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■ Volume 30 – Number 29 ■ 20 August 2026 ■ 7 Elul 5786

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Choritz defends slur against Mendelsohn

TALI FEINBERG

Antizionist agitator Megan Choritz argues that she has a right to denigrate Professor Adam Mendelsohn because he is "a self-confessed Zionist" who supports the "apartheid settler colony in Israel".

She makes the claim in her defendant's plea, submitted to the Western Cape High Court on 7 August. And she claims that Mendelsohn "defends, justifies, or associates himself with Israel's actions in Gaza", which she calls "a genocide".

Mendelsohn, however, has never officially stated that he is a Zionist nor said that he supports Israel's actions in Gaza.

Choritz argues that she can call Mendelsohn an "Islamophobe" because he expressed concerns about the University of Cape Town (UCT) awarding an honorary doctorate to Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who happens to be Muslim. Yet, she called Mendelsohn an "Islamophobe" before he even expressed these concerns, which in no way targeted Sooliman because of his religion, but rather addressed his antisemitic rhetoric.

Choritz, represented by Ashmodien Attorneys, made the assertions in response to Mendelsohn suing her for defamation. She denies causing him damage, that her statements are defamatory, and that Mendelsohn is entitled to an apology or an award of costs. She is asking the court to dismiss Mendelsohn's claims, with punitive costs.

But Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch says, "Professor Mendelsohn has every right to defend his professional and personal reputation, and the Cape SAJBD supports his decision to do so."

Bloch says the idea that "being a Zionist somehow makes a person fair game for professional targeting and personal vilification" is both "dangerous and intellectually dishonest".

He says people are entitled to express political views and criticise public figures, institutions, and political ideologies. "But political disagreement does not remove an individual's right to dignity and reputation, nor does it provide a licence to make serious and damaging allegations against them. Branding an individual an 'Islamophobe' or accusing him of 'supporting genocide' goes well beyond legitimate political criticism."

Choritz says her comments were in the public interest because Zionism is "an apartheid policy, and a crime against humanity".

The summons refers to two instances in which Choritz allegedly defamed Mendelsohn in response to his inaugural lecture at UCT in April.

In the first, she alleged in a TikTok video that Mendelsohn is "a supporter of Israel's genocide" and "an Islamophobe" and asked why he is "allowed a voice" and is not "criticised, stopped, and deplatformed".

In the second incident, Choritz wrote on the blogging platform Substack that "there is no word for what Mendelsohn and his friends are … these Zionists do not fear Muslims, they hate them. Their hatred looks and sounds exactly like antisemitism."

She wrote that "letting his [inaugural] lecture happen without protest gives him and his hateful, racist views legitimacy", and that "Mendelsohn's Zionist paranoia, fragile feelings, and bad faith slurring of antizionists needs to be challenged at every opportunity."

The summons states that Mendelsohn has suffered damages in the amount of R500 000. He is claiming R250 000 per claim, and interest on these amounts from the date of judgment to date of payment at the prescribed rate of 10.25% per year. He is also asking the court to order Choritz to make an unconditional apology. Further or alternative relief would be legal costs.

In her defendant's plea, Choritz argues that her TikTok video was published "in the context of robust public debate". She says her statements are justified as "fair comment" because Mendelsohn "supports and defends Israel, including its war waged in Gaza since 7 October 2023, notwithstanding that the war is a genocide against the Palestinian people".

Israel was not waging war in Gaza on 7 October 2023. Mendelsohn has not expressed his political views about Israel, and the war in Gaza has not been defined as a "genocide".

She argues that her statements, including "he is a supporter of Israel's genocide", should not be taken to mean that he literally supports "genocide" or has committed a crime. She also says her accusation that Mendelsohn is an "Islamophobe" should not be taken literally. Her comments are not "a literal assertion of fact", she says.

Her comments are in the public interest because Mendelsohn has defended "a Jewish connection to Israel" and expressed that factually, Israel has not occupied "Palestinian land" since 1948.

Choritz says her comments are justified because Mendelsohn took UCT to court over its Gaza resolutions. In that case, Mendelsohn argued that UCT did not follow its own processes when adopting them.

She says her comments should also be allowed because Mendelsohn argued that South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice is infused with political bias and antisemitism. She claims that her TikTok video and Substack post were not intended to harm Mendelsohn.

Her Substack article was a "first-person opinion piece written in emotive and rhetorical language" and, Choritz says, the reader would understand that she did not mean her statements literally, but as

Continued on page 3>>

End of an era

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

See story on page 5

Education icons Elliot and Jeffrey Wolf

Trump campus antisemitism investigations 'violated the law'

GRACE GILSON – JTA

The Trump administration's investigations into antisemitism at three elite universities were driven by premeditated political goals and violated federal law, according to an account by a former Department of Justice (DOJ) attorney.

The testimony of the whistleblower, Haley Van Erem, is now being used as evidence in an investigation, led by Jewish United States Representative Jamie Raskin, into what the Democrat from Maryland said was the federal government's "fake" and "pre-baked frame-up" handling of campus antisemitism cases.

Van Erem, a former civil rights attorney, alleged in a disclosure provided to Congress on Monday, 17 August, that in high-profile antisemitism investigations at Harvard, Brown, and Columbia, the "outcomes of the investigations were predetermined, without regard to the evidence".

The Trump administration had investigated all three Ivy League schools for alleged Title VI civil rights violations, ultimately striking deals with two of them to drop the charges. The disclosure concerns investigations conducted as part of the Trump administration's Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, led by Justice Department official Leo Terrell.

Van Erem left the Justice Department in May 2025 because she was "unwilling to be made vulnerable to further participation in politically motivated investigations unsupported by facts and contrary to law", according to the complaint.

When reached for comment about the disclosure by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a DOJ spokesperson said, "While at the DOJ, Ms Haley Van Erem did not work on university investigations. And for all matters, the department stands behind the integrity of these investigations."

A student walks on the campus of Brown University ahead of the school board's vote on divestment from Israel in October 2024

Photo: Jonathan Wiggs;The Boston Globe via Getty Images

The disclosure alleges that officials rushed investigations, disregarded concerns from career attorneys, and pursued funding cuts and settlements with the schools before establishing that they had violated federal civil rights law.

In all three cases, which were investigated by the US Department of Health and Human Services' civil rights office, the Trump administration pulled billions in federal grants to the schools after determining they had fostered antisemitic environments on campus.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars were suspended from these universities prior to the completion of Title VI investigations and the investigative team's conclusions were frequently disregarded," the complaint says.

The complaint alleges that, at Columbia, officials moved forward with allegations of discrimination and funding cuts before completing a thorough review, at one point giving attorneys only hours to review draft findings. At Harvard, Van Erem alleged that the Trump administration had pursued sweeping funding freezes "before any completed investigation had established Title VI violations".

At Brown, Van Erem claimed that investigators found insufficient evidence to conclude that the university had violated Title VI, but said that administration officials refused to close the investigation. After reporting the lack of findings to Daniel Shieh, a senior Trump administration official in the department, Shieh allegedly admitted that there was "not a Title VI violation" at Brown but said that "there's no way we're going to get a letter of no violation cleared" by higher-ups.

"The task force's investigations into alleged antisemitism on university campuses were marked by extraordinary procedural irregularities, predetermined outcomes without factual or legal support, and disregard for Title VI's legal requirements and the First Amendment to meet the political mission of the task force," the complaint reads.

It alleges that the Trump administration violated the procedural safeguards of Title VI, and that "the agency's own attorneys acknowledged that they lacked complaints, findings, or evidence to justify the funding suspensions".

The allegations come days after a federal judge threw out the Trump administration's antisemitism lawsuit against Harvard, citing a lack of evidence that the school had "turned a blind eye" to Jewish and Israeli students. The legal battle, which ensued after Harvard refused to settle its antisemitism claims with the administration, had divided Jewish groups.

Last year, the Trump administration reached a $220 million (R3.6 billion) settlement with Columbia over allegations of antisemitism on the school's campus, and Brown agreed to pay $50 million to state workforce development efforts in Rhode Island as part of its settlement.

The disclosure by Van Erem prompted Raskin, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, to demand in a letter on Tuesday that Harmeet Dhillon, the head of the DOJ's Civil Rights Division, sit for an interview with the committee and turn over records related to the investigation into the three schools, as well as Cornell.

"Antisemitism at American universities and medical schools is real. It needs to be addressed seriously. But your 'investigation' into antisemitism was fake, a pre-baked frame-up operation thoroughly political in nature," Raskin wrote in the letter.

"Before an actual investigation took place and regardless of what you actually found, the whole project was designed to harass professors and administrators at major universities, to curtail their freedom of speech and academic freedom, and to strip targeted institutions of hundreds of millions of dollars in grants that they had already been awarded on the merits of their applications," Raskin said.

This was not the first time former Trump officials have alleged improprieties in the administration's campus antisemitism probes. Last year, nine federal prosecutors resigned from the Justice Department after alleging a "sham" investigation against the University of California system.

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Torah Thought

The month of truly hearing

Rabbi Alon Friedman
Yeshiva Mizrachi

"You can listen to Jimi Hendrix, but you can't hear him. There's a difference."

I once came across this fascinating line in an article from the early 1990s during a discussion about music and whether someone from one cultural background can truly appreciate the music of another. At first glance, it sounds like a distinction without a difference. But it isn't.

We can listen without hearing.

That simple insight lies at the heart of one of the Torah's most challenging passages, the *ben sorer u'moreh*, the wayward and rebellious son, at the beginning of Parshat Ki Teitzei.

The Torah describes a child who refuses to listen to his parents. They discipline him, but he remains unmoved. Eventually, they bring him before the elders of the city and declare, "Our son is wayward and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice."

The passage is deeply unsettling. How can a young person face such a severe punishment for gluttony and drunkenness? Even more remarkably, the Gemara teaches that a *ben sorer u'moreh* "never was and never will be". If this case never actually occurred, why does the Torah devote an entire section to it?

Perhaps the answer lies in one word that echoes throughout the passage: "*shome'a*" (hearing)..

The child does not hear his father. He does not hear his mother. He does not hear their rebuke. Then, after describing the punishment, the Torah concludes, "And all Israel shall hear and fear."

The message is striking. The real tragedy is not simply what this child has done. It is that he has lost the ability to hear.

The Ohr HaChaim notices something subtle in the Torah's wording. It says "*einenu shome'a*" - literally "he is not hearing", rather than the simpler "*eino shome'a*". He explains that this choice of language reveals something deeper. This child has become incapable of hearing. The words are reaching his ears, but they are no longer reaching his heart.

Perhaps that is the Torah's true warning.

We live in an age of constant noise. Podcasts, WhatsApp messages, *shiurim*, news, social media, and endless opinions compete for our attention every waking moment. We are constantly listening.

But how much are we truly hearing?

A friend once told me about a teacher who met a former student after the young man had spent a year learning in Israel. The transformation was extraordinary. He had become deeply committed to Torah, to personal growth, and to his relationship with Hashem.

When the teacher asked what had changed him, the student replied, "I discovered *Mesillat Yesharim*. It changed my life."

The teacher began to cry.

"We learned *Mesillat Yesharim* throughout high school," he said. "You even studied it for your exams."

The student had listened. He simply had not heard.

That may be one of the most powerful messages of Elul.

Throughout this precious month we are surrounded by opportunities for growth. We hear inspiring *shiurim*. We read words of *teshuvah* (repentance). We recite heartfelt *tefillot*. And then comes the shofar, a sound whose sole purpose is to awaken the sleeping soul.

The question is not whether we will hear the sound.

The question is whether we will hear its message.

Because in the Torah, hearing is far more than receiving sound. It means allowing a message to penetrate, to challenge us, to reshape us, and ultimately to change us.

This Elul, may we not merely listen to the shofar.

May we truly hear it.

And may what we hear inspire us to change, to grow, and to become the people Hashem knows we can be.

Jewish Report
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‘Homeless’ Le Clos raises money for fire-struck neighbours

LEE TANKLE

Just days after making Commonwealth Games history, Chad le Clos returned to a very different kind of reality. His home at the Dorchester in Sea Point had been gutted in a fire. And he’d lost a neighbour he was fond of.

The fire tore through the building on High Level Road on 30 July, destroying several top-floor apartments, displacing dozens of residents, and claiming the life of 93-year-old neighbour Sam Strime.

Swimming star Le Clos was in Glasgow, having celebrated becoming the most decorated athlete in Commonwealth Games history, when the blaze engulfed the home he’d lived in for more than a decade.

Now, Le Clos is raising funds for his mostly Jewish neighbours. He launched a fundraising campaign through the Chad le Clos Foundation to help those affected begin rebuilding their lives. He has so far raised R12 000.

“To my fellow neighbours whose homes and lives have been severely affected by this fire, please know that you are not alone,” Le Clos wrote on Instagram on 4 August. “This is a tight-knit community, and it is in moments like these that we lean on one another.

“Together with my foundation, I have set up a dedicated campaign solely to assist my neighbours as they embark on a very difficult journey of rebuilding. One hundred percent of any donations raised will go solely to my neighbours, with the Chad le Clos Foundation managing the proceeds to ensure they are looked after,” he wrote.

“It’s been an incredibly difficult time for the whole Dorchester community,” Le Clos told the *SA Jewish Report*. “We’d been neighbours for almost 10 years, so we would see each other most days. I would so often see Sam Strime’s daughter, Lauren, coming through, walking the dog, going to the shop, just in passing. When I was in Cape Town, we would see each other almost every day, so it’s been tragic to have this happen.

“But I think the most important thing to remember in this tragedy is that a life was lost. That puts everything into perspective. The other families who lost their homes, me included, are devastated, but we didn’t lose a loved one. I’m grateful that I still have my parents and my family,” he said.

Chad le Clos on the balcony of his flat that burned down

“In some respects, the Commonwealth Games saved my life. If I had been in the apartment, I probably wouldn’t have heard anything. I always sleep with an eye mask, so I’m not sure I would have known what was happening. It’s just incredibly sad what happened,” he said.

As soon as he saw the devastation the fire had caused, he’d wanted to help his neighbours and immediately launched his fundraiser.

“My immediate question was: who else had been affected? We decided to go and help our neighbours and the community in whatever way we could. All the donations that come through will go to the affected residents. We’re also setting up some other initiatives to try to help out. I’m just grateful and blessed that I still have my family,” he said.

“Unfortunately, I lost everything [in the apartment]. There’s nothing left to salvage. I lost a lot of medals – I’m not even sure whether the Olympic medals were there – as well as my World Cup medals and all the memorabilia I’ve collected over the years. All my Olympic gold tracksuits and other sentimental things are gone. Obviously, all my training equipment was lost as well,” Le Clos said.

Ryan Passmore, the chairperson of the Chad le Clos Foundation, said that while they haven’t had time to assess the damage in the swimmer’s apartment as they were only recently let in, they are aware that many of the apartments on the top floor have significant water damage.

“We’re still trying to understand where things currently stand. We know there is an investigation into the fire, and there are certain processes that need to be followed, but in the meantime, the neighbours have immediate needs and pressing concerns simply to get through day-to-day life. That’s why we felt the urgent need to step in and help,” he said.

Le Clos had been living in his apartment at the Dorchester since he bought it in 2014.

“It’s a devastating loss, but thankfully Chad and his parents are still here. Unfortunately, others were not so lucky,” said Passmore.

The foundation is not the only charity drive for Dorchester residents. A few BackaBuddy campaigns have already raised more than R800 000 in total for those who lost everything.

“Our fundraising has raised a relatively small amount compared with some of the other campaigns, but as we’ve looked into them, we’ve seen friends and fellow competitors contributing to the various neighbours’ funds. So, for us, it’s not only about the funds we can raise ourselves, but about creating awareness about the other campaigns and encouraging people to support them,” said Passmore.

“Ultimately, we feel that the funds and awareness being generated across all the campaigns are helping to support the affected residents,” he said.

Said Le Clos, “I lost a lot on a personal level, but again, I want to put things into perspective. I want to use this platform to help others. As much as my family and I are suffering, other people have lost so much too.”

Choritz defends slur against Mendelsohn

>>Continued from page 1

hyperbole and opinion. She says calling Mendelsohn “racist” and “hateful” were “value judgements” and “political criticism”.

Choritz’s plea refers to several statements Mendelsohn made in his inaugural lecture. However, she admitted on Substack that she had not read or listened to the lecture when she made her comments.

She says Mendelsohn’s lawsuit against her is “an abuse of the judicial process”, brought “with an ulterior motive” to “deter her” from criticising him, Zionism, or Israel. She says the case is “retaliation”, aims to “increase the risks” for people criticising Israel and Zionism, and violates her right to free expression.

Choritz has also entered a special plea, a SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) defence, stating that Mendelsohn’s case has the “designed aim of using litigation as lawfare in pursuit of an improper end”.

Attorney Simon Dippenaar frequently writes and advises on online defamation and digital reputation management in South Africa. He explained to the *SA Jewish Report* that, in simple terms, “Choritz admits publishing the material but disputes the defamatory meanings alleged.”

She says her words were “forceful political opinion, rhetoric, or hyperbole based on true or publicly known facts; or that any factual sting was substantially true and published in the public interest”.

But Dippenaar says that while “protected comment can include harsh, exaggerated, or p rejudiced criticism, it must remain recognisable as opinion, concern a matter of public interest, and rest on true facts that were stated, clearly indicated, or sufficiently notorious”.

He says it will be difficult for Choritz to prove that it was not defamatory to say that Mendelsohn “supports genocidal conduct, hates Muslims, holds racist views, or acts in bad faith”.

This is because “general support for Israel or opposition to an honorary doctorate would not automatically establish those wider conclusions”.

In addition, “if the comments about Sooliman were made only during the inaugural lecture, after the TikTok publication, they cannot retrospectively provide the disclosed factual foundation for the earlier comment,” says Dippenaar.

He says Mendelsohn’s summons is “not self-evidently abusive [of the law]”.

Bloch agrees that calling the litigation abusive does not make it so. “Professor Mendelsohn is entitled to seek legal recourse to protect his reputation.

“What we have seen over a prolonged period is that Jewish individuals, institutions, businesses, and the Jewish community have been subjected to personal attacks and serious allegations, with attempts to shield such conduct by simply labelling it ‘criticism’ or ‘free speech’,” says Bloch.

However, “political activism does not place individuals beyond accountability for what they say about others”, he says. “Those who make such allegations must be prepared to substantiate and defend them when challenged.”

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to Choritz for comment, but she didn’t respond.

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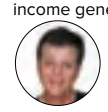

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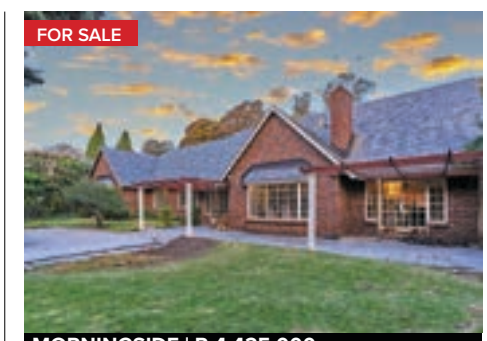

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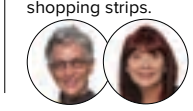

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Family living in car gets help and Shabbat invitation

LEE TANKLE

After three years of living in their car in Cape Town, Jolene Erasmus and her Jewish husband and son were given more than just R20 when they crossed paths with Gary Meyers. They were given a lifeline.

The family – Erasmus and Itzy Diamond and their 11-year-old son, Hymie Diamond – had survived a farm attack and were facing certain destitution when they met Meyers.

"What started as a small gesture of R20 has now grown to approximately R22 000 to R23 000," said Meyers, a South African architect who moved to Australia and has been in Cape Town for several months doing long-distance charity walks.

Itzy Diamond, Jolene Erasmus, and Hymie Diamond

Meyers first noticed an old car parked on the side of the road while walking towards Hout Bay in March. Towels hung from the windows, making it appear that someone was living inside. A few weeks later, outside a nearby coffee shop, a young woman approached him and asked if he could help her find a job. Erasmus was living in the car with her family – Itzy sleeping outside in a sleeping bag and Hymie on the back seat – even in the rain.

"At the time, I thought to myself, well, this is South Africa, everyone is struggling. I honestly wondered whether it was just another story," said Meyers. "I normally don't carry cash with me when I'm walking, but this time I had a R20 note and I gave it to her."

Afterwards, Erasmus handed him a handwritten note thanking him and explaining her situation and that she and her husband were not looking for handouts but rather jobs so they could get back on their feet.

Erasmus said that since she and her family had survived a farm attack in 2023, they had been living in their car in various spots along the Cape Town coast.

"We ended up living in our vehicle. We get work from time to time, but we do not get permanent work. We're still staying in our vehicle. We are looking for work, a stable home, and a roof over our head. We have slept in other places, where we've moved around because people are not happy when we sleep near their houses. We're currently sleeping at Cosy Bay and have been here since March. It's very dark out here. There are no street lights," she said.

Meyers was concerned about the family's vulnerability. "I walk a lot in Cape Town, particularly when I'm training for my long-distance walks. I've walked from Station House in Sea Point all the way towards Chapman's Peak and back, sometimes returning in the dark. That road can be completely unlit. Cars fly past at 100km an hour. I've seen how dangerous it can be. And suddenly, I was looking at an 11-year-old child living in a car, while his father was sleeping outside in a sleeping bag, in those conditions. I couldn't just walk past. I remember thinking, I can't do this. It's not right. It's not godly. It's not human."

He phoned Erasmus to say that he wanted to help them in any way he could, and started a GoFundMe page on 18 June, which has since raised more than R20 000.

Meyers has also given the family clothes when possible, but more importantly, he has given them a sense of dignity.

"Since we've been living in our vehicle, my husband has been able to buy some of the car parts we've needed to keep it on the road. There are still things that need to be fixed, but unfortunately, it costs a lot of money. If we don't receive enough money at once, we can't fix everything, so we have to repair the vehicle in parts as the money comes in," Erasmus said. "There are still a lot of things that need to be fixed. We've managed to get our child to school and put food on the table, but we're looking for anyone who can help us find work – honest work. We're not looking for handouts. We're just looking for a roof over our heads, somewhere safe where my husband can start looking for work and we can have some stability."

In addition to financial and material help, Meyers invited the family to join his weekly Friday Night Club. Despite their situation, they always turn up in their best clothes with something in hand.

"Each Friday night we go to his club, we pray over the bread and the wine, we light candles, and we participate in the Hebrew prayers," said Erasmus.

After Itzy shared his story at an evening gathering, Meyer's friend, Biscuit, helped him secure work as a boilermaker.

But for the family, this was a chance to build a community.

"We've been here for three years, and nobody has ever invited us even for a cup of coffee. So when Gary invited us, it was an absolute blessing to have somewhere that felt homely, where we could sit, talk, and connect with people. Gary and his team continue to help us where they can, and it means the world to us to know we have somewhere to go on a Friday night," Erasmus said.

"It feels very family-oriented, especially because most of the people are Jewish. My husband and son are Jewish, although I'm not, but being there makes us feel like we have somewhere to go and that we are part of society again.

"It's an absolute blessing. Living in our vehicle, we don't have friends, and nobody really reaches out to us. Every Friday night, we look forward to putting on some nice clothes, going to Gary's suppers, meeting new people, and simply having an outing," she said.

Shofar a wake-up call we need to hear

GILANA LAB

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, the sharp daily blast of the shofar punctuates the month of Elul, serving as a spiritual wake-up call to prompt self-reflection.

For Rabbi Motti Hadar of the Pine Street Shul, this preparation links biblical history with personal growth. "Historically, it recalls the shofar that sounded when Moshe ascended Mount Sinai," he says. "The shofar is a spiritual wake-up call, reminding each one of us that Rosh Hashanah is coming. It asks us to stop and reflect on the year that has passed."

Rabbi Ari Kievman of Sandton Central Shul and the director of the Chabad Seniors Programme, similarly views the daily blasts as a tool against complacency. "During Elul, we blow the shofar each week day to awaken us to *teshuvah* (return), self-reflection, and preparation for the high holy days," he says.

This period of introspection is further illuminated by the Chassidic concept that "the King is in the field". "Elul is a particularly opportune time to connect with G-d, who has left His divine palace to come to the 'field' where we are. The shofar tells us that we can always return, grow, repair, and begin again," says Hadar.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Zalman Marcus blows the shofar in Kliptown, Soweto, while on vacation in South Africa

On Rosh Hashanah itself, the shofar shifts from local custom to mandatory Torah commandment. Rabbi Sam Thurgood, from the United Herzlia Schools, says the sound speaks directly to the soul in ways language cannot match. "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says that the enterprise of giving reasons for *mitzvot* is like art commentary," he says. "Certainly, in the case of *mitzvot*, the Artist of Infinite Capacity has intentions broad enough for all of our souls."

The horn conveys both a jarring alarm and a raw cry. "One view of the shofar casts it as a wake-up call, similar to an ambulance siren. This is a noise that tells you that something is wrong, that unsettles you," Thurgood says. "Another view of the shofar casts it as the wordless cry. We spend the first part of Rosh Hashanah engaged with seemingly endless words – until we find ourselves at the point of the raw and the real for which we have no more words, just pure human yearning."

Proclaiming this wordless connection is central to the holiday experience. "Hearing the shofar is a Torah *mitzvah* and represents proclaiming G-d as King and awakening the soul," says Kievman. He references the Rambam, who described the sound as a call to "wake up" from spiritual slumber and examine one's deeds.

Understanding the halachic distinctions between Elul and Rosh Hashanah is crucial.

"There are two separate things going on," says Thurgood. "The custom of hearing the shofar every day during the month of Elul … [and] the Torah commandment of hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah itself. Hearing the shofar during Elul is a good deed and a lovely custom, but it is not a Torah commandment. Rosh Hashanah is different."

Because Elul is governed by custom, rules regarding technology are lenient. While Hadar says the shofar should ideally be heard directly, he acknowledges the benefits of digital access. "Since the Elul shofar is a custom rather than an obligation, there is nothing wrong with listening online." Digital inclusion plays a practical role. Kievman's daily classes are both in person and on Zoom, and "we always end with the shofar in Elul", he says.

However, when Rosh Hashanah arrives, the requirement for a live sound becomes absolute. "Hearing a shofar through a livestream, Zoom, phone, or recording does not fulfil the *mitzvah*," says Kievman. Thurgood concurs: "It must be heard live. A recording, a phone call, a voice note, none of these fulfil the *mitzvah*."

Because the *mitzvah* is mandatory, communities ensure that no one is isolated. Thurgood recalls organising this outreach as a shul rabbi. "When I was preparing for Rosh Hashanah, one of my responsibilities was a spreadsheet. It combined input from those who were not going to be able to be in shul, and those who were willing and able to blow shofar for them."

Kievman's work with Chabad mirrors this profound communal responsibility. "Ideally, one should make every effort to be in shul on Rosh Hashanah," he says. "If one cannot make it to shul, then arrangements should be made to hear the shofar at home. For the past 16 years, we have arranged for volunteers to visit Johannesburg's retirement facilities and home-bound elderly people."

Fulfilling the obligation outside of a synagogue structure is highly accessible. Hadar reassures community members that "the shofar does not have to be heard specifically in shul, and many rabbis will gladly come to your home or office". Furthermore, requirements at home are far less demanding. "While we sound 100 blasts in the shul, you fulfil the *mitzvah* fully by hearing 30 blasts anywhere else," Thurgood notes.

With Rosh Hashanah falling on Shabbat and Sunday this year, the *mitzvah* effectively comes down to a single day because the shofar is not blown on Shabbat.

Thurgood sums up, "If all else fails, learn to blow the shofar yourself!"

Wolf's legacy reaches far beyond the classroom

LEE TANKLE

The name Jeffrey Wolf will always be synonymous with King David Victory Park. Now, with the loss of this educational icon on 17 August, his legacy lives on in his family, former colleagues, and all the pupils whose lives he touched.

"Some teachers teach you a subject. A very few leave something of themselves in who you become. Mr Wolf was one of those," said Michael Kransdorff, a former pupil and now chairperson of the Jewish National Fund South Africa.

Barbara Wolf, Jeffrey's widow, said, "Education was not simply his profession. It was his calling."

Wolf, and his late twin brother, Elliot, leave behind a legacy of Jewish education that will extend far beyond the 50 years they spent at the helm of King David Victory Park and King David Linksfield, respectively.

Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, said, "Together they were the stewards of Jewish high school education. It is impossible to overestimate how they shaped the entire landscape of Jewish Johannesburg. Our entire community, and many others globally, have been built upon the foundations they created."

But their legacy was defined not only by their commitment to education; there was also an extraordinary bond between the brothers. This connection remained constant throughout their lives, and they are now buried near one another.

Elliot's sudden death at the end of 2021 sent shockwaves through the Jewish community and left Jeffrey heartbroken.

Said Jeffrey's son, Graham, "Besides my mother, this was his soulmate. He was happy in the past five years, but he hadn't been the same since Uncle Elliot left us. And when he was passing away, he said he was ready and he wanted to go to his brother."

Raelene Tradonsky, the executive director of the King David Schools' Foundation, who worked closely with Elliot, said the twins were inseparable.

"I recall countless times when travelling with Elliot, literally as we would arrive at a place, he would be insistent on letting Jeffrey know that he had arrived and that he was well. They were really inseparably close. And when Elliot died, it had an enormous impact on Jeffrey's life. He used to joke that they were womb buddies and then room buddies," Tradonsky said.

Wolf and his brother grew up in Yeoville, Johannesburg. In 1956, they graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand, majoring in English, Latin, and Hebrew.

In 1968, Norman Sandler, the former headmaster of King David Linksfield, caught wind of the Wolf brothers and managed to lure them onto his staff, Elliot as head of Latin and Jeffrey as head of English.

Jeffrey became headmaster of King David Victory Park in 1975, a year after Elliot assumed the position of headmaster at King David Linksfield. Jeffrey was soon joined by his wife, Barbara, and they spent the next 30 years working side by side. "And in all those 30 years, we never had a single disagreement," said Barbara. "That may sound impossible to some people, but it was simply the way we were. We respected one another, trusted one another, and always wanted the best for each other.

AI-generated composite

"He was the kindest, most caring, warm, and generous husband anyone could ever wish for. He was a truly modern man long before his time, a man who believed in equality, who listened, who cared deeply, and who treated everyone with dignity and respect," said Barbara.

"He set an example not only for our three children, but for the many thousands of children who were privileged to pass through our school. He had an extraordinary ability to see the potential in every child. He mentored each and every pupil, encouraged them, believed in them, and helped them become the best people they could be," she said.

Kransdorff said it was only years after leaving school that he'd realised the influence Wolf had had on the person he became. "Watching *The Odyssey* recently brought me back to the hours and hours we spent in Latin class translating all 10 years of the endless Trojan War, Mr Wolf regularly scolding me for not having learnt the required vocabulary or confusing the pluperfect tense for the subjunctive. 'Even the Barbarians knew that,' he would joke.

"But he taught me far more than Latin. He instilled a love of learning, an appreciation of ancient history as a window into the timelessness of the human condition, and a deep connection to Israel and Jewish peoplehood," Kransdorff said.

Tradonsky said many former pupils credited the Wolf brothers with helping shape their education, careers, and eventual success.

"Their legacy lives on through the alumni they taught and the enormous impact they had. They instilled a love of Judaism, a love of Jewish education, and a strong sense of pride in Zionism. They were both incredibly proud of Israel and its achievements. I know that today Israel has become a controversial subject in many places, but they were always deeply proud of the Jewish state," she said.

Said Seeff, "Generations of alumni were so fond of Jeffrey because he genuinely cared. As the saying goes, no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. Jeffrey knew each child and their family. He took a real interest in them and their lives and helped them grow and find confidence in themselves – something that lasts long after one leaves high school."

Besides all the accolades and achievements, Jeffrey ensured that his family was brought up with the ethos of being a mensch. Said Graham, "He was a patient, warm, loving *mensch*. His whole life. That's what he was. "We're proud of him, proud of the legacy he's left behind and what he instilled in all of his family," he said.

"He taught us not to judge people, but always to look for that little bit of goodness in everyone, even when they might not seem like good people. That's what he did. He never judged anyone; he simply looked for the goodness in everyone."

Said Barbara, "He leaves behind far more than memories. He leaves behind the values he lived by, the lessons he taught, the love he gave, and the countless people who are better because they knew him."

south african Jewish Report

The Wolf legacy of learning

The passing of Jeffrey Wolf this week has highlighted the end of an era in Jewish education. It also reminds me of the extraordinary value our community places on education. He and his late twin brother, Elliot, were part of the fabric of Jewish education in South Africa. As far back as I can recall, their names have been associated with King David Schools, and probably always will be.

That is no small thing in a community like ours, where education is seen as one of the most important gifts we give our children. In South African Jewish life, that's often meant sacrifice: parents prioritising school fees, grandparents helping where they can, and communal structures stepping in when families need support. We don't treat education as a luxury, but as a responsibility, a lifeline, and a way of ensuring continuity.

As my beloved parents used to say, "They can take everything from you, but they cannot take your education." I am sure they aren't the only Jewish parents who said or still say that. For this reason, we make it our business to do what we can to educate our children. For most of us, it is way more important than most other things.

I guess it's why there are so many lawyers, doctors, accountants, actuaries, and other professionals in our community.

Jeffrey and Elliot Wolf seemed to embody that belief. Their example was not only about the schools they served, but about the importance of giving children a strong foundation, a sense of belonging, and the confidence to make something of themselves. In that way, their work was never only about academics. It was about helping to shape young South African Jews who would go on to carry those values into the wider world.

They also remind me of the role teachers play in all our lives. The best teachers do far more than deliver lessons or prepare pupils for exams. They notice us, challenge us, encourage us, and sometimes believe in us before we believe in ourselves. Years later, we may not remember every fact they taught us, but we remember how they made us feel about learning, about ourselves, and about what was possible.

I recall my Standard 3 (Grade 5) teacher at King David Linksfield, who was then Miss Friedland and who marvelled at my ability to write stories. Need I say more, considering the career I chose and am still involved in so many years later? She influenced my life and the choices I made.

That is why educators like Jeffrey and Elliot leave such a lasting mark. Their influence does not end when a school bell rings, or even when their lives come to an end. It continues in the people they taught, the choices those people make, the families they raise, and the communities they help to build. In that way, great teachers remain alive among us, nurturing our lives long after they have left the classroom.

The ever-wise late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks wrote, "The influence of good teachers stays with us. They are the people who really shape our lives." He also said, "There is only one way to change the world and that is through education."

That belief in education as the foundation of a life is precisely why the state of schooling beyond our community should matter deeply to us.

In South Africa, it is obligatory to go to school. However, getting children into schools has not translated reliably into getting them to learn effectively. It seems that access to education has expanded, but the system has not succeeded in delivering consistently high-quality education.

A recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, conducted by the University of Pretoria and commissioned by the Department of Basic Education, found that 81% of South African Grade 4 pupils could not read for meaning. That finding points to a severe foundational literacy crisis: if children cannot understand what they read, every other part of learning becomes harder.

It also exposes the deeper problem in our schooling system, where a minority of strong schools can produce excellent outcomes while millions of children still reach high school without having mastered reading, writing, and basic mathematics.

Those of us with access to Jewish or other private schools are largely shielded from this crisis, but that protection comes at a significant cost.

Still, the country's future cannot depend only on a small minority of children in well-resourced schools, which is why fixing foundational learning in government primary schools is so urgent.

There is so much emphasis in our system on matric and matric results, but the reality is that if we haven't concentrated our resources on Grade R to Grade 3, we make it unbearably difficult for those children to catch up. So, we have to focus on those first years of school to ensure that our children can read, write, and calculate by the end of Grade 3.

What does that take? It takes exceptional teachers. It takes people who are not churners, but who are passionate about building young minds. It takes people who choose the profession because they can really make a difference in young lives. It takes teachers who see each individual child as someone with potential and ability. It takes people like Elliot and Jeffrey Wolf.

That is why Limmud in Johannesburg this weekend feels like such a fitting continuation of this reflection: a community choosing, once again, to gather around learning.

For me, Limmud's greatest gift is not only the calibre of local and international speakers, but the chance to spend a weekend thinking, questioning, and debating together.

At a time when education in this country so urgently needs attention, there is something powerful about a community that still treats learning as a shared responsibility and a lifelong privilege.

That, perhaps, is the most meaningful tribute we can pay to educators like Jeffrey and Elliot Wolf: to keep learning, keep teaching, and keep insisting that every child deserves the foundation to do both.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

Fissures among Haredim – a challenge for Netanyahu

OPINION PAULA SLIER

For years, Israel's argument over ultra-Orthodox military service has told a fairly simple story. On one side are Israelis who serve, whose children serve, and whose husbands and wives spend months doing reserve duty. On the other are Haredi men who largely do not.

Since 7 October, that divide has become increasingly difficult to ignore. Israelis have watched reservists return again and again to Gaza, Lebanon, and other fronts. Funerals for soldiers have been held across the country and families have reorganised their lives around military service. Against that backdrop, the question of why tens of thousands of Haredi men should remain exempt has become one of the most explosive issues in Israeli politics.

But there is another story unfolding that receives much less attention.

The draft crisis isn't simply dividing Haredim from the rest of Israel. It's exposing divisions inside Haredi society and politics itself. With Israel heading towards elections on 27 October, these divisions could matter enormously to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

It would be wrong to suggest that Haredi society is suddenly splitting into those who support compulsory military service and those who don't. The dominant Haredi leadership remains strongly opposed to compulsory enlistment. But attitudes inside Haredi society are not entirely uniform either. Politically, these differences are becoming more difficult to ignore.

We talk about "the Haredim" as though they are one community with one position. They aren't. Shas represents a predominantly Sephardi Haredi constituency. United Torah Judaism (UTJ) represents the Ashkenazi Haredi world, but is itself made up of two very different factions: Degel HaTorah, associated with the Lithuanian yeshiva world, and Agudat Yisrael, representing Hasidic communities. Even within those worlds there are different rabbinic authorities and different views about how far to compromise with the state. And it is these differences that we are increasingly seeing play out over the draft.

Photo: Screenshot

Haredim in Israel protesting the draft

Earlier this year, these differences were already visible over the state budget. Shas and Degel HaTorah supported its first reading, while Agudat Yisrael voted against it over the unresolved draft legislation. The differences have continued. In July, for example, Shas and Degel HaTorah agreed to remove a controversial provision from legislation recognising Torah study as a fundamental value, while Agudat Yisrael leader Yitzhak Goldknopf objected, saying he had not even been consulted. These are not necessarily ideological ruptures, but they do show that what we routinely describe as "the Haredi position" is considerably less uniform when you look inside it.

And increasingly, the argument is not simply about whether Haredi men should serve. It is about how Haredi leaders respond to the pressure coming from the state. How far can Haredi politicians compromise? What sanctions can they live with? How much pressure should they put on a government they have helped keep in power? And at what point do they decide that the political alliance that's served them for years is no longer delivering? That last question is particularly important for Netanyahu.

In May, Rabbi Dov Lando, the senior spiritual leader of Degel HaTorah, said his faction had lost trust in Netanyahu over his failure to resolve the draft issue, and backed moves towards dissolving the Knesset. Degel legislators were subsequently instructed to stop cooperating with efforts to advance the government's draft legislation. This was more than a warning. The dispute helped push Netanyahu's government towards a political crisis and exposed something that had long been taken for granted: Haredi support for Netanyahu was no longer automatic. For years, Netanyahu was able to count on the ultra-Orthodox parties as some of the most dependable members of his political bloc. Governments changed, coalitions collapsed, and Israeli politics became increasingly volatile, but the relationship between Netanyahu and the Haredi parties proved remarkably durable.

And it may remain so. The Haredi parties are unlikely suddenly to become natural partners of Israel's centre or left, and anger with Netanyahu does not mean they have an obvious alternative. But there is a difference between having limited alternatives and being guaranteed to support the same prime minister.

The draft issue is also causing problems elsewhere on the right. After nearly three years of war, military service isn't an abstract political argument. Families have lived it. Reservists have served repeated tours. Parents have sent children into battle. This makes any attempt to preserve sweeping Haredi exemptions politically difficult among voters whose own families are carrying the burden. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, the leader of the Religious Zionism party and one of Netanyahu's coalition partners, says Haredim should serve, but has also backed compromises intended to avoid a rupture with the ultra-Orthodox parties. That's angered some of his own religious Zionist supporters, a constituency in which military service is deeply embedded and many families have carried a heavy burden during the war. For Netanyahu, Smotrich's predicament is another warning: concessions that keep Haredi allies on his side can cost him support elsewhere on the right. A survey reported by Reuters this week found that more than 80% of Likud voters want increased Haredi enlistment.

So, Netanyahu has a problem on both sides. His Haredi partners want him to protect their way of life and the yeshiva world. Many of his non-Haredi right-wing voters want a fairer sharing of the military burden. Keeping one side happy risks angering the other.

And this is where I think the narrative around the draft has sometimes led us astray. Journalists, myself included, use shorthand because complicated societies are difficult to explain. We talk about "the Haredim", "the settlers", "the secular", "the right", and "the left". But the shorthand can become the story. If we keep describing the draft crisis simply as Haredim versus everyone else, we miss what is happening inside the Haredi world: different communities, different rabbinic authorities, different political parties, and different calculations about how best to protect Haredi life in an Israel that has changed profoundly since 7 October.

Haredim may agree far more than they disagree about compulsory enlistment, but they do not necessarily agree about what to do about it. That distinction could matter politically.

Netanyahu has survived enough political crises that nobody sensible should predict this will be the one that finally brings him down. His Haredi partners may ultimately decide that, despite their anger and disappointment, he remains their best option. But the relationship is under strain at precisely the moment when Netanyahu needs every possible partner to assemble another government.

For years, Israel has asked whether the draft crisis between Haredim and everyone else can be resolved. As the election approaches, there is another question worth asking: can the Haredim resolve it among themselves?

- *Paula Slier is an international journalist, war correspondent and speaker who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Her work focuses on geopolitics, modern conflict, information warfare and the battle for truth.*

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Q&A with Andrea Be

Principal of King David Ariel

Q Does Ariel offer opportunities for my child to get involved in sport and cultural activities?

A Sport and cultural activities are integrated with the mainstream school, offering a full range of sporting, cultural and extracurricular activities available. Our holistic approach encourages participation to build confidence, develop social connections and support overall well-being.

Q When will my child mainstream?

A Every child's journey is unique. We work closely with families, teachers and therapists to build academic, emotional and social readiness, and when a child is ready to thrive in a mainstream environment, we support a smooth transition.

Q How do teachers support students in a class if they all have different challenges?

A Our specialist and remedially trained teachers use differentiated teaching, small classes and individual support plans to meet each child's needs, so each child's class experience is as unique as he or she is. Teachers work alongside our therapeutic team including remedial therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and physiotherapists to ensure comprehensive support for all learners. Our holistic model addresses not only academic gaps, but also emotional, social and behavioural needs.

Q If my child has remedial challenges but is in class with children with behavioural issues, will it affect my child?

A Our teachers and therapists help students develop emotional regulation, coping skills and positive peer relationships. The classroom is a safe, supportive environment where each child can feel secure, focus on learning and grow with confidence.

Q Surely if I get extra lessons and therapy for my child, they will be able to cope in a mainstream school?

A Additional lessons and therapy can be valuable, but depending on your child's assessment recommendations, mainstream readiness may involve a more extensive and holistic plan to achieve the best outcome for the child. Our remedial school provides an integrated environment where academic instruction, therapeutic services, and social-emotional learning happen together daily. This coordinated, comprehensive approach, all within the school day often proves more effective than isolated interventions,

Q My child is academically strong but struggles socially. How would a remedial school benefit them?

A Academic strength alone doesn't guarantee success or well-being. We provide targeted social-emotional support, including counselling, social skills coaching, and peer relationship building. Smaller class sizes and a therapeutic environment allow your child to develop confidence in social interactions while continuing to advance academically.

Q My child already receives therapy outside school. Should this continue if they are receiving therapy during school?

A King David Ariel offers a range of therapies as part of the school programme, so in most cases, additional outside therapy will not be necessary. In some instances, psycho-educational therapy may continue if longer-term support is recommended.

Q What Jewish education does King David Ariel offer?

A King David Ariel embraces the Jewish values and curriculum at the heart of King David Schools, including Jewish studies, Hebrew and davening, and supports Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation and transition to High School.

Q Can my child move at any time of the year, or does it have to be at the start of a term or year? Will they have missed too much?

A While starting at the beginning of a term can make the transition easier, we can accommodate mid-year placements where appropriate. Our team will support your child to settle in, catch up where needed and integrate smoothly.

Q I'm worried that if my child moves to a remedial school, she will be seen as different and lose friendships.

A Our school is built on acceptance, respect, and understanding. Every student here is navigating their own challenges, which creates a culture of empathy rather than judgment. Friendships from mainstream school can continue at extracurricular activities, joint school events and outside school hours, fostering positive peer relationships and teaching students to value diversity.

Q There are so many different assessments required for admission to a remedial school. Can you explain what they are?

A Our assessment process is comprehensive and holistic, designed to understand your child. Assessments typically include:

- Psycho Educational assessment
- Speech and language assessment
- Occupational therapy assessment
- Academic assessments

Together, these assessments paint a complete picture of your child's strengths, challenges, and support needs.

Q What additional programmes and approaches are offered at King David Ariel?

A King David Ariel offers a range of specialised programmes and approaches designed to support each child's unique learning and developmental needs.

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- Cognitive Education
- Visualizing and Verbalizing
- Rave-O
- Orton-Gillingham
- PROMPT therapy
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Government legally obliged to help return Perez's body

OPINION

RABBI DAVID BENJAMIN

Photo: GCIS

President Cyril Ramaphosa and Rabbi Doron Perez

No one should have any moral or legal difficulty with President Cyril Ramaphosa's intervention to secure the return of Captain Daniel Perez's body. The president has done the right thing and should be unreservedly commended for it. There are humanitarian considerations that transcend conflicts.

In Jewish tradition, the Teruah shofar blast is said to signify the sobbing of Sisera's mother – Sisera was the military leader of one of ancient Israel's greatest foes - as she waits in vain for her son to return from battle with Israel. This teaches us that Judaism expects empathy for human suffering, even that of our worst enemies.

This expectation is also manifested in modern international humanitarian principles governing armed conflicts. It is reflected in the overarching principle of humanity, which dictates that human suffering should be limited only to what is necessary to win wars.

This principle protects not only civilians but combatants, the latter ordinarily being legitimate targets for attack. Hence the limitation on types of weapons that cause additional suffering beyond simply killing their target. The same principle dictates that a combatant who no longer presents a threat on the battlefield is to be treated humanely.

Similar logic underpins international legal norms regarding the mortal remains of fallen enemy soldiers. The Geneva Conventions require dignified interment of the dead and arrangements that allow for future exhumation of remains and their transportation to their home country. The exact positions of graves are to be communicated as soon as circumstances permit.

The International Committee of the Red Cross goes further and asserts as a principle of binding customary international law that "parties to the conflict must endeavour to facilitate the return of the remains of the deceased upon request of the party to which they belong or upon the request of their next of kin".

If these humanitarian obligations apply to parties directly engaged in armed conflict with each other, how much more so can we expect powers that are not involved directly in a conflict to employ their best efforts to facilitate the return of fallen soldiers to their grieving families?

So even if official South Africa persists in its antagonism towards Israel, in advancing the patently false accusation of "genocide" in Gaza and in casting Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers as villains, this should not stand in the way of a purely humanitarian gesture towards a bereaved family.

Of course, this writer would like to believe that the South African government's conduct in this matter holds additional significance. Does this good deed, along with the decision to make it public, denote a slight, but not inconsequential, realignment with its professed policy of non-alignment, which was abandoned wholesale in relation to Israel?

The official accompanying statement of the Presidency affirming "South Africa's support for an all-inclusive peace process that will deliver a lasting peace for the people of Israel and Palestine" has the appearance of balance. To some, it might sound vaguely conciliatory.

Dare we perceive a glimmer of understanding that IDF soldiers, proud South Africans among them, are our finest sons and daughters whose parents wait anxiously for their return, risking their lives to defend their fellow human beings against cruel and powerful forces openly seeking not "a lasting peace", but their destruction?

• *David Benjamin is a rabbi and international law specialist living in Israel.*

What leading the Jewish community of KZN taught me

OPINION

ALANA PUGH-JONES BARANOV

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, then when?" Hillel's words in Pirkei Avot have sat with me throughout my term as president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) KwaZulu-Natal Council, not as a slogan, but as an instruction. A community must protect itself, must never turn so inwards it forgets the world around it, and must act now, because leadership deferred is leadership abdicated.

Fourteen months ago, this community entrusted me to lead its council. As I step back from my role, I want to share what I set out to build, and what building it taught me – about leadership, continuity, and what a small, close-knit community on the eastern edge of the country can mean to Jewish South Africa as a whole.

I took office wanting to revitalise an organisation that had drifted from its core mandate: to be this community's voice to the outside world and its shield against antisemitism. Much of the early work was deeply unglamorous: reconstituting structures, updating community trusts, and rebuilding financial oversight. It was slow, thankless, and at times met with real resistance.

Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov and eThekwini Mayor Cyril Xaba

Reform is uncomfortable. But governance is not a technical detail of Jewish leadership; it is the foundation of it. An organisation cannot credibly speak for its people if it cannot first account for itself.

Although our core mandate is to protect Jewish civil liberties and combat antisemitism, we are not just a wall. Our job is to be a bridge. So, I made it my mission to represent my community to the broader society. I met KwaZulu-Natal Premier (KZN) Thami Ntuli within weeks of taking office; hosted the United States consul general for a tour of the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre; met the Indian consul general; and engaged the South African Hindu Maha Sabha. I shared a Hebrew prayer at a memorial service at St Thomas Church, and broke bread at an Interfaith Iftar at the Grey Street Mosque. I carried out my roles on the KwaZulu-Natal Interreligious Leaders Council and the Religions for Peace South Africa executive because a Jewish voice needed to be there.

One of the highlights, for me, was being part of a panel at the G20 Interfaith Forum in Cape Town, speaking about the work of the Jewish refugee agency HIAS South Africa. At a moment when Jewish voices are being pushed out of many rooms around the world, we were invited into one of the most consequential.

This year, our council hosted a Freedom Seder, bringing government, political parties, interfaith partners, and media together around a Pesach table, where we told the Jewish people's journey of redemption, from slavery to freedom, likening it to the transition from apartheid to democracy. Watching guests who had never sat at a seder before making the connection between the Jewish story and that of our country was truly inspiring.

When xenophobic violence swept through our province, we partnered with HIAS South Africa to launch an emergency food relief appeal, guided by *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), *tzedakah* (justice), and our ancient obligation to the stranger. Our community answered generously. In May alone, we distributed food parcels to more than 120 refugee and asylum-seeker families, and we continued our handovers of food, goods, and baby items in the weeks leading up to, and in the wake of, the 30 June anti-migrant protests, alongside the Catholic Archdiocese Refugee Pastoral Care. South African Jewry descends largely from people who fled. When mobs march through the streets demanding to see papers and deciding who belongs and who does not, we recognise the chilling pattern. We did not stand on the sidelines.

We also stood up for our own. When protests outside the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre and the Durban Progressive Shul infringed on our members' right to pray in peace, I issued a press release and wrote to the eThekwini mayor, pushing for engagement with the SA Police Service, metro police, and eThekwini Municipality until that right was respected. No one in our country should have to think twice before walking into a shul.

Our council also marked Yom HaShoah alongside Holocaust survivor Wanda Albinska, whose harrowing testimony of the Warsaw Ghetto reminded us of the power of memory against forgetting.

None of these achievements happened by accident. It required us to keep showing up, again and again, at tables where a Jewish voice was not guaranteed an ear. The world does not distinguish between Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban. It sees one South African Jewry. When we showed up credibly for KwaZulu-Natal, the whole country's Jewish community was taken more seriously.

> When mobs march through the streets demanding to see papers and deciding who belongs and who does not, we recognise the chilling pattern. We did not stand on the sidelines.

We also did not do this work alone. We had the tireless support of the SAJBD national office and Cape Council of the SAJBD; generous community donors and affiliate organisations; and, of course, our executive committee and professional staff.

When I first addressed my community as president, I told the story of the sage Choni HaMe'agel, who found an old man planting a carob tree that would take 70 years to bear fruit. "I was born into a world filled with carob trees," the man said. "Just as my ancestors planted for me, so I plant for my descendants."

That is what these 14 months have been. Planting.

Rabbi Tarfon taught that it is not upon us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist from it.

That, for me, is the essence of Jewish continuity. No president finishes this work. Indeed, no generation does. We inherit it from those who came before us; we each do our part with faith, courage, and humility, and then we place it in good hands and trust those who come after us to carry it further.

May we continue to be a bridge and a voice, a shield, and a light, and may Jewish KwaZulu-Natal keep showing the country and the world what it looks like to plant trees whose shade we may never sit in ourselves.

• *Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov is the outgoing president of the SAJBD KwaZulu-Natal Council and the country director of HIAS South Africa. This is an extract from her president's address at the 92nd AGM of the SAJBD KZN Council.*

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The Muslim sisters who found out they are Jewish

CLAUDIA GROSS

For most of their lives, Batyah* and Gila* understood themselves to be Muslim. Yet, woven through generations of their family was a Jewish identity they did not fully understand.

The two sisters shared their story at Limmud Cape Town on Saturday in a session titled "Becoming Ourselves: Two Sisters and their Jewish Journey Home". The talk drew such a large crowd that people sat on the floor after all the chairs were taken. It was repeated on Sunday because of the demand.

The sisters were born in the late 1980s and grew up in a traditionally Muslim household. They attended madrasa, learnt to read Arabic, observed halal laws, and participated in Islamic religious practices. Their mother and grandmother also placed a strong emphasis on character, conduct, and religious understanding.

But there were differences between their family and the wider Muslim community that they struggled to explain. Their grandmother spoke about generations of women before them, using names such as Rachel, Chava, and Chana. The sisters regarded these women as beloved ancestors whose opinions still carried weight within the family.

They also followed the women's traditions closely, even when they did not understand their origins. "I was one of those kids who always asked why," Batyah said.

She eventually discovered that the family's connection to Judaism was more significant than she'd realised. In 2011, while studying religious studies at the University of Cape Town, a Jewish classmate asked about the maternal line of her Jewish ancestry.

Photo: Tamara Marcus

A packed Limmud audience listens to the sisters' story

As Islam uses a system of patrilineal descent, and their father is Muslim, the sisters had never considered that they might be Jewish.

The question changed her understanding of her family. "What if all those tensions had some sort of a name or relation?" Batyah recalled. "What if this meant more than what I thought it meant?"

The sisters began researching Judaism and their ancestry from North Africa. Their maternal grandmother told them on her deathbed that they had female Jewish ancestors, which makes them halachically Jewish.

They read Jewish literature, attended community events, listened to podcasts, and spoke to people around them. They encountered the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. They explored Jewish philosophy, storytelling, and Kabbalah.

What they found was not simply a new religion. "Everything sounded familiar," one sister said. "It was like accessing a memory that you didn't even know you had." The experience was particularly striking because many Jewish concepts resonated with ideas they'd encountered throughout their Muslim upbringing.

They began attending Jewish events, including the Sinai Indaba and the Jewish Literary Festival. Hearing rabbis discuss ideas they had known throughout their lives, but in a different language, became an important part of their journey. "Every single time my heart would open," Gila said.

Their understanding of their ancestors also changed. The women they had known as wise and influential figures were now understood as people who had preserved aspects of a Jewish identity across generations. The sisters described this as a process of preservation that had continued despite isolation and difficult circumstances.

They ultimately decided to embrace and observe Judaism formally in December 2020. The decision followed what they described as a 16-year process of questioning, research, experiences, and what they saw as repeated connections to Judaism.

Their first year was spent largely learning privately and observing Jewish practices for themselves. Batyah chose separating milk and meat as an initial symbolic practice. They navigated Jewish festivals at home, often learning as they went.

They gradually began engaging more deeply with the Jewish community. Limmud became part of that process, with the sisters attending last year as volunteers before returning this year.

Their journey has not been without complications. They've had to navigate relationships with family members who reacted differently to their decision. They have also faced difficult conversations in their workplaces and communities.

For the sisters, however, the journey is not simply about leaving one identity for another. It is about understanding what was already present. "We were already there," one sister said of their eventual decision. "It was like a 16-year-long decision, and when you wake up one day, you're there."

**Speakers have chosen to go by their Hebrew names for privacy reasons.*

Israel needs military tactics in narrative war

CLAUDIA GROSS

For Israel, the battle is no longer only a military one. Dan Feferman told Limmud Cape Town that the information space is as strategic a battlefield, capable of shaping public opinion, political decisions, and physical violence.

Feferman, an Israel-based media entrepreneur focusing on the Middle East and an expert on military, intelligence, and diplomatic affairs, said the problem is bigger than poor Israeli public relations.

"What we're facing is not a better PR campaign or a better spokesperson," he said. "We're facing something much more organised, something much more insidious. We're facing a properly strategised and crafted information ecosystem."

Speaking at a session titled "The Narrative War on Israel and the West: How We Win", Feferman said Israel and its supporters are confronting networks that understand information as a weapon.

According to Feferman, Israel entered the 7 October war without the information infrastructure needed to respond at the same speed. He contrasted this with Israel's military preparedness. "I live 10 minutes away from one of Israel's biggest air force bases. There are pilots training and flying overhead ready to defend Israel at a moment's notice.

"But when it comes to the information space, the so-called pilots and the mechanics and the engineers of the information warfare were nowhere to be found."

Photo: Tamara Marcus

Dan Feferman

He said Microsoft had tracked nine Iranian cyber-influence groups targeting Israel in the first week after 7 October, rising to 14 by day 15. And Iranian cyber-enabled influence operations increased from about one every two months in 2021 to 11 during October 2023.

Feferman said the effectiveness of such campaigns comes partly from their ability to move faster than verification. He cited claims circulated after 7 October about Israel targeting a hospital, deliberately starving Gaza, targeting aid workers, and blocking humanitarian assistance.

"The point is not that every criticism of Israel is false," he said. "The point is the speed at which the most disgusting interpretation of Israel's actions and intentions hits the media and spreads like wildfire, and then becomes the accepted narrative."

Feferman described social media amplification as a key part of this process. Repeated messages can create the impression that a particular view is universally accepted, even when fake accounts or coordinated networks are involved.

He warned that artificial intelligence (AI) is making the information environment even more difficult to navigate. AI-generated images and videos can increasingly appear authentic, allowing emotionally powerful material to spread before it can be verified.

For Feferman, the consequences extend beyond online arguments. Narratives can contribute to political pressure, boycotts, sanctions, diplomatic decisions, and hostility towards Jewish communities.

He described Israel as an "omnicause", meaning a symbol through which wider political and ideological struggles are expressed. The conflict with Palestinians has been connected to broader anti-Western and anti-colonial narratives for decades, he said.

The roots of modern information warfare could be traced to Soviet "active measures" during the Cold War. These included disinformation, forged documents, front organisations, planted stories, and the amplification of divisions within societies.

Feferman said the response therefore could not simply be better public relations. "This is not bad PR, this is not a PR crisis," he said. "What we need is to think in military terms."

He called for fully operational capabilities dedicated to understanding and responding to information warfare around the clock. This would include mapping who is involved, how networks are funded, and how they operate. "We have to change our mindset," he said. "This is not more hasbara and it's not another activist advocacy organisation."

Feferman acknowledged that democratic societies cannot approach information warfare in the same way as authoritarian regimes or terrorist organisations. They need specialists capable of understanding the methods being used against them.

But he pointed out that the narrative battle cannot be treated as an afterthought. "We're fighting over the ninth storey while they're taking out the foundations of the building."

Freedom for women is financial

CLAUDIA GROSS

Investing can seem like something reserved for people with substantial savings, financial expertise, or a high tolerance for risk. A Limmud Cape Town session challenged all three assumptions.

The "Invest Like a Woman" session brought together Tanya Golan, Jess Mallach, and Tamar Haim to discuss women, investing, financial literacy, and long-term wealth creation. The three women work in financial advisory services and explained that compliance requirements meant they could not give personalised financial advice at the session. Instead, their aim was to educate and encourage greater financial engagement.

Photo: Tamara Marcus

Tamar Haim, Tanya Golan, and Jessica Mallach

Golan said the idea for "Invest Like a Woman" originated from the general lack of knowledge about basic financial concepts and the various investment products.

"I realised that during your school and university career, no one actually teaches you the basic foundations of financial literacy," Golan said. This lack of knowledge was particularly significant for women because financial dependence can leave them vulnerable when circumstances change.

Mallach said she had seen this in her work with clients, where husbands sometimes attended financial meetings without their wives. She said women could then find themselves struggling to understand their finances after a divorce, the death of a spouse, or any other life-changing event.

The speakers highlighted the importance of passing on financial knowledge between generations. Haim, who studied accounting before completing her postgraduate studies in financial planning, said she had not understood investing before entering the financial industry. She wished she had started investing at 21 and wanted younger people to understand the value of starting early.

One of the central concepts the women discussed was compound growth. Haim described it as a snowball effect, where investment growth remains invested and can itself generate further growth. "The earlier you start, the more powerful it becomes."

The amount someone started with was less important than developing the habit of investing. "Your first thousand could actually be more important than your million," she said.

The session examined the financial challenges women face. Golan quoted statistics that women in South Africa generally retire with 21% to 29% less in their pension or provident funds than men. She attributed this to factors including lower earnings, career breaks, caregiving responsibilities, and women's longer life expectancy.

The speakers distinguished between saving and investing, noting that keeping money entirely in cash could expose it to the effects of inflation over time.

However, they stressed that investing should not come at the expense of financial stability. Haim said people should first understand their budgets and establish an emergency fund. Risk was another major topic. The speakers explained that different investments carry different levels of volatility and that investors need to understand their own circumstances and tolerance for risk.

Continued on page 13>>

To Bibi or not Bibi? Israel's next election could be a watershed

CLAUDIA GROSS

Right-wing voters who no longer want Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition to be in power could decide Israel's election in October. It could also hinge on the cost of living, military service, and whether Netanyahu can once again turn political uncertainty to his advantage.

Those were among the issues Linda Dayan, Dan Feferman, Roni Fantanesh Malkai, and Amir Sela, explored at a Limmud Cape Town panel titled "Bibi or Not Bibi: The 2026 Israeli Election", moderated by Wayne Sussman. The panel highlighted how difficult the election is to predict, with the speakers offering sharply different assessments of what voters will prioritise.

Roni Fantanesh Malkai, Dan Feferman, Wayne Sussman, Amir Sela, and Linda Dayan

For Malkai, the most important issue is the cost of living. She pointed to the high price of basic goods and argued that political parties should make affordability a central part of their campaigns.

Sela identified racism and settler violence as major problems facing Israeli society.

Feferman focused instead on what he described as the question of who carries the national burden. He argued that military service by the Haredi community will be a major election issue.

The speakers discussed accountability for 7 October. Opposition parties are calling for a state commission of inquiry, but the current government has resisted establishing one. The question of who should take responsibility for the failures surrounding the attack could therefore influence voters.

A key complication is Israel's electoral system. Parties must receive at least 3.25% of the vote to enter the Knesset. Several new parties and breakaway groups are therefore fighting to cross the threshold. A party that falls just short receives no seats, potentially changing the balance between political blocs. This has particular significance for the right. Some parties have broken away from Likud, while others are attempting to appeal to voters who remain right-wing but are dissatisfied with Netanyahu.

Feferman argued that some of these new groups could represent a shift within the Israeli right. He said several politicians leaving Likud are experienced figures who support institutions and the rule of law. He also argued that the traditional left-right labels do not adequately describe Israeli politics today.

Young voters might further complicate the picture. Dayan said younger Israelis tend to be more conservative on security because many have grown up during periods of war and terrorism. Yet many have also spent hundreds of days in military service since 7 October. This means younger right-wing voters may not automatically support Netanyahu or the parties in his coalition.

Netanyahu himself remains central to the election. Malkai noted that he continues to command significant support after 7 October, citing polling that placed Likud at about 23 mandates. She argued that his political instincts and ability to respond to changing circumstances should not be underestimated.

The panel disagreed about who could lead the next government. Malkai predicted that Naftali Bennett might emerge as a strong contender, while another scenario raised was a renewed deadlock between the blocs. Previous elections have produced near 60-60 splits, leaving neither side able to form a government.

Feferman suggested another possibility: a national unity government led by former Israel Defence Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot and including Likud. He argued that Eisenkot might perform strongly because he is campaigning as a security-focused candidate rather than a representative of the left.

The discussion ultimately returned to the unpredictability of Israeli politics. The election might strengthen Netanyahu, produce a new right-wing leadership, or once again leave Israel facing a political stalemate.

For the panel, the central question was therefore not simply whether Israelis would vote for or against Bibi. It was whether the political map that has dominated Israel for years can survive the pressures created by 7 October, the war, and a growing demand for a different kind of leadership.

Freedom for women is financial

>>Continued from page 12

A diversified portfolio can include different asset classes, such as cash, bonds, property, and equities. Diversification can reduce exposure to the performance of any single investment.

The speakers cautioned against allowing fear or excitement to dictate investment decisions during market fluctuations.

Mallach compared investing to a roller coaster, with periods of significant declines followed by periods of growth. She said education could make it easier for people to remain invested through market cycles.

The session ultimately returned to the importance of financial independence and knowledge. The speakers said financial freedom is not necessarily about becoming wealthy, it is about having greater choice, security, and control over the future.

Learn the basics, ask questions, start with what is affordable, invest consistently, and avoid waiting until everything is understood before taking action, they said. "Confidence doesn't always come before you start. It often comes because you started."

Shifting sand of Sobibor reveals horrific past

CLAUDIA GROSS

For decades, the Nazi extermination camp at Sobibor in Poland was deliberately hidden beneath trees, earth, and silence. Now, archaeological discoveries are revealing the physical traces of the people murdered there.

Dr Yoram Haimi, the Israeli archaeologist who has spent almost two decades excavating the site, shared some of those discoveries at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre on Thursday, 13 August.

His talk, "Unearthing the Past: Archaeological Research, Discovery, and Commemoration at the Sobibor Extermination Camp", explored how archaeology can help reconstruct a place where the Nazis deliberately tried to destroy evidence of their crimes.

Rafaela Joffe Peerutin, Yoram Haimi, and Hélène Joffe at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre

The talk had deeply personal meaning for Holocaust survivor Hélène Joffe, who attended with her daughter Rafaela. Joffe was a child when the Nazis invaded France. Her family lived in Marseille, where her father, Ruben Mindal, was arrested by the Nazis and French collaborators in January 1943. He was taken to Drancy, the French transit camp from which Jews were deported to extermination camps. He was subsequently sent to Sobibor, where he was murdered.

Joffe and the rest of her immediate family survived the Holocaust by going into hiding in various parts of France. She later settled in South Africa. For Joffe, the subject of Haimi's talk was therefore directly connected to the loss of her father.

Sobibor was one of three Nazi killing centres established as part of Operation Reinhard, the Nazi plan to murder Jews in occupied Poland. It operated from 1942 until October 1943 and, unlike concentration camps where some prisoners were selected for forced labour, Sobibor was established primarily as a killing centre. Deportees were murdered in gas chambers shortly after arriving.

The Nazis dismantled the camp following a prisoner uprising on 14 October 1943. They destroyed the buildings, removed traces of the camp, and planted trees over parts of the site. That created an unusual challenge for archaeologists.

Haimi explained that much of what was known about Sobibor came from documents and testimony from the small number of people who survived. "We are not talking, we are reading documents, but when you start to dig and to sift the sand, the evidence starts to show up," he said.

Haimi began excavating Sobibor in 2007 with Polish archaeologist Wojciech Mazurek. Dutch archaeologist Ivar Schute was also part of the team. They excavated the site using a 5m grid. Every object found was recorded according to the precise section of ground where it was discovered.

The team soon found that the physical evidence did not always correspond with existing plans of the camp. Haimi said there were more than 50 different plans of Sobibor, based largely on the recollections of survivors. However, the plans differed from one another.

This was particularly problematic for Camp III, the area containing the gas chambers, cremation facilities, and mass graves. No prisoner from Camp III survived to provide a direct account of its layout. "We cannot make a plan, the true plan of Sobibor extermination camp," Haimi said.

The excavations began providing evidence that could help resolve some of those uncertainties. At one site, the team discovered more than 800 objects almost immediately. Haimi said this showed that the structure could not have been a gas chamber. "In a gas chamber, people come naked, with nothing," he said. "We shouldn't find any artefacts in the gas chamber."

The team eventually determined that what had been identified as a building was actually a shooting trench measuring about 100m. They also discovered evidence of a double fence separating different areas of the camp. On one side, they found thousands of artefacts, including dentures and jewellery.

Another significant discovery was the route that led victims from the undressing area to the gas chambers. The Nazis referred to this path as the *schlauch*, or "road to heaven". The path was about 5m wide and enclosed by fences. Branches were woven into the fences so people inside could not see what was happening outside.

Haimi explained that the route was designed to prevent deportees from understanding where they were being taken. Survivor testimony indicated that people were told they were going to shower before continuing their journey. They could not see the gas chamber until they were very close to it.

The team also discovered evidence of the railway ramp via which deportees arrived. Haimi said archaeological measurements showed the ramp was about 165m long. This showed how trains and wagons could enter the camp.

For Haimi, however, some of the most significant discoveries were much smaller. The team has found about 220 000 artefacts at Sobibor. These include watches, combs, glasses, perfume bottles, medicine containers, jewellery, religious objects, and pieces of luggage.

Most of these objects belonged to people murdered at the camp. Some have enabled researchers to identify individual victims and connect their belongings to surviving relatives. Haimi showed the audience an identification tag belonging to a seven-year-old child. "It is very important because it connects a name to the place."

The discovery changed the way Haimi viewed the enormous numbers associated with the Holocaust. "The whole story, which is a story about big numbers, it's more or less impossible to understand," he said. "When you see those items, the whole story becomes quite personal. It's not a story of big figures anymore. It's a story of one person."

Artefacts have revealed connections between Sobibor and Jewish communities across Europe. Haimi described objects belonging to Jews from places including France, the Netherlands, and North Africa. One identification tag took the team five years to decipher. Archival research eventually connected it to a Moroccan victim.

Haimi said records identified 402 Jews from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco who were sent to Sobibor. His own family history was one of the reasons he began investigating the site.

Haimi's family lived in Paris during World War II and were murdered in the Holocaust. His mother lived in Morocco and spent years trying to discover what had happened to them. He eventually went to Yad Vashem, where he found transport records that helped him trace members of his family. They showed that his relatives had been deported from France.

Haimi also described the difficulty of establishing exactly where particular transports ended. He explained that one from France arrived at Majdanek before some prisoners were sent to Sobibor, according to at least one survivor.

For him, this demonstrated why archaeological evidence is important when reconstructing the history of the camp. "We can see very clearly how important the archaeological excavations, the testimonies, and the history books are because we can combine all this information and bring the true story of the camp."

Local Polish volunteers have also been involved in the excavation. Haimi described people ranging from teenagers to elderly residents participating in the work. Some volunteers initially knew little about Sobibor. Over time, he said, their understanding of the site changed.

The team has also worked with relatives of victims to identify objects and reconstruct individual stories. For Haimi, this is one of the most important functions of Holocaust archaeology. The Nazis attempted to destroy Sobibor physically after the uprising. They removed structures, destroyed evidence ,and attempted to conceal the purpose of the site.

The archaeological work has shown that the ground still contains evidence of what happened there. Among the thousands of objects are reminders of ordinary lives interrupted by the Holocaust. A watch, a comb, a piece of jewellery, or a child's identification tag can connect an individual to a place where almost no physical trace remained.

For Haimi, each discovery contributes to reconstructing the history of Sobibor. "Each artefact that we find is a story," he said. And at a site designed to erase its victims, those stories provide evidence that the people murdered there were never simply numbers.

Annual art auction reframes perspectives and fertility

LEE TANKLE

Seventy Jewish women artists and 100 artworks with one shared purpose: helping individuals and couples in the community who are facing infertility.

This is the premise behind the Malka Ella Fertility Fund's annual art exhibition and auction, which raises funds for fertility treatment, genetic testing, and fertility preservation.

Held every 18 months, the exhibition also shines a light on the talent of artists within the community.

This year's exhibition, REFRAME, which took place from 16 to 19 August at Schaffler's Nursery in Johannesburg, explored the transformative power of perspective – the idea that changing the way we see something can change the way we experience it. At the heart of REFRAME was a simple but powerful idea: we may not always be able to change what happens to us, but we can choose how we see it, how we respond to it, and what meaning we find within it. Inspired by Viktor Frankl's philosophy, the exhibition invited us to shift perspective, spark meaning, and discover hope through the eyes and stories of Jewish women artists.

The Malka Ella Fertility Fund, founded 25 years ago, provides financial assistance for a wide range of fertility treatments and reproductive care. Funding is available for general fertility treatments including timed cycles, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilisation, and intracytoplasmic sperm injection, as well as preimplantation genetic testing for aneuploidy and monogenic disorders. The fund also assists women who wish to preserve future fertility through egg freezing.

To date, more than 480 babies have been born because of the organisation, and more than 1 000 fertility, genetic testing, and egg-preservation procedures have been financed and supported.

The annual art exhibition serves three main purposes: fundraising; raising awareness of Malka Ella; and supporting Jewish women artists, according to Nicole Hoffman, who created the exhibition alongside Malka Ella's marketing director, Kate Gershuni.

"It is an important fundraiser for Malka Ella, while also introducing the wider community to its work and ethos. Because the artworks are auctioned online, the initiative reaches far beyond the physical exhibition and allows more people to learn about the organisation," Hoffman said.

The exhibition also gives a platform to 70 Jewish women artists to showcase their work to a large audience. The Malka Ella team searches for months on end for the artists featured in the exhibition.

"We give a platform to 70 Jewish women who are either professional artists, part-time artists, or hobby artists. Most of them don't have the opportunity to put their art in front of so many people over a period. So, it's wonderful exposure for the Jewish women artists themselves," said Hoffman.

"And we create this really amazing holy space for these women to display their beautiful art and then for the community to come and enjoy it," she said.

The exhibition creates a welcoming Jewish cultural space where people of different ages, backgrounds, and levels of religious observance come together to enjoy art.

At the same time, the artworks are sold through an online auction, closing on 20 August, at which people from around South Africa can bid for whichever piece speaks to them in increments of R500 or R1 000.

"Eighty percent of all funds go directly to treatments. There is a portion that covers the cost of the exhibition, obviously. But the funds go directly either to fund fertility treatments or genetic testing. The operational cost of the fund is covered completely separately. It all goes directly to treatments," Hoffman said.

Our children have left us unsupervised

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

I sometimes wonder how my wife and I make it through the day. Given how little confidence our adult children have in us, it's a wonder we manage to dress ourselves in the morning. And close to an open miracle that, despite our clear lack of basic decision-making skills, we lead fully functional lives and have even reached moderate levels of success.

With our youngest now engaged and soon to leave the family home, I have no idea who's going to take on the massive responsibility of pointing out the constant errors of our ways. With the empty nest looming in the forest, I wonder who'll be there to point out that the figurative tree should not have fallen as it did.

It's a genuine concern.

For nearly three decades, we have had a sophisticated, 24-hour quality-control department operating from inside our home. No opinion too insignificant to be challenged. No sentence allowed to pass without being checked for possible offence.

"Dad, you can't say that." Apparently I can. I just did.

I have long suspected that a significant number of complaints lodged at the Broadcasting Complaints Commission about things I've said on air come from those who share my DNA. I have no evidence of this, but there is motive, opportunity, and a family WhatsApp group.

The problem is that I am apparently increasingly out of step with the times. Nobody formally tells you this has happened. You simply wake up one morning and discover that words you've used for 40 years now require context, an apology, and possibly legal representation.

My children know instinctively what I can no longer say. They know which jokes are inappropriate, which expressions are outdated, and which stories I absolutely must not tell in public.

I have also discovered that adult children don't actually want advice. This came as something of a shock because I have accumulated quite a lot of it.

I have spent decades solving their problems. I have driven forgotten school projects across Johannesburg and dealt with broken cars, missed flights, questionable boyfriends and girlfriends, university crises, and things that needed to be fixed immediately. And now, when they tell me about a problem, I'm expected simply to listen. I'm supposed to nod thoughtfully and say, "That sounds difficult."

Of course it sounds difficult. That's why I have a solution. But apparently offering it is "interfering".

There are new rules. Be interested, but don't interrogate. Be supportive, but don't advise. Be available, but don't hover. Respect their independence, but remain ready for airport lifts, storage, emergencies, and occasional financial interventions.

And above all, respect boundaries. I particularly enjoy boundaries. These are people who once walked into our bedroom without knocking, ate food off our plates, and regarded everything we owned as communal property.

The great irony is that this is exactly what we wanted. We raised them to think independently, question things, and have strong opinions. It turns out we were the things they were going to question.

We taught them to speak. They have spent the last decade trying to get us to stop.

And now they are leaving us. Unsupervised.

My wife and I will finally be free to make our own decisions, hold our outdated opinions, and complete an entire sentence.

For perhaps seven minutes. Then my phone will ping. "Dad. I heard what you said on air this morning." And order will be restored to the universe.

And I'll smile. Because sometimes being told you're wrong is just another way of being reminded that your children are still close enough to care.

Jews reclaiming life in Spain

GILANA LAB

For centuries Jews were forced out of Spain. Today, Jewish communities are once again holding services there, studying Torah, and building Jewish life across the country.

Their story is one thread in the tapestry encapsulated by the theme for the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever awards, "*Les Festival des Juifs*", bringing together the cultures, histories, and experiences that make up Jewish life around the world.

Spain's Jewish story is one of resilience and achievement. A culture scattered more than 500 years ago has survived, evolved, and found its way back to the country it once called home.

"The community is quite mixed, but predominantly Sephardi," says Eryn Sarkin, a member of the World Union of Jewish Students who has explored Jewish life in Spain. "It's a melting pot of other cultures." That mixture reflects both the depth of Spanish Jewish history and the people shaping its community today.

David Benatar of the Federation of Jewish Youth in Spain at a community event

Medieval Iberia was home to a flourishing Jewish world in which scholars, poets, and scientists contributed significantly to intellectual and cultural life. That world was shattered in 1492 when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree, ordering Jews to convert to Catholicism or leave Spain.

Those who fled established Sephardic communities across North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, carrying their traditions with them. One of the strongest threads connecting those communities to their former home was Ladino, the language that developed from the Spanish spoken by Jews before the expulsion and which absorbed influences from the languages of the diaspora. For generations, Ladino preserved a connection to *Sefarad* (modern-day Spain and Portugal).

Today, Spain is again an important centre for the study and preservation of Ladino and Sephardic culture. At the same time, its modern Jewish population is far from uniform. Alongside Sephardim are Jews whose families came from elsewhere, including Latin America, as well as Spaniards rediscovering Jewish ancestry hidden for generations.

David Benatar, the president of the Federation of Jewish Youth in Spain, offers a first-hand perspective. "There isn't a common or homogeneous experience," he says. "There are a lot of different experiences. For me, being Jewish in Spain is a really different experience than for a lot of other Jews.

"I grew up in a non-Jewish school and high school," he says. "I went to the public university and studied political science, which is an extremely complicated space to be Jewish. My experience has been harder, or at least different, to that of a person who went to a Jewish school with all Jewish friends."

Yet there is also a shared reality, particularly among younger Jews. Recorded antisemitic discourse, incidents, and attacks in Spain increased by 321% in 2024 compared with 2023, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain's Observatory on Antisemitism.

"There is a common ground among Spanish Jews when it comes to the hard situation we've been facing over the past three years," says Benatar. "In public spaces, we are not Jewish. We don't eat kosher, we are just vegetarians, or we just feel sick that day. We try to hide our identity because we are scared, or simply because it brings us fewer problems."

That in no way discourages them from being Jewish. "It has meant that we enjoy Jewish spaces more and need them more than ever," Benatar says. "We no longer show our Jewish identity in public spaces, but we still need to show that identity somewhere. So, we all go to Jewish spaces – not only synagogues, but activities, unions, and other organisations that provide these environments."

That determination to create and protect Jewish spaces is another achievement in a long history.

More than 500 years after the expulsion, Judaism in Spain has many strands. Together, they tell a story of a culture that survived being scattered, adapted to new realities, and continues to be woven into the fabric of Jewish life today. Spain is not simply a chapter in Jewish history. It is a living thread in the tapestry of Jewish culture.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

KZN Council stands tall

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is a national body with a presence around the country. The majority of South African Jews live in Johannesburg and Cape Town, but we are also present in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Gqeberha, and Pretoria. These smaller communities are often key in representing our voice and protecting our rights. That is true nowhere more than in KZN, where I joined National Director Wendy Kahn last week for the annual general meeting of the KZN Council of the SAJBD.

The national Board places great value on the KZN region. Over the past year, the community there has been bolstered and, despite its small size, delivers meaningful value for all South African Jewry. The AGM was a fitting moment to take stock of the remarkable impact of the SAJBD KZN Council.

At the meeting, I spoke about the importance of resilience, and no word better describes the state of the KZN community today. Wendy and I were heartened to see an active community leading our national body in so many critical areas. Over the past year, KZN has become a leading voice in interfaith engagement. It held its first Freedom Seder, hosted an interfaith Shabbat, and took part in a number of significant interfaith events and dialogues. The community has been active politically, too, welcoming the KZN premier, the mayor of eThekwini, and several other public representatives from this important province. *Kol hakavod* to outgoing KZN President Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov and her remarkable council.

The same commitment to being present was evident elsewhere this month. As part of the Board's ongoing outreach and intercommunal work, our political and university liaison, Gabi Farber Cohen, attended two Women's Month events. The first was the Gertrude Shope Women's Peace Mediators Network Annual Assembly at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation in Pretoria. The second was the National Women's Dialogue Celebration hosted by Unisa, SA Women in Dialogue, and UN Women. Both gatherings brought together women from government, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, civil society, and a range of industries to consider the role women can play in peacebuilding, advancing our country, and confronting the challenges facing South Africa, our region, and our continent.

What was especially encouraging was the deliberate focus on South Africa and our own challenges. After several years in which so much of our attention has been drawn to international issues and global crises, it was refreshing to see organisations creating space for meaningful conversations about our own people, our own communities, and our own future. There is clearly a great deal of work to do but seeing diverse groups of women come together to find solutions and drive change is a welcome shift, and one that is both necessary and inspiring.

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

Dancing is in every fibre of Winkler's being

*Cape Town dancer **Gala Winkler** is performing in the Darkroom Contemporary production of e.ID: A Fugue at the State Theatre in Pretoria. The* SA Jewish Report *spoke to her between performances.*

What is your background?

I was born in Cape Town to mother Michelle and father Mark. My mother has worked as a dancer, stylist, yoga teacher, and Montessori teacher. She was a pre-school teacher as I grew up. My father worked in advertising and spent his spare hours writing novels that have since been published.

My sister, Grace, is four years older than me and when she was not at school, she was dancing, acting, singing, and performing. As a younger sibling wanting to be as great, I did all the same. I imitated and recited all her material to the point that my mother put me in tap classes when I was two years old.

I then expanded to ballet, modern, drama, and acrobatics as I got older.

I began my schooling at Herzlia, then moved to Cedar House at 15 years old.

What drew you to dance?

I like to think dance was a specialised cell embedded in my embryo. I moved and wriggled in my mother's womb so much so that I was wrapped in the umbilical cord when I was born.

My mother danced professionally until her mid-twenties, and my sister danced and went on to finish a degree in choreography. She has always been the apple of my eye, and I wanted to be just like her.

Gala Winkler

What does dance mean to you?

Dance doesn't just mean something to me; it is me.

There have been times I've taken a pause from dance, times I've sacrificed all else in my world to give light to dance, times I've used dance to express and release, times I've just danced because I can, times I've left the dance world, knowing in that moment that that chapter of my life is closed.

But there is a light that leaves me whenever I move away from dance. It is having an arm or a leg missing, but more so a heart that is missing. It is the simplest, purest love, one that cannot be explained by the way it makes me feel or express myself. It just is me.

What do you love about dancing for an audience?

I performed on stage in June this year for the first time in seven years. And it was only then that I really understood why I'm hungry to be a dancer. In all my love for dance, there has always been fear about performance. But this time round, I found a confidence, trust, and belief that my body is capable of telling a story with its lines and shapes and collapse and heights.

And with that comes the strongest presence in the space, within myself. The audience all but disappears and I am there with me, with dance, with my team. And it feels like home.

Which is your favourite dance form?

I am a big lover of ballet, the discipline, the strength, the centring it gives me. I thrive on having direction and routine and knowing what to expect. But contemporary dance challenges me to be curious, to have trust that whatever comes will come, and I am capable of growing through the movement to understand it.

How would you describe Darkroom Contemporary?

Darkroom Contemporary has been a dream company of mine since I watched my dance teacher, Kristy Brown, perform with it 14 years ago. What I love about Darkroom's work is that it's not just dancing to dance, not just dancing to be beautiful and to make others smile.

Darkroom's work is an exploration of what is not considered. It confronts and questions, encourages both the dancers and the audience to be curious. And I believe to be curious is a great gift. Without curiosity, we would never grow, learn, or have the awareness that choice is ours.

The work is also extremely beautiful, creative, weird, and impactful.

What did it take to clinch a role with Darkroom Contemporary?

Last year, when I hadn't been actively dancing or training for about three years, I started going to the Darkroom open classes for professional dancers. And something possessed me to go to the audition – something fun to do and a free class maybe

After discussing the possibility of an apprenticeship, I committed to attending every class they offered, finding other open ballet classes, and dedicating my focus and energy to dance in those spaces.

I joined Darkroom as an apprentice in April this year.

What does this role mean to you, not least of all as your first professional contract?

There are moments it still feels unreal. I see this role as the biggest blessing and privilege I have yet to encounter, a thousandth chance to live my dream. If you'd have told me six months ago that this is where I would find myself, I would have laughed in your face or cried.

Other than dance, what makes you happy?

I used to think it takes a lot to be happy, but focusing on smaller things has made it so much simpler. Learning, watching, sharing, creating. Those actions can be vast or minimal, but any degree of them has the ability to bring joy.

- e.ID: A Fugue *by Darkroom Contemporary is at the State Theatre in Pretoria until 23 August. The company will tour Berlin and Arnhem in September.*

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