religious expression." The source also claimed that Kenya Airways didn't offer to rebook the men on the next flight, saying, "It was neither offered nor facilitated. Had that been the case, it would have made things easier and cheaper."

Ultimately, Rabbi Wagner and his two students secured a direct flight to New York on a different airline later that night, arriving even earlier than their fellow travellers. By the time they reached Crown Heights, they

were warmly welcomed by the Chabad community, already aware of the ordeal.

Charisse Zeifert, SAJBD deputy director, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The SAJBD has been in touch with all parties involved in this upsetting incident. Our lawyer has advised Rabbi Wagner to open a case in respect of the incident.

"We have also been in touch with Kenya Airways, which has referred to the incident as 'unfortunate, and one that could have been avoided'. It expressed that it held the Jewish community in high esteem, and said it didn't follow any discriminatory actions. We are conducting further investigation into exactly what transpired."

This incident comes at a particularly sensitive time for Jewish communities worldwide. The rise in antisemitic incidents since 7 October 2023 has heightened concern among Jewish travellers, making them more vigilant against potential discrimination. While many believe the men were unfairly targeted, others acknowledged that the exuberant behaviour, while culturally normal within Chassidic circles, may have been perceived as disruptive in an international airport.

The incident has left many questions unanswered. Were the men simply festive, or did their behaviour cross into disorderly conduct? Was this legitimate safety enforcement, or blatant discrimination against visibly religious passengers?

The pressing question now is whether those involved will press charges or lodge an official complaint. Should they proceed, CCTV footage from OR Tambo Airport could offer a definitive perspective. Until then, the video clips circulating online remain incomplete, providing just enough to ignite outrage but not enough to offer a clear, conclusive account.

According to the insider, for now, efforts remain focused on resolving the situation amicably and ensuring that such incidents, whether rooted in misunderstanding or something more serious, are handled with care and sensitivity.



A screenshot of Rabbi Noam Wagner from the video taken at OR Tambo International Airport

## 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!**



**Having European citizenship offers more than one benefit, besides the fact that it makes traveling far easier than with a South African passport...**

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.**

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.



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# Bassem Youssef's SA tour – an unfunny development

OPINION

JOY THERON



The invitation of Bassem Youssef by Gift of the Givers to perform in South Africa raised significant questions about the non-governmental organisation's (NGO's) motives. Was this an endorsement of his views, or an attempt to leverage his popularity to further an agenda?

Given that Youssef has openly said he wears accusations of antisemitism almost "like a badge of honour", observers had to ponder whether this invitation signalled a shift in the NGO's focus from humanitarian aid to political activism, potentially at the expense of fostering understanding and peace.

Youssef is an Egyptian comedian who rose to prominence during the Arab Spring in 2011. Often dubbed the "Jon Stewart of the Arab world", Youssef hosted a satirical show that critiqued Egypt's political establishment. His humour led to legal challenges, censorship, and eventual exile from Egypt. Now based abroad, Youssef positions himself as a critic of authoritarianism and Western foreign policy, more often than not focusing on Israeli-Palestinian issues.

For many Jewish and Zionist observers, Youssef's rhetoric reflects a broader trend of antisemitism masquerading as anti-Zionism. His South Africa tour raised alarms about normalising harmful stereotypes under the guise of comedy or activism. Some argue that though legitimate criticism of Israel is, of course, acceptable, Youssef's approach, steeped in conspiracy, historical inaccuracy, and incendiary analogies, fuels like hatred rather than dialogue.

Youssef's past comedy and comments aren't just edgy, they are downright alarming. Take his appearance on the PBD Podcast, where he floated a bizarre conspiracy theory, claiming that Israel kidnapped Yemeni Jewish children in the 1950s to "manipulate Semitic DNA" and build its population. Not only was this a gross distortion of the real-life Yemenite Children Affair – a tragic chapter of historical neglect – it dredged up antisemitic myths about Jewish control and deception. He even threw in the lie that DNA testing was illegal in Israel. Spoiler: It isn't. Privacy restrictions exist, but that's hardly the same thing. Why stick to facts when a juicy conspiracy grabs more attention?

**YOUSSEF'S PAST COMEDY AND COMMENTS AREN'T JUST EDGY, THEY ARE DOWNRIGHT ALARMING.**

Then there was his appearance on Theo Von's podcast. When asked whether media was mostly run by Jews, Youssef casually replied, "It is." That isn't satire, it's a recycling of the oldest, deadliest antisemitic trope in the book – the idea that Jews secretly pull the strings of global power. This isn't just offensive; it's dangerous. History has shown where that kind of rhetoric leads.

Youssef's takes on Israel often spiral into moral grandstanding. On Piers Morgan's show, he accused Israel of "corrupting the West morally for 100 years". Critics noted that Israel was only 76 years old. Was he bending timelines to fit a narrative? It came across as a cheap shot that swapped facts for inflammatory soundbites.

Youssef has repeatedly compared



Bassem Youssef performing in Cape Town on 8 February

Photo: Screenshot

Israel's actions to Nazi Germany, including during interviews with Lex Fridman and Piers Morgan. Equating the Holocaust, a systematic genocide of six million Jews, to modern geopolitical conflicts isn't just inaccurate, it's a slap in the face to survivors and their descendants.

His habit of downplaying Hamas's atrocities, like the 7 October attacks, which Hamas itself documented and celebrated, also drew condemnation. Dismissing these horrors isn't scepticism; it's denialism, plain and simple. It shouldn't be forgotten that the Holocaust didn't start with gas chambers and death marches, it started with words and exclusions.

South Africa, of all places, should know better. This is a nation still healing from apartheid, one that has fought hard for reconciliation. Bringing in a figure who traffics in harmful stereotypes, especially about a conflict as fraught as the Israeli-

Palestinian one, risks reopening old wounds. Instead of fostering understanding, it could fan the flames of division.

Free speech matters, but as a public figure with a platform, Youssef's words carry weight. His rhetoric isn't just critical of Israel, it leans into tropes that have fuelled hatred for centuries. South Africa deserves better than a sideshow that reduces one of the world's most complex issues to cheap, dehumanising jokes. Many now hope that Gift of the Givers remember what its mission really is.

• Joy Theron is an animal activist and political realist. Raised in KwaZulu-Natal and living in Gauteng, she believes that by gathering all the facts and engaging in thoughtful dialogue, we can foster a more informed and empathetic society.

## BRIGA TOWERS IR YAMIM



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A stunning 164-square-meter apartment for sale with a 30-square-meter terrace facing the Mediterranean Sea, just 300 meters from a wonderful sandy beach in one of the most prestigious buildings in Israel called Briga Tower.

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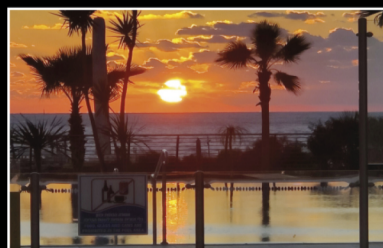
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30% of the tenants in the building are from Anglo backgrounds specifically the United Kingdom, United States, and South Africa. The concierge team speak English as does the resident management team. Residents are all from a cosmopolitan and similar background.

The apartment is for sale directly from the owner at a price of 10.75m shekels.



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

## Keeping the Jewish voice alive

Asking for money is an extraordinarily difficult thing for most of us to do. But the alternative, not asking for financial assistance to sustain the *SA Jewish Report*, would leave a deep and abiding hole in our community. In fact, it would take away our very voice.

The *SA Jewish Report* is the voice of the Jewish community. We do our utmost to ensure that nothing that is or could be important to the community goes by without informing you. And we, the *SA Jewish Report* team, are truly passionate about this.

We spend all our time, day and night, looking for stories that we believe would interest you, our readers. Then we do our best to give them to you in the best way possible, making them good reads and easy to consume.

Sometimes we might get it wrong. But we do our best to get it right because we are literally part of the community working for the whole because you are important to us. We believe you have the right to know whatever is out there of relevance to us.

It's interesting that, while we try to give you information and opinions that we deem relevant, we sometimes upset certain elements of the community.

Last weekend, we had an opinion piece by Joel Pollak, editor-at-large at Breitbart News, on this page. I sought him out to write for us because he is a South African Jew. He now lives in the United States, but he was born here, grew up here, was educated here, and even married a South African woman, whose mother was Rhoda Kadalie, a struggle stalwart and former human rights commissioner. The point is, he is undoubtedly an expert on United States President Donald Trump, who is consistently creating news. So, Pollack fits a lot of criteria for someone whose voice would interest you.

It was therefore no surprise to me that at the same time that I was asking Pollak to write for the newspaper, our chairperson, Howard Sackstein, was asking him to be on a webinar.

Nobody doubts that Pollak is right-wing in his views, and our readers cross all political and religious spectrums. So, some of our left-leaning readers were angry that we gave him a platform.

Just a few weeks ago, we had Gershon Baskin, who is very left-wing in his views on Israel, write for us. Some readers voiced their anger at giving him space.

The point is: we call on these people for you. You don't have to agree with everyone, but you have the right to read or hear what they say. And what they say could potentially inform you, which is why we get their opinions.

We ask many people to write opinion pieces for us. Some you may like, and others you may not. Some I may like, and others I may not, but giving a voice to people to offer you something you may not know that may guide, inspire, illicit anger in you, faith, or relief, is why we do it.

When there is an important meeting between leaders of our community and leaders of this country or Israel, we get the information to share with you.

When the videos of the Chabadniks who were refused permission to fly on Kenya Airways last week went viral in our community, we knew it was incumbent on us to find out what happened. Were they stopped because they were Jews, or was there some other explanation? This week, the story is in the newspaper for you to read.

Last week, President Cyril Ramaphosa gave his State of the Nation Address. So, we called on acclaimed and highly respected radio journalist and author, Mandy Wiener, to unpack the things he said for us in this week's publication.

We have been through so much together – 25 years of giving you news. In the past five years, we survived the COVID-19 pandemic when our team worked totally remotely but did what we had to in order to keep you up to date on what was happening in our micro and macro world.

As we were finding out what happened on 7 October 2023, we were seeking out the stories that would connect us to the events. We made sure that any South African connection to Israel's war on Hamas and other terrorist organisations was there for you to read.

We make sure that you know what our situation is in South Africa, leaving no stone unturned and ensuring that our haters don't get away with anything. You have the right to know it all. We are intent on continuing to do this.

The point is, as a media house, we bring you what you can't get elsewhere, and we do it with a passion few have for their craft. Our publication is different to most media outlets because, as I said before, we aren't just writing for you as our audience, we're a part of you.

We are the voice of South African Jewry. Truth is, we can't do our jobs without you, both by giving us the information, stories, features, and news and now, by helping to keep our voice loud and clear.

The *SA Jewish Report* cannot survive without you. Surviving means continuing to give you everything you could ever want to know that will be important to you as a Jewish South African, whether you live here in Jozi or in the furthest parts of the United States, Europe, or Southeast Asia.

There are many in our midst who would love to see us disappear because we are a proudly Jewish newspaper that 100% believes in Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. They don't want us to keep giving you the information and stories we do. They want to shut us up. Please don't let them take our voice.

### Shabbat Shalom!

**Peta Krost**  
Editor

### Omission

The Louk family talks in South Africa in February 2025 were made possible because of Partnership2Gether, a Jewish Agency initiative that has been building bridges between the Jewish community in South Africa and the community of Beit Shemesh – Mate Yehuda for the past 30 years.



## When giving up isn't an option

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



As I watched the harrowing footage of Israeli hostages emerging from captivity, their faces etched with exhaustion yet radiant with an unmistakable glow, I couldn't help but wonder: what fuels their unyielding resilience?

How do they manage to smile, laugh, and declare their determination to move forward despite the unimaginable trauma they've endured?

Take Agam Berger as just one example.

When 20-year-old Agam Berger, one of the young women recently released by Hamas in the hostage deal, was picked up by the Israeli military helicopter, she was handed a whiteboard and offered to write a message to everyone, in Israel and beyond, watching and waiting for her reunion with her family. Agam's message began with, "I chose the path of faith, and in the path of faith I returned."

This happened after a year of keeping Shabbos in captivity and refusing to cook and work for her captors on the day of rest! This wasn't refusing a car ride with one's friend to Sandton Mall on Saturday morning. This was saying no to her enemy, an enemy which seemed to hold all the power.

How in the world does someone do that?



Former hostage Agam Berger on the day of her release

There are many answers to this question. Faith. Purpose. Taking inspiration from people who have faced tough times. The power of the soul. The power of education. If you read up about Agam's mother, Meirav, you will understand her daughter's strength a bit more.

Yet, I believe that at least part of the answer lies in a profound realisation, one that has the power to transform our lives, no matter what challenges we face.

Resilience, you see, isn't just about bouncing back from adversity, it's about reaching a point where you understand that there's no other choice but to show up, move forward, and rise above. It's the unwavering conviction that failure isn't an option, that the only direction is up.

We become resilient when we remove any other option because there really isn't any other.

I'm reminded of one example within my family history, one that embodies the essence of resilience. My paternal grandmother, Cheyena Avtzon, lived through the unimaginable horrors of World War II. She witnessed the devastation of her community, the loss of loved ones, and the brutality of war.

Her mother died from starvation during the siege of Leningrad by the Nazis. Her younger brother died soon after. While trying to reserve a place in the Jewish cemetery for her mother's burial, the earth was frozen, and my grandmother worried that with all the death taking place, somebody else would grab the few remaining graves in a Jewish cemetery. So, she slept in the frozen Russian winter cemetery for at least one whole long, unbearable, below-zero night. I heard a version that she slept there for more than a week! She suffered for the rest of her life from illness that came from this decision. But there was no choice other than to have her mom buried the right way.

Soon afterwards, her father realised that they had no choice but to cross the frozen river. They were lucky as others who tried to cross the river fell through the ice and drowned. Miraculously, they

survived and then tried to avoid the Nazis by running through forests, eventually arriving in the Ural forests. The strain took its toll, and her father, a great Chassidic teacher and mentor, died as well on the road. She buried her dad.

She was left alone with her two younger sisters.

Eventually, she made it to Uzbekistan. She met my grandfather – 13 years older than her – and they got married.

Despite her unimaginable challenges, Cheyena Avtzon refused to be defined by her circumstances. Instead, she chose to move forward, rebuild, and create a new life for herself. There was simply no other choice.

The story gets even crazier.

She and my grandfather had a daughter while still living in the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Then, she gave birth to five more children while living in displaced persons camps in France. When she and her husband, Rabbi Meir Avtzon, came to the United States, she expected a more advanced and patient-oriented approach to medical treatment.

How surprised she was that upon a visit to a gynaecologist, he adamantly told her that she should never consider having another child!

My grandmother tenaciously told the doctor that his job was to help women have children, not to count them or try to prevent them from having more. When she told the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of righteous memory, about the doctor's prognosis of the dangers that might arise in future pregnancies, the Rebbe answered with a vigorous blessing, promising her that she would have many more children.

Which she did. Nine more children subsequently joined the Avtzon family, including my dad. If you struggle with maths, I'll spell it out. She had 15 children! More than 120 grandchildren! And you can only imagine the generations after that.

How does a woman who buried her own parents and siblings with her own hands go on with so much determination to rebuild the world lost, even bigger and better than before?

Faith – definitely in abundance. She had a strong "why". And she had an incredibly strong character. She was no pushover.

And, she had no other choice. She didn't allow herself to believe that there was another choice other than moving forward and upward.

We live in a world that celebrates choice. There are thousands of movie options on Netflix; 20 different jams in the supermarket; infinite places to live and emigrate to; limitless subjects to study; and a plethora of life choices and values to choose to live by. Everything is an option. Everything. And it is destroying us.

Choice is lovely and one of the great gifts of being human. But it comes with a price tag, which we often forget to highlight – too many options can immobilise us. The more choices we allow ourselves, the more confusion we allow into our lives.

One of the great gifts of religious observance is that for 25 hours a week – on Shabbos – the phone isn't an option, it's away. Ninety nine, point nine percent of restaurants aren't an option – not kosher. Forgetting about G-d isn't an option – prayer and blessings etc. You get the picture. When I choose to remove some choices from before me, I'm gifting myself the gift of clarity. I know what needs to be done.

When you marry someone, you are essentially saying no to every other person on the planet. They are no longer an option. And that's a good thing. Choosing the path of resilience is saying no to any other option.

Let's draw on our resilience, and face the challenges ahead. When we do, we'll discover that the only direction is up and that together, we can overcome even the most daunting obstacles. We are so strong when we realise that weakness was never an option.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

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# Something GNU here: Ramaphosa's gimmick-free SONA

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa gave his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 6 February. Esteemed journalist **Mandy Wiener** was there.

## Was there anything unpredictable in Ramaphosa's SONA? If so, what was it?

There was no gimmick this year as there has been in prior SONAs. No mention of Tintswalo, or bullet trains, or any major revelation. The focus was on the MTDP (Medium Term Development Plan) which is the government of national unity's (GNU's) plan for the next five years. The one thing we were trying to predict beforehand was whether Ramaphosa would use the platform to address United States (US) President Donald Trump, and he did it in a fairly subtle way, as I anticipated he would.

## Every year, we hear about the need for jobs and improving our economy, but are we witnessing any change? If so, where?

The government sharpened its focus on this in the MTDP. Ramaphosa specified that the government was targeting 3% growth, which is a figure that has been put out by the private sector and its collaboration with treasury through Operation Vulindlela. Opposition parties argue that there isn't enough change yet, and unemployment remains alarmingly high, so this will be the real test of the success of the GNU.

## Does the president's SONA have any impact? If so, how and where?

Anecdotally, I would say no. I'm not sure that the majority of South Africans pay attention to the specifics of what the president has to say in the SONA or if they even bother watching or listening to it. Many people say they just read my summary on social media. I do think it's important for the government to set out its plan and communicate that to the electorate, but the real measure is whether it actually delivers on its promises.

## Will this year be different?

Well, this is the first SONA on behalf of a GNU, so from that perspective it will be different. This wasn't merely an African National Congress (ANC) policy regurgitation. The president actually consulted GNU partners on the content of the speech. Then Cabinet members made submissions during the *lekgotla*, and there was a meeting of the GNU on the day of the SONA to go through the details. I do think with other parties having a vested interest in various portfolios, delivery is likely to improve.

## One of the issues he dealt with was municipalities' failed service delivery. Why do you think this was relevant, what promises did he make, and what do you believe will happen now?

There will be a local government election in 18 months' time, so it didn't come as a shock that there was a considerable focus on municipalities. These have been the site of the most visible and obvious failings of the ANC government. The MTDP contains plans which include reviewing how municipalities are funded and improving water and electricity delivery.

## Following SONA, what do you believe we have to be inspired by?

The nuts and bolts of the speech wasn't particularly inspiring. There was no poetic call to action like we have seen in the past with his "Thuma mina" speech, and no evocative symbolism like he used with the sociable weaver-birds metaphor. The most stirring part of the speech was the sub-tweet to US President Donald Trump, in which Ramaphosa laid out South Africa's values as a nation; its commitment to justice and freedoms; emphasising that we wouldn't be bullied as a nation.

## With Ramaphosa as the new chair of the G20, and Marco Rubio (US Secretary of State) having said that he wasn't coming to its meeting this year, was this tackled or ignored? Either way, why do you think this was?

It wasn't directly addressed, but there was a passive



aggressive acknowledgement. Ramaphosa and his speech writers wanted to focus on domestic issues and not current affairs, so it wasn't directly addressed on this platform. Ramaphosa did speak about the importance of hosting the G20 on the world stage, and said he would send envoys to the US to explain foreign policy.

## How did Ramaphosa deal with Trump's recent "confiscating land" tweet?

Ramaphosa responded to Trump without directly responding to him, insisting that we are a country that won't be bullied and that stands for justice and is true to our values. He said, "We are not daunted. We will not be deterred. We are a resilient people. We will not be bullied. We will stand together as a united nation. We will speak with one voice in defence of our national interest, our sovereignty, and our constitutional democracy. As South Africans, we stand for peace and justice, for equality and solidarity. We stand for non-racialism and democracy, for tolerance and compassion."

## What was your biggest "take home" from SONA?

We are in an era of coalition politics and the ANC, as much as it refuses to acknowledge it, no longer has a majority in Parliament. The electorate has sent a message that it wants political parties to govern together, and things are different now. The hand of the other parties like the Democratic Alliance and Rise Mzansi were evident in the policies set out in the speech, and there is now a clear willingness to collaborate with the private sector.

## If you could whisper into the president's ear about how to move forward, what would you say?

Like any good marriage, it requires compromise on all sides, and he would do well to remember that when signing off contentious legislation and implementing policy. He's no longer only an ANC president but a president leading a coalition of parties.



Mandy Wiener outside the Cape Town City Hall before the State of the Nation Address

# What a release! Mandela's freedom etched in people's minds

## LEE TANKLE

Though it's 35 years since 11 February 1990, the day that Nelson Mandela was released from his 27-year imprisonment, the day is imprinted on the minds of many Jewish South Africans.

So many recall being glued to their television screens – or portable radios – to see the man walk out of prison with his head held high, holding the hand of his wife, Winnie, signalling a new South Africa.

Arthur Goldstuck, the chief executive of World Wide Worx and the editor-in-chief of Gadget.co.za, described the day as the "happiest radio day in my life".

Goldstuck was sitting in the Johannesburg studios of Capital Radio in Milpark with then news editor David O'Sullivan when suddenly, the five bells sounded from the telex machine – where all news organisations got their news – signalling that something momentous was happening.

"We both dashed to the machine, knowing what to expect because a major press conference had been called for that afternoon in Cape Town," he said. "There was one announcement that the world was waiting for, and it declared itself over the telex machine: Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela would be released from prison the following day."

Likewise, Max Price, the former vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town, said he and his friends were all wondering what Mandela would look like when he walked out of prison.

"We wondered whether he would resemble the posters and campaign pictures that were all based on a grainy photo from the 1960s," he said, "When he came out with Winnie and then later, when he spoke from the balcony at Cape Town City Hall, it was exhilarating."

Journalist Nechama Brodie was similarly perplexed as to what Mandela would look like when he stepped into the spotlight. "We thought it would never happen, and suddenly, we were seeing this old man coming out of prison and we had never seen him before, only pictures of him as a young man, as the state had restricted images of him. The sight of him leaving the prison was the first time that most South Africans had seen his face, which would become the beloved face of this grandfather of our democratic nation."

Former African National Congress (ANC) councillor Sol Cowan said, "It was spine-chilling because I didn't think it would ever happen, to be quite honest. And then just suddenly to see this – you had to pinch yourself to see if it was real."

Watching Mandela being released and the end of apartheid was one of the many reasons why Cowan decided to jump into the world of politics as an ANC member.

Many community members who weren't in the country remember that day fondly. Often it was the catalyst that brought them back to South Africa.

An anonymous community member said that though she was living in Israel, watching Mandela being released gave her the impetus to return to South Africa.

"That was the moment when I knew that I had to come home," she said. "I could see that South Africa was changing, and I needed to be there to see it happen."

At the time of Mandela's release, Marc Lubner, now group chief executive of Afrika Tikkun, was living in Chicago in the United States. He had been there since being placed on a security police watchlist in South Africa after the June 1976 riots. He had participated in organising a protest at City Hall in Johannesburg, and was bashed by police.

"It gave me new hope for our country," she said, "and allowed me to continue with my plans to become an independent producer and open a new theatre for Johannesburg."

Johannesburg resident Mandy Rosin remembers that day like it happened yesterday. Her entire family was gathered to celebrate her parents' 30th wedding anniversary when the party stopped while everyone sat watching the televised reportage of Mandela walking out of prison.

"When he was released, the party came to a complete standstill," she said. "Anyone who was eating food put their knife and fork down and went to watch."

Similarly, businessman Howard Sackstein, who was working at Werksmans Attorneys at the time, was so excited about Mandela's release that his birthday party turned into a Mandela release party a few days before Mandela was released.

"I was with a few friends watching TV on the day he was released, and when we saw those iconic pictures of Nelson and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela walking out of Victor Verster prison, we erupted in celebration," he said. "So we all then went to Hillbrow. There were tens of thousands of people on the streets of Hillbrow, singing and dancing. People were breaking branches off the trees and dancing with the branches up and down the streets of Hillbrow. It was a day full of exhilaration, hope, and inspiration."



Nelson Mandela with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela shortly after being released from Victor Verster prison

"I decided while watching Mandela being released that I wanted to return to be a part of the 'Rainbow Nation', where respect and love for the diversity of life here would be more appealing than simply making dollars for myself," Lubner said. "Mandela's inauguration was attended by my dad and brother, and I felt a pang of remorse at not being home."

For Daphne Kuhn, the owner, producer, and artistic director of the Theatre on the Square in Sandton, Mandela's release not only signalled a new future for South Africa, but also for her professional career.

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# Solly Krok – the man who made charity cool

TRIBUTE

Strong and sprightly until only recently, Solly Krok, the 95-year-old larger-than-life legend, has now rejoined his beloved wife, Rita, and his dear identical twin brother, Abie, in the world above. Solly was besotted with his late wife, Rita, his children and grandchildren. Naturally, things weren't quite the same after her passing.

The funeral on Sunday, 9 February, was deservedly huge, and Solly was laid to rest next to Rita and Abie in the place of honour at Westpark Jewish Cemetery. Family and friends, rabbis, and business colleagues all came in their hundreds to pay tribute to a man who believed in giving rather than taking, and to whom our community is indebted for his philanthropy, generosity, deep love, and genuine concern.

We have been blessed to have many philanthropists over the years who have contributed to the vibrancy of Jewish life in South Africa. But Solly, in partnership with Abie, played a critical role in making *tzedakah* popular. Back in the 1980s, they produced a hilarious original *Mock Wedding*, which became a popular theatrical success. Solly was the groom and Eric Ellerin the bride. Chazan Ari Klein, Oshy Tugendhaft, and the

Solly Krok



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Sydenham Shul Choir provided live wedding music for the *simcha*. It became a huge hit in the community. It was a fun and creative way of raising a lot of money for good causes. Then there was their Millionex Charity Raffle which predated the national Lotto by decades.

Together, these projects conveyed to the community how important it was to give

*tzedakah*. In fact, it popularised *tzedakah* and made giving charity cool!

So passionate was he about *tzedakah*, I recall him once declaring to me in absolute sincerity, "Yossy, we just have to make more money. We need to be able to give more *tzedakah*!" There was no self-consciousness whatsoever. It was his pure and heartfelt wish. Solly and Abie were a perfect

counterbalance to each other. Solly, though he was an accountant was the dreamer, forever concocting business schemes and community projects that he hoped would change the world. Abie, the pharmacist, kept him grounded. Together, their imagination and due diligence led to many huge successes and only few setbacks. That Solly died on Abie's *yahrzeit* can only be an incredible heavenly testament to their identical and inseparable twin lives from beginning to end.

Some of their more famous acquisitions were Gold Reef City, which became a premier centre of entertainment, and Summer Place, famous for its exquisite events in a beautiful garden setting.

Solly's often flamboyant enthusiasm for sport led them to buy Mamelodi Sundowns Football Club in the 1980s. Subsequently, they sold the club to Patrice Motsepe in 2004. Indeed, Patrice, his wife, Precious, and the Motsepe family were prominent attendees at the funeral.

Solly supported almost every cause under the sun. I'm personally familiar with but some of his fortunate beneficiaries. The Shul @ Hyde Park was housed at Summer Place for quite a few years. The Torah Academy schools were close to his heart, and I know he was very helpful to my wife, Rochel, when she ran Women of the World. Solly was involved in Cyrildene Shul for many years, and was also one of the early benefactors of the Yeshiva Gedolah; Ohr Somayach; and Aish HaTorah in South Africa. He was committed to the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, and in 2001, the Kroks opened the Apartheid Museum. Solly was also closely

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



affiliated with Bar Ilan University and various yeshivas in Israel. And I know for a fact that he personally helped many families and individuals suffering hard times. All these acts of kindness are unknown to the wider community. No doubt the list could go on and on.

Never one to shy away from a party, Solly's annual Sukkos luncheon was a firm fixture in the calendar of hundreds of people over the years.

Quite remarkably, well into his 90s, Solly was still thinking of new enterprises and projects to save the world. Whether it was to fight global antisemitism or to alleviate poverty in South Africa by "keeping the wolf from the door", he was passionate and involved and constantly "on the boil". His Touchdown Challenge was to encourage senior citizens to touch their toes to stay healthy and mobile.

Ever appreciative that G-d gave him longevity and health, he would frequently wax dramatic and proclaim for all to hear, "I am blessed! I am blessed!"

In his eulogy at the funeral, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, the head of the Lubavitch Foundation and rabbi at The Shul @ Hyde Park said, "For Solly, prince and pauper were equals, and he treated them both with the same respect and dignity. I encourage Solly's family and friends to carry on his extraordinary, inspirational legacy of love and generosity. May we all learn from Solly's example!"

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is life rabbi emeritus at Sydenham Shul and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

## Tu B'Shvat helps us see the wood for the trees

JESSICA CONNÉ

Climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation. For many, these terms evoke fear, guilt, sadness, or even grief. This reaction is widespread, and was recently coined "eco-anxiety".

Many people feel fear and helplessness over the state of our planet and overwhelmed by the huge responsibility of mitigating environmental damage. According to researcher Caroline Hickman, young people are especially affected by eco-anxiety.

Says Avital Devir, a recent law graduate from the University of Cape Town (UCT), "I generally feel anxious about the climate crisis. But as time goes on, there's more of a sense of resignation or a reluctant acceptance. Because it keeps getting worse, there's expectation that it will keep getting worse."

Recent UCT history graduate Sarah Saacks says, "I wouldn't say I feel optimistic about the climate crisis. It's kind of like a leaky tap you're trying to ignore. You know it's there, but you try not to pay attention to it otherwise you'll be overwhelmed by it all."

Hickman says that over time, some young people's concern turns into frustration with leaders who fail to act, as they feel betrayed by politicians, corporations, and decision-makers who they believe should be protecting their future.

Says Saacks, "With what's happening in the United States, with it pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, it's going to have long-term effects that it isn't thinking through. That's the problem. Politicians put the future in the future without understanding that the 'future' will affect our generation." This sense of betrayal and frustration leaves many young people

disillusioned about their role in a world that seems to ignore their well-being.

As science education and climate change are intertwined and inseparable, adults and institutions can help by validating their concerns and showing accountability through meaningful actions. These include regenerative agriculture, investing in green energy, retrofitting, implementing a green, circular economic model, and supporting organic and sustainable farming practices. Says Rabbi Sam Thurgood, "The direction we should take as a community should be something that's well considered from a perspective of Torah and Jewish

values but also from experts in environmental and political change.

"As Jews, we have a responsibility to protect the planet. This is part of how we were created, and a part of the initial responsibility and charge that was given to us," he says. "It really goes back to the story of creation, of Adam and Eve, when it says, 'Hashem placed Adam within the garden to work it and to guard it.' Our sages have always seen this as symbolic of the way we should relate to the entire world – to work it and to protect it. There are many *mitzvot* and verses of value that speak to Judaism's role as caretakers of the world and the need for responsibility."

This year Tu B'Shvat, also known as the New Year or Birthday of the Trees takes place on 13 February, or the 15th of Sh'vat. "Tu B'Shvat is a day on which the *ma'aser* [tithes of the trees] are calculated," Thurgood said. "In other words, one of our obligations as farmers in Israel is to give a tenth of our tree produce to the Levi within a particular year. This has become a symbol of giving 10% of our income to *tzedakah* [charity]."

"It's a day we have adopted, some people call it Jewish Arbor Day or Jewish

Environmentalism Day. I would say that's not its original focus, intention, or observance, but it has become the way we do it. Certainly, the way in which the Jewish people relate to this day is through our responsibility from the trees and to the trees and towards nature," Thurgood says.

"Another powerful step we can take to combat climate anxiety, alongside systematic change, is to adopt an optimistic outlook. While eco-anxiety is a natural reaction to the climate crisis, too much distress can lead to inaction. Climate optimism provides balance by focusing on hope and possibility. Effective optimism highlights real progress, such as advances in renewable energy or conservation successes, while acknowledging the challenges."

Says Devir, "Knowing that policies and corporations have to adopt sustainable and restorative policies makes me feel optimistic. That the people with power to make change are utilising that power."

The Australian Psychological Society suggests several ways to combat eco-anxiety and be more optimistic about the climate crisis:

- Focus on environmental successes and progress toward sustainability;
- Remember that small actions, like conserving energy or speaking up for change, contribute to larger solutions;
- Break big problems into manageable steps to avoid feeling overwhelmed;
- Learn from reliable sources to understand problems and solutions;
- Prioritise mental and physical health to stay engaged long-term;
- Share your feelings and ideas with friends, family, or community groups to feel less alone; and
- Look for clear, solution-focused advice instead of focusing only on the severity of the crisis.

Eco-anxiety and climate optimism aren't opposites. Together, they help to create a balanced approach to tackling environmental challenges. As researcher Jessica Fritze suggests, distress alone can be paralyzing, but combining emotional engagement with rational action can lead to meaningful change.



## Holocaust survivor's testimony puts spotlight on ethnic prejudice

Ninety-year-old Holocaust survivor Lyonell Fliss marked the 80th International Day of Holocaust Remembrance with an account to the United Nations office in Nairobi, Kenya, on 28 January of his survival of the pogrom of Iasi, Romania.

Fliss was six years old during the pogrom in 1941. Half of the population of Iasi was Jewish. At the height of World War II, Romania joined forces with the Adolf Hitler-led Nazi regime in Germany as part of the Axis powers. Like Nazi Germany, Romania started a campaign of identifying and rounding up Jews.

Fliss was the only child of his father, Lupo, and mother, Adela. Up to the time of the war, the Fliss family lived amiably with its neighbours. But when turmoil blew up, it was those very neighbours who directed the soldiers to where the Jews lived.

The Sunday of 28 June 1941 is freshly printed on Fliss's mind.

On the day, the caretaker of their apartment threatened to target his family. His mother insisted that they hide under their beds when they heard banging on the door. The caretaker broke open the door, but luckily didn't see them. He then carted away a few of their precious household items.

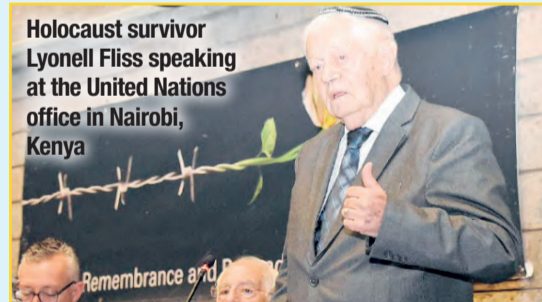
Later, German soldiers were on a hunting spree for Jews, knocking on every door as neighbours guided them. Unluckily for the Fliss family, they were found.

"They were forcibly removed from the apartment, and Fliss's mother broke her leg when a soldier pushed her down the stairs," according to material in possession of the Johannesburg Holocaust &

Genocide Centre (JHGC).

"The Fliss family was then ordered to join a line of Jews outside the central police station. The queue moved forward slowly, and while they waited, they heard gunshots and saw piles of dead bodies."

The selfless protective instinct of a parent kicked in, and Fliss's mother, upon seeing a kind looking Romanian soldier, begged him to adopt the boy.



Holocaust survivor Lyonell Fliss speaking at the United Nations office in Nairobi, Kenya

The soldier took Fliss and his parents to the back of the line, by which time the shooting had stopped and they were released.

They couldn't go back to their own apartment as they were scared of the caretaker, so they joined other family members who had gathered at Fliss's grandmother's home.

More than 13 000 Jews were massacred that day. Lyonell's relatives were among the thousands of Jews rounded up and packed into freight cars and vans.

Those death trains were sealed, moved back and forth between railway stations, and 2 650 people died of suffocation or thirst, while others lost their sanity, according to the JHGC.

The family moved to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, and Fliss later moved across the Iron Curtain, finally making it to Israel in the 1950s. He lived in Israel for six years before moving to South Africa for work.

# Enabling aliya where the dream seemed impossible

PETA KROST

There are some who believe that if you can visualise it, your dream will come true. But when Anthony\*, 68, and his wife, Helen\*, 69, were turned away from their aliya dream years ago, they sadly let it go. Last week, they heard not only that they are making aliya, they have affordable accommodation on the Netanya coast.

"This is our dream come true, and I have no words to say how blessed we feel to Israel for making this happen," said Anthony this week. "It feels like a miracle."

Shay Felber, the deputy director-general of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the director of the aliya and absorption unit, said, "We went to the Israeli ministry of aliya and absorption to find out how we could help older South Africans who have family in Israel but can't afford to make aliya. We have secured 40 two-room units in Netanya that are heavily subsidised by the government specially for South African couples who will have to pay only about 350 Israeli shekels a month."

Felber, who has a close relationship with the South African Jewish community having been a Jewish Agency *shaliach* (emissary) here in the early 2000s, is determined to show the South African community that Israel recognises its consistent contribution and dedication. And this project, he said, is one way they can do so.

"We do recognise that the South African community is passionate about Israel and it has challenges because of this. We know that there's undoubtedly a future for Jews in South Africa, but it will continue to be difficult politically and financially," Felber told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"We want you to know that we will continue to support South Africa, and we see that you are paying the price of being a proudly Zionist community. And we want you to know that you aren't alone. This is our way of giving back to you, by helping those who would otherwise not be able to make aliya to do so."

This project, a close collaboration between the Jewish Agency and the Chevrah Kadisha (Chev), is at the moment available only

to South Africans Jewish couples who are over 60 and physically independent, with a monthly income of less than R30 000. "We'll obviously have to do our checks, and this unique opportunity will all be on a first-come-first-served basis," says Felber.

He said the building that will house these people has just been built, and will be specifically for older *olim*. Though Israel has a good system of public housing, Felber said "queues of Israelis are being bypassed to make this possible".

magnificent. It turns out we were so close to where we will be living," he said.

When they went to a talk a week ago about the Netanya Project, Anthony said, "After hearing about this, I literally stood up and asked, 'Where do we sign up?' I was blown away by the fact that they are making this happen for us. I just broke down crying. I now believe in miracles.

"It's still sinking in, and we have a lot to do like sell the house we have lived in for 40 years. We haven't told most people yet. It's still so hard to believe it's happening."

"I can't wait to be able to walk the streets late at night, going to visit people on Shabbos, feeling safe," said Helen. "I love the fact that the children are safe to ride their bicycles everywhere. It's so wonderful at our age to have a new lease on life, an exciting adventure ahead of us in Israel."

They are likely to be living in Israel by the middle of 2025.

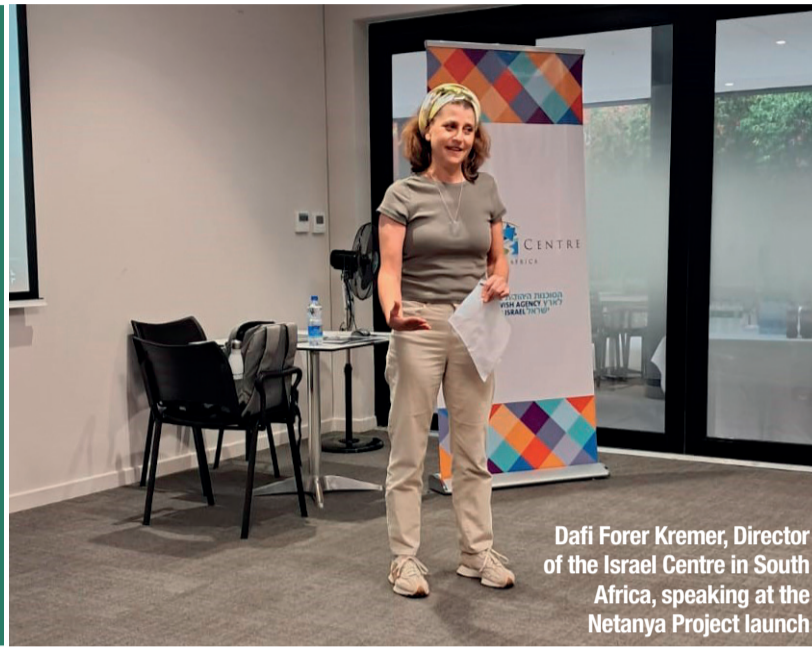
Felber said that as in the case of this couple, the desire to make aliya in South Africa and around the world hasn't been curtailed because of Israel being at war. In fact, the opposite is true.

"We have doubled our numbers from France, with 2 200 *olim* in 2024; more than 700 from the United Kingdom; 3 700 from North America; and 400 from South Africa," he said.

"While it may seem crazy that aliya has increased to a country at war, it shows people's commitment to, belief in, and love of Israel," he said. "Though people may not feel comfortable in France or even South Africa, they aren't having missiles directed at them there. However, they feel that the only place they will feel comfortable in again is Israel."

For more information, contact Ziva Taitz at the Israel Centre on 082 610 9077.

*\*The couple's names have been changed because they have yet to tell their family and friends that they are making aliya*



Dafi Forer Kremer, Director of the Israel Centre in South Africa, speaking at the Netanya Project launch

For Anthony and Helen, choosing to take up this opportunity was a no-brainer. "My son lives in Israel and I lost my job a few years ago and have been getting help from the Chev," said Anthony. When they went to the Israel Centre a few years back, they were told that they wouldn't make it in Israel and so they put their dream on hold.

"We visited our son in Ra'anana in 2022, and loved it there. A friend of the family took us out for a day, and it so happened she took us to Netanya. We drove along the beachfront, and it was

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# Galentines Day – a “bestie” experience for gal pals

LEE TANKLE

Rather than letting single life stop women from celebrating Valentine's Day, groups of women are gathering up their “gal pals” to celebrate Galentine's Day – a day for female friendship – instead.

“There are many more types of love than merely romance. Women have more financial freedom than ever in recorded history and are therefore unwilling to settle for unequal partnerships that don't fulfil their need for emotional intimacy.”

So says Sarit Shull, special projects co-ordinator at Paramount Group, on why rather than celebrating Valentine's Day this year, she and her friends are embracing their female friendships.

The term “Galentine's Day” originated from the television programme *Parks and Recreation*. In a 2010 episode, the main character, Leslie Knope, explains that the holiday is celebrated on 13 February, the day before Valentine's Day. The holiday's main goal is to celebrate female friendships, which many women rely on so heavily. Since the holiday is so new, there's no right or wrong way to celebrate it. It's up to the group of friends to decide what

feels right to celebrate their friendship.

Many people choose to pay tribute to Leslie Knope by hosting a waffle and cocktail brunch, as that's what they do in the Galentine's Day episode. But if breakfast foods aren't your vibe, you could gather your gal pals for a happy hour; make a reservation at a fancy restaurant; co-ordinate a group mani-pedi appointment; or simply pop champagne and celebrate how great it is to be in a room full of your favourite people for a few hours.

Shull and her friends are getting together in true Galentine's fashion and eating a “girl dinner”, which is an assortment of little snacks as popularised on TikTok, where girls put out a random assortment of food to please their fancy.

“The dress code is pyjamas and pearls,” said Shull. “In this way, we can all be comfy while embracing our fancy side. It's just a fun time where we girls can get together and



Female friendships are embraced and celebrated on Galentine's Day

do whatever we want without the influence of any romantic partners.”

“Galentine's Day gives me and my friends the chance to hang out with each other and celebrate us,” said an anonymous 23-year-old. “We dress up in pink or red and in our girliest attire, and we take ourselves out to a nice dinner that we would go on with a romantic partner. The only

difference is that this is way more fun. We don't have to dress up to impress anyone else – only ourselves. We can treat each other way better than any boyfriend we have had, so to celebrate with each other is the perfect way to spend our night.”

Similarly, 22-year-old mental health therapist Channing Haefner is getting together with her best

friend and going to an all-girls movie premier for the new Bridget Jones film, *Mad About the Boy*.

Haefner said this event appealed to them because both she and her best friend recently had their hearts broken – late last year and early this year – so when they saw the film premier advertised as being for girls in a similar situation, they jumped at the chance to laugh, dress up, and be spoiled.

“It's such a hard day. Especially because I'm a mental health therapist. For me, it's important to show my patients that you don't need validation

from a man or flowers or chocolates. Just your girls. Nobody can ever make you feel as amazing as your girls do,” she said.

Haefner was also excited to share the new Bridget Jones experience with her bestie. “We both love the book – it taught me everything I know about love. Bridget Jones inspired us and taught us that female friendships are the best you will ever have, so instead of it being a miserable day, we get to spend it in such an empowering way especially because on this particular night, there will be a few hundred of us.”

It's not only singles going out to celebrate Galentine's Day. Another anonymous 24-year-old said that though she does have a boyfriend, she still wants to celebrate Galentine's Day with her friends and is going to watch the new Bridget Jones movie with them on Saturday night.

“Valentine's Day can be all about my boyfriend and spending time with him, but I also need to spend some time celebrating girl power with my friends,” she says.

Twenty-five-year-old marketing assistant Michaela Tobias decided that though some people in her friendship group have significant others, Galentine's Day and celebrating female friendships is still important.

Tobias is having a whole group of girls in their early 20s come together for a mocktails and dessert night. Every girl has to bring a dessert as well as a small gift for a Galentine's surprise swap.

“We're all so busy with our lives, so to be able to have a night where it's just us girls is something special,” she said, “Of course, having a label for it is helpful, as it just gives us an excuse to say that there are no boys allowed and we can have some good-old-fashioned fun with the girls.”

“The night is going to be about all us girls,” Tobias said, “We're just going to get together in whatever way makes us feel comfortable, eat some yummy desserts, drink some delicious drinks, and have a good old catch-up session.”

“We get to spoil each other in a way that sometimes a significant other can't,” said Haefner. “I'm so excited just to be able to celebrate with my girls because nobody can make you feel as amazing as your girls do.”

# SA Jews make splash at Midmar Mile

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The Jewish community left its mark at this year's Midmar Mile in Howick, KwaZulu-Natal, on 8 and 9 February, with Sylvia Zwick the oldest female swimmer, and 13-year-old Romy Smith winning a bronze medal. And that's not all.

Zwick, 82, said she found the swim nice and easy. She finished with a time of 59 minutes, improving her time by two minutes on last year's swim.

Zwick, who trains at Melrose Arch Gym three times a week, has been swimming since she was a child, and now always swims the Mile with her niece, Karen Jankelow.

“I do a lot of open water swimming, so Sylvia was encouraged by that to do Midmar,” Jankelow says. “I swim right next to her the whole way. It's amazing. She's a strong person, very fit. She walks and used to do spinning classes.”

Jankelow has loads of Midmar swims under her belt. At Midmar this year, the 52nd edition of the event, she swam the Charity Eight Mile for the Cancer Association of South Africa and completed three further Midmar Mile races, including the one with her aunt.

“The conditions the whole weekend were really nice,” Jankelow says. “A little bit of wind on Saturday, but Sunday was nice, overcast, and the water quite flat.”

Smith finished in third place to claim a bronze medal in the Under-13 girls Midmar Mile category, with a time of 23 minutes, 35 seconds. The race came down to an intriguing battle between the top three, who ended up with just five seconds separating each of them. Smith also placed fifth overall out of 1 195 female swimmers, including the 31-and-over women's event, the winner being double gold Dutch Olympic medallist Sharon van Rouwendaal, who came in just three minutes ahead of Smith.

Smith's oldest sister, Rachel, who matriculated at King David Linksfield last year and has now started studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, finished 15th overall out of 975 swimmers in the 14 to 30 women's category with a time of 22 minutes, 33 seconds. Having finished tied for fifth place last year, Rachel achieved this year's



Karen Jankelow (in front) coming out of the Midmar Dam

Swimming made Ralph's recovery easier. “I just love swimming. It's therapeutic. I train at the Sydenham Swimming Pool and I do a lot of open water training at Prime View in Olifantsfontein.”

Ralph increased his swimming about a year ago, and completed the Robben Island swim in November 2024. He found the Midmar's

conditions to be lovely, not cold, and slightly choppy for about half an hour.

“I was comfortable in the swim. My navigation wasn't good, so instead of the eight miles, I probably swam a bit more because I can't swim straight, but I'm working on that. I'll be doing the swim again next year for PinkDrive to raise awareness that men can also get breast cancer and should undergo checkups from time to time.”

Gary Furman swam with his daughter, Dani. “My dad definitely lowered the water levels by about two millimetres due to swallowing so much water,” Dani says. “When my dad got out of the water, he was wearing a ‘Bring Them Home’ necklace, and a bunch of King David students were chanting ‘Bring them home!’ which was awesome as we were watching the

men's race waiting for the women's one to start.” King David Linksfield's annual trip to Midmar was “particularly marvellous” this year, says the school's Samantha Michau, who enthused about the school's Marvel theme for this year's tour.

Michau says the tour group of 37 teenagers and several staff members each recorded personal bests in the Mile, with notable performances from Alex Stonefield, who placed second in his age group; Dylan Bloch, a Central Gauteng Aquatics national open water swimmer; Ethan Lunt, an Eastern Gauteng Aquatics national open water swimmer; and the school's own teachers, Nirit Mindel and Rabbi Ilan Raanan.



Dani and Gary Furman at the Midmar Dam

result despite not having done that much training and with very little race practice due to the fact that she was in matric.

Swimming in the same category was her 16-year-old sister, Gabriella, who finished 52nd in tough, choppy conditions as the wind and current picked up.

Breast cancer survivor Ian

Ralph, 62, completed the 8 Mile swim on the Thursday and Friday (6 and 7 February) to raise money for PinkDrive, swimming four miles each day, before doing the one mile with his son, Daniel, 22, on the weekend.

“Nineteen years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer,” Ralph recalls. “It was interesting. For every 1 000 women that got it at the time, one male was diagnosed with breast cancer.”

“I had two operations, chemotherapy, and other medication. I've been clear for quite a while now. At the time I was diagnosed, I wanted to do the Midmar, and I was quite fit, which made my chemo quite easy, more bearable than it would have been had I not been fit.”



Ian and Daniel Ralph after their Midmar Mile



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# Teeger's cricket coaching a hit at King David

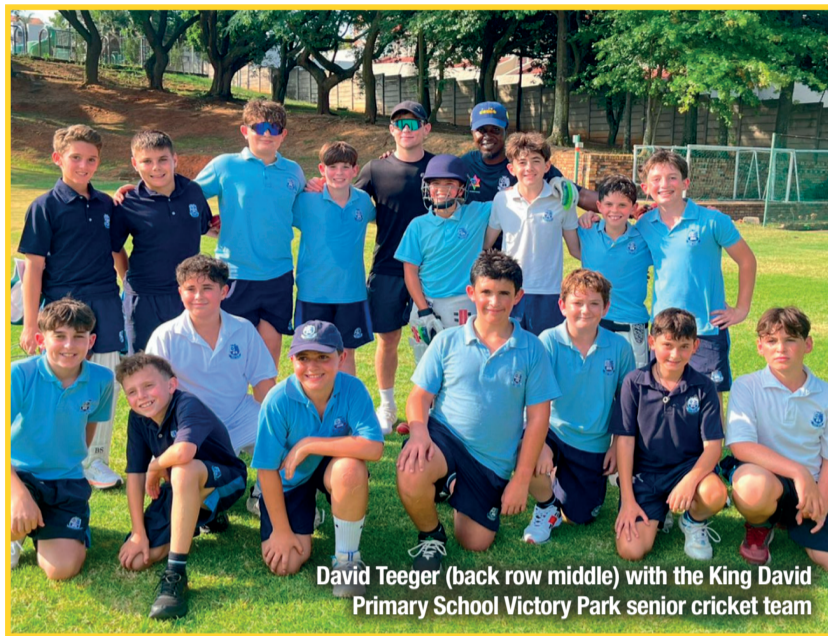
The senior cricket team at King David Primary School Victory Park (KDVP) had an unforgettable training session with South African Under-19 Cricket Captain David Teeger on 6 February, who shared his expertise in fielding, bowling, and batting as well as the

it allowed them to engage in friendly competition and teamwork across both schools.

Teeger worked closely with the players, demonstrating advanced techniques, offering individual feedback, and emphasising the importance of discipline

in the game.

"David also addressed our boys at the Sports Awards in December last year, and they were inspired by his leadership, passion, and commitment to the sport," said KDVP Sports Director Keifer



David Teeger (back row middle) with the King David Primary School Victory Park senior cricket team

art of dedication, perseverance, and mental toughness.

The session was made even more exciting by the inclusion of the King David Primary School Sandton senior boys' team. This collaboration not only gave the boys the opportunity to refine their technical skills,

Govender.

"He gave them a glimpse of what it takes to compete at the highest level, and motivated them to push their own limits, which will stand them in good stead as they prepare for an upcoming cricket tour to Gqeberha from 17-20 March."

The South African Board of Jewish Education invites dynamic and motivated applicants for the position of

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### The essential qualities, skills and requirements for the position are:

- A proven track record with a minimum of 3-5 years' experience in a leadership role in a Pre-Primary School, preferably an independent school.
- Appropriate academic and professional qualifications and experience.
- In-depth knowledge and expertise in terms of pre-primary learning and development.
- Strong leadership and communication skills coupled with effective administrative and organisational skills.
- A progressive, innovative educational philosophy, aligned with current trends, best practice and technological advances.
- A commitment to the maintenance and enhancement of the schools teaching excellence as well as to the continuity of a warm, community environment.
- A champion of the Jewish ethos and support for Israel, with a strong commitment to the South African Jewish community.
- Commitment to continuous professional development and staying current with educational trends and practices.
- Knowledge of 21 century learning practices.
- Registered with SACE.

A full curriculum vitae and contact information of two referees should be emailed to [kdcareers@sabje.co.za](mailto:kdcareers@sabje.co.za). The school reserves the right not to make an appointment. Only short-listed candidates will be interviewed.

**CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: 28 FEBRUARY 2025**  
**EFFECTIVE DATE: 29 APRIL 2025**

King David Schools are a network of Jewish day schools offering pre-primary through to high school education across five campuses in Johannesburg. Our purpose is to instil Jewish values, deliver exceptional education and inspire a life of purpose

In line with POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act), King David will attempt to ensure the confidentiality of all applicants for this role. All reasonable measures will be in place to protect personal information but will be used in the recruitment, selection, and reporting process. By submitting your application for this position, you are recognising and accepting this disclaimer.

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## Letters

### THERE ARE AUSSIES WHO CARE – AND THEY AREN'T ALL JEWISH

I applaud Peta Krost's editorial – "Hatred Down Under" (*SA Jewish Report*, 6 February 2025) – and her support for South African expats in Australia. However, I wish to respond to one of her statements as it paints an inaccurate picture.

Remarking on the spate of antisemitic incidents which have rocked Australian Jewry, she wrote that "it doesn't appear likely to stop because there are few, other than in the Jewish community, who seem to care about it".

Not so. Just last week, the entire Australian parliament condemned antisemitism. This was followed by the government and opposition combining to legislate mandatory minimum prison sentences for antisemitic offences, an initiative strongly endorsed by the Jewish community. The premier of New South Wales (NSW) committed to strengthening legislation in this state which will crack down on incitement to racist violence. And the chief justice issued a statement blasting antisemitism, saying it "must not be permitted to stain the soul of our city".

Last month, Anglican, Catholic, and Greek archbishops united to condemn antisemitism. Mainstream media regularly gives the issue front-page coverage, the opening sentence in a national newspaper recently describing the antisemitic attacks as a "national scandal". And police and counterterrorism agencies are deploying vast numbers of officers to address the issue.

All that said, the imperative for more leaders of civil society to speak out is paramount. As is the need for tougher police action, more arrests, legislation that is fit for purpose, and an effective political response. Yes, the community is alarmed today and concerned for the future. But this is one of the most multicultural nations in the world, and I'm confident we will get past this.

– **Vic Alhadeff, former chief executive NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, Sydney, Australia**

### SA JEWISH REPORT ENTHUSES OVER ANTI-SA SLANDER FROM POLLAK

On the night President Cyril Ramaphosa made one of the finest speeches of his career, making him one of the few world leaders to defy United States bullying and stand up for the democratic values of equality and justice, the leading Jewish South African newspaper enthused over a speaker with diametrically opposed views: Joel Pollak, a MAGA (Make America Great Again) supporter vying to be the next US ambassador to South Africa.

Said Ramaphosa, "We are witnessing the rise of nationalism and protectionism, the pursuit of narrow interests and the decline of common cause." In contrast, South Africa stands for peace and justice, for equality and solidarity. We stand for non-racialism and democracy, for tolerance and compassion. We stand for equal rights for women, for persons with disabilities, and for members of the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) community. We stand for our shared humanity, not for the survival of the fittest."

Pollak, as if in direct retort, explained to his admiring hosts that Donald Trump's anti-altruism campaign has justifiably targeted South Africa precisely because of the values advocated by Ramaphosa. Pollak defended the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID agencies, and his threats to halt trade assistance to countries that are not in lock-step with MAGA values.

In South Africa's case, Pollak justified an antagonistic stance by Washington towards South

Africa by echoing the newly-invented US claims that the government persecutes the white minority and seizes their property. He further decried the "anti-Western bias" of South Africa's foreign policy, especially our government's approach to the International Court of Justice in the genocide case against Israel.

There's some irony here. There was a time when "Western" values – a debatable term – was taken to mean a fundamental aspiration towards equality and a shared humanity including adherence to the rule of law, principles no longer championed by the "anti-woke" MAGA racists and ethno-nationalists who have seized power in Washington today.

Of course, the *SA Jewish Report* is entitled to invite high-profile speakers to its forums, particularly a man who could very easily be the next US ambassador. But Pollak wasn't merely an independent voice of general interest. The leading South African Jewish newspaper couldn't restrain its exuberance as he lambasted South Africa. The expression is "kissing his tuches".

There is much to be disappointed in with our current government. But allowing ignorant slander and belittling the African National Congress's most valuable contribution to South Africa, its democratic Constitution, shouldn't be part of that. We know the *SA Jewish Report's* stance on Israel. What we'd like to know is whether it stands up for South Africa

– **Jewish Democratic Initiative (JDI) South Africa**

### TRUMP IS SCARY, BUT WOKE BRIGADE IS SCARIER

Trump isn't an ideal leader. We all know that, and it's awful. Elon Musk is a risky person emboldened by wealth and impunity. I'd never want either of them in remotely significant leadership positions. I'm in favour of USAID and sane governance. I'm in favour of leaders being ethical, consistent, and self-regulating. Trump isn't the leader I'd ever choose. I said that.

But the woke progressives that have held sway for two decades now are scary. The USAID projects were often massively beneficial, and should continue. But the woke and progressive agenda which permeated international "humanitarian" communities was appalling: little sympathy for Jewish women who were victims of rape and murder. Lots of silence about Hamas, which is Islamist central when it comes to women and Jews. And as to the rape and murder of Jewish women: they didn't care, and blamed the victims – "You brought this upon yourself because you were so awful to the Palestinians."

I could always support the proposition that war is awful and both sides should stop, but "progressives" and "humanitarians" generally are critical of Israel endlessly. They think that Israel can and should know better and do better. So they avoid any action or harsh comment about Hamas and its supporters

because, I suppose, they think that nothing better can be expected of them.

Two examples: South Africa purports to care, but takes only one side in the conflict to task. I'm sick of hearing the technical excuses that Hamas isn't a state. C'mon! And another example: people who bleat on about how bad Israel and Bibi etc are, and don't care to tick the other box much. I'm tired of that discourse.

The people who put Trump into power are voters who started to hate the double standards of progressives and humanitarians. Blame them for Trump and Musk. Hopefully things will settle, but the ongoing vilification of Israel and centrist politics makes me worry that progressives and humanitarians love themselves more than they love people in need.

I think of all the words written in the media about how bad Trump and Musk are, and I marvel at how silent these critics are about Hamas, Iran, antisemitism, and so on.

So Trump is a less than desirable leader. I get that. But the other side are pigs with lipstick. And much worse than Trump. Much more scary.

– **Gilad Stern, Cape Town**

**Disclaimer:** The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not reflect the views of the *SA Jewish Report*. The editor is not obliged to use every letter and will not publish vitriolic statements or any letters with inappropriate content. Letters will be edited and – if need be – shortened. **Guidelines:** Letters are limited to 400 words. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. Letters should be emailed to [editorial@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:editorial@sajewishreport.co.za)

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# Believing the narrative and knowing nothing

First it was the American podcast guy. We were in his studio in Ramat Gan outside Tel Aviv recording an interview, when he asked, "Is there a future for Jews in South Africa?" "No idea," I replied. "Is there a future for Jews in New York?" His reaction told me that until recently, he could have confidently answered in the affirmative, now he wasn't so sure.

Then there was the Australian guy. He turned to me in shul and said, "Welcome to Israel! Where are you from?" "South Africa," I answered. "You still live there?" he enquired with a frown. "Why?"

Why indeed? News media in Israel hasn't been kind to South Africa. Nor should it be. The African National Congress government with its International Court of Justice case; its embracing of Iran and Hamas; and its rejection of South African Jews has done little to inspire confidence. This follows a targeted focus by the United States president on the country.

"Why? Because South African Jews have as much right to live in the

country as President Ramaphosa does. And if he doesn't like us, then he should leave. We are there because we choose to be. As citizens."

That wasn't enough for my new friend. He had heard that there were parts of South Africa where one couldn't safely walk around. "True!" I answered, "But then I'm not sure that I would walk around Jenin either."

By now, it was clear that his knowledge of the country was skin deep, lacked nuance, and was gleaned from a few conversations that had confirmed his well-established view. I suspect that he discarded contradictory opinions along the way. More than that, I suspect that his experience with South Africans on his gap year in 1986 wasn't a good one.

For the record, he is a smart guy. And I liked him. But because he chose to believe anything that validated his narrative, he also spoke a lot of "rubbish". Again, something that I should have thought but not said out loud.

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



We live in the age of narrative news. Thirty minutes on X will prove that beyond question. As Jews and Zionists, we have seen this more than most. And where that should make us more aware, it somehow doesn't seem to.

We might choose to believe that the Australian Jewish community is in peril because it justifies us staying in South Africa when many left. In the same way as we might believe that New York isn't safe for Jews to "prove" that nowhere is.

What do we know? We know that no matter what magnificent communities we build outside Israel, we're building on quicksand. We know that we can live full and wonderful lives, that we can contribute and thrive. We know, too, that there's always a timeline. More importantly, following 7 October, we now know how little we know.

## A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Aiding and abetting atrocities

On Saturday, we witnessed the release of three more hostages from Gaza, an occasion marked by relief at their return and profound horror at their condition. The emaciated bodies of Ohad Ben Ami, Eli Sharabi, and Or Levy serve as a chilling reminder of some of the darkest chapters in our history. Their testimonies paint an even grimmer picture – of cruelty, torment, and unimaginable suffering at the hands of Hamas. Each word they have shared underscores the desperate urgency of securing the release of those still held captive.

We were further appalled by the grotesque spectacle of their release, orchestrated as yet another propaganda display. In a particularly depraved act, Hamas forced Eli Sharabi to read a statement in Hebrew expressing his hope to reunite with his family, all the while knowing that his wife and two daughters were brutally murdered on 7 October and that his brother perished in captivity.

This ongoing atrocity has been aided and abetted not only by Hamas itself, but by those in South Africa and around the world who have offered it support. It's not mere indifference that has allowed these horrors to unfold, but the active complicity of those who have protested on Hamas's behalf, engaged with its leaders, legitimised, and lent credibility to its cause.

Heartbreakingly, this week we also learnt that hostage Shlomo Mantzur (85) was murdered on 7 October, and that his body is being held in Gaza, serving as yet another

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



reminder of the savagery and tragedy of the day. We have also been informed that signs of life have been received for a number of other hostages, including twins Gali and Ziv Berman and Yossef Ohana, and we continue to pray for their safe return to their families.

The grave physical and psychological toll on the hostages is a clarion call for action. We again urge the South African government to condemn unequivocally the mistreatment of hostages, and to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all those still held by Hamas.

Last week, I was in attendance at the opening of Parliament and the delivery of the State of the Nation Address (SONA) in Cape Town as a representative of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. In his address, President Cyril Ramaphosa opened with the statement, "We will not be bullied," a clear nod to the ongoing diplomatic tension between South Africa and the United States.

We were also proud to see two young representatives of the Board, Gabi Farber and Brad Gottschalk, invited by the media to participate in the televised SONA watch party, where they had the opportunity to share their perspectives on national issues. Their articulate contributions reinforced the importance of our community having a voice in these critical discussions.

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

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