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Extremist targets judge in antisemitism case

TALI FEINBERG

Walking into the Western Cape High Court on 25 August, political extremist Mehmet Vefa Dag shouted "Death to Israel" at Jewish community members gathered for his Equality Court hearing on charges of antisemitic hate speech.

Dag, who is originally from Turkey, became a South African citizen in 2006.

The Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) has taken him to court for a plethora of social media posts disparaging Jews. "Jews have ruined SA"; "Jews are looting SA"; "Jews are dogs, they should be burned"; and "One hundred thousand Jews control the entire economy of South Africa," are some of the statements he made on X, all just in July 2024.

When the hearing began, Dag verbally attacked Judge Nontuthuzelo Elizabeth Ralarala.

He accused her of ordering his "unjust" imprisonment when he was in contempt of court in a different case. Dag had tweeted an image of Ralarala the day before and written that she had "unjustly incarcerated me in Pollsmoor [Prison] last year without a trial. We will ensure that this judge's tenure comes to an end. This unacceptable behaviour must lead to her resignation from the court." He later deleted this tweet.

Yelling "You are the most unjust judge", he accused Ralarala of being the reason he was "almost murdered" in prison. When she said she had not been that judge, he responded that all African women look similar, which is why he'd been confused. Along with his antisemitic and racist statements, Dag has also targeted the LGBTQI+ community.

Cape SAJBD executive director Daniel Bloch says, "We noted with deep concern the racist and accusatory remarks directed at Judge Ralarala, which she handled with remarkable composure, dignity, and restraint befitting her office."

He says such conduct has no place in a court of law. "Judicial officers must be able to perform their duties without being subjected to racist or personal attacks."

The Cape SAJBD filed the case against Dag in 2024. In the summons, it says his comments demand that Jews "be killed, harmed, or otherwise suffer reprisals", and describe Jewish people as "illicitly, by force, and without consent, kidnapping the children of non-Jewish people".

In just one example, on 2 August 2024, Dag posted on X, "Jews, your ancestors came to this country [South Africa] as refugees and robbed the whole country. Now take your bags and go to Israel. Don't let me lose my coolers."

Before the Equality Court hearing, Dag wrote on social media that he would "use this legal process to place his position before the court and to defend the principles of justice, equality, accountability and freedom of expression", implying that he would represent himself. He also tweeted on 19 June, "Israeli settlers must leave South Africa on 25 August 2026 [the date of the hearing]. We are shutting down the Western Cape High Court."

But at the hearing, he asked Ralarala for a postponement because, he said, his lawyer had withdrawn from representing him the day before and he needed legal representation.

He also asked for a postponement because he believed Ralarala had ordered his previous imprisonment. She told him he was "making a very serious allegation" and asserted that she was not that judge.

Ralarala said she was glad the media were in the room to record Dag's racist remark implying all African women look the same.

A small group of supporters accompanied Dag, who calls himself the "president of the Truth and Solidarity Movement" and says he is a mayoral candidate in the coming municipal elections. His followers addressed him as "President Dag" or "Mr President".

At the court, he told the *SA Jewish Report* that Israel belongs to the Ottoman empire and he aims to return it to "Ottoman" rule and remove the current inhabitants. He said Jewish families like "the Oppenheimers" must "go to hell!" He said he does not "fear these people" [Jews] and "You [Jews] only know one thing: you know how to loot, you know corruption, and you stole land of [the] black man!".

He continued to say "Death to Israel" before court proceedings began, and told the judge he was there to "free Palestine".

The judge agreed to a postponement of the case, but ordered Dag to submit a formal application, explaining his reasoning for the postponement, by mid-September. She ordered a new hearing on 2 November, despite Dag asking for a longer postponement.

Bloch says the Cape SAJBD remains committed to pursuing the matter and to "ensuring that the issues raised in these proceedings are adjudicated fairly and in accordance with the law".

He says it was disturbing to hear Dag repeatedly chant "Death to Israel". "Such inflammatory and provocative rhetoric has no place in a court of law, which should be respected as a forum for reasoned argument, evidence, and due process, not as a platform for calls for death or hostility.

"It is important to emphasise that these proceedings concern allegations of antisemitic hate speech and conduct directed at Jews; they are not proceedings about the Middle East conflict or the merits of any particular political position," says Bloch.

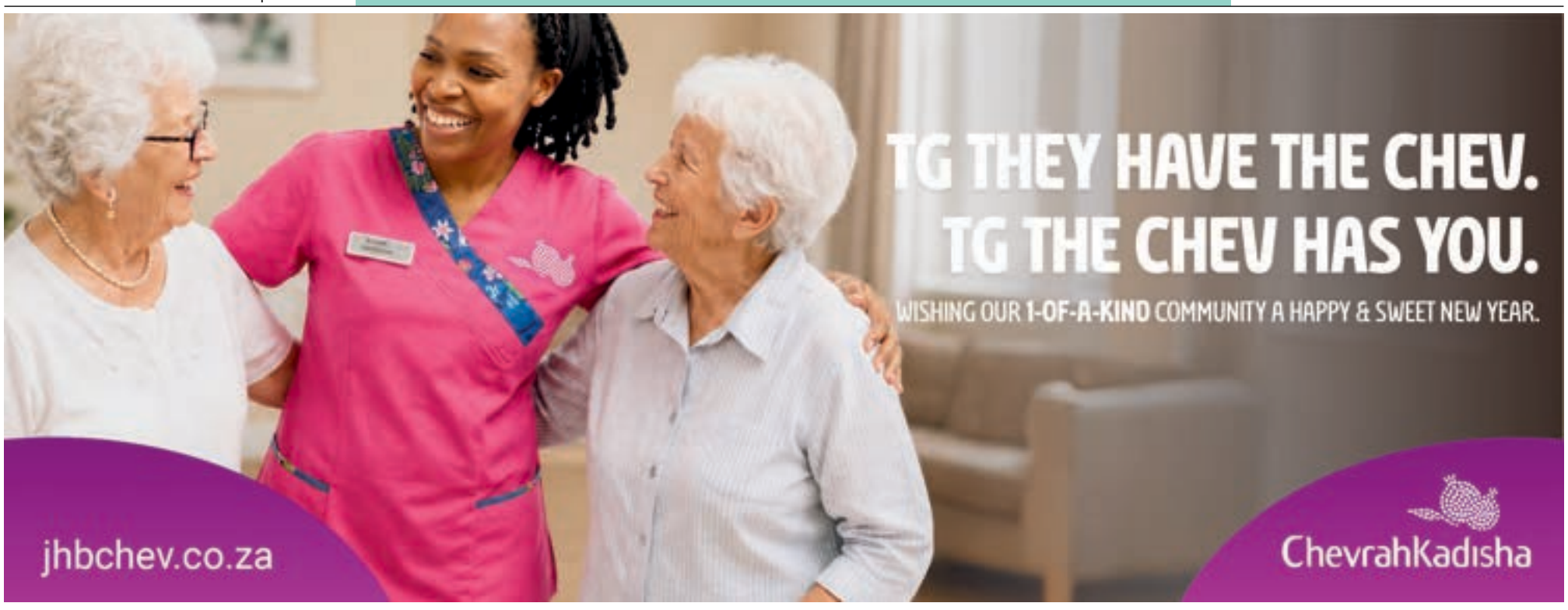
Continued on page 3>>

Igniting the flame of learning

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Hannah Rome and Greg Landau during havdallah at Limmud Johannesburg

See stories on pages 9, 10, and 11



Dehumanisation in any form is unacceptable

OPINION

MENACHEM Z ROSENSAFT

I cannot for the life of me decide whether the individuals who thought it was a good idea to write numbers on the skin of detained Palestinians were evil, devoid of any moral compass, or just terminally, irrevocably stupid.

Following a recent raid in the West Bank, according to reports that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) tacitly acknowledged, detained Palestinians were marked with numbers on their foreheads and other parts of their bodies. I find myself in full agreement with Ta'al Knesset Member Ahmad Tibi's outrage on X that writing "identification numbers on the foreheads of Palestinians" was "shocking and sickening ... This is what dehumanisation looks like: erasing the person and turning them into a number. An image reminiscent of dark periods, and one that should shock everyone."

It is woefully insufficient for the IDF to say in a statement that "the commanders stressed the seriousness of the incident, and the necessary lessons were learned".

What is this supposed to mean? Did someone senior in the chain of command figure out that the optics of branding people like cattle, even if it is with a pen rather than a tattoo needle, are horrific? Are the "lessons learned" that doing so results in appallingly bad public relations, or that this entire episode was unconscionable?

We also know that this isn't the first time something like this has happened. As noted in *Haaretz*, "In April, Israeli soldiers wrote numbers on the hands of dozens of Palestinian women entering the Jenin refugee camp. The IDF later acknowledged the practice as an 'error in judgement' or 'poor judgement'."

"Lessons were learned," observed the Israeli-Palestinian journalist Hanin Majadli. "For decades, lessons have been learned here. After Palestinians are killed, lessons are learned. After detainees are abused, lessons are learned. After every act that was supposed to be an exception, lessons are learned. And yet, the lessons somehow are never learned in time to prevent the next incident."

Perhaps it is time for the lessons in question to be taught proactively rather than being used as an utterly inadequate response.

I don't write as a disinterested observer. On the night of 3 to 4 August 1943, my mother had the number 52406 tattooed on her arm at Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the end of that month, upon his arrival at the same Nazi German death camp, my father was branded with the number 140594.

I want to be clear: I am decidedly *not* comparing the IDF to the SS at Auschwitz in any way, shape, or form, nor am I making any wholly unwarranted analogies between Israel and the Third Reich. I don't question the motivation of the soldiers in question, who presumably wanted a practical means of identifying individuals who had been questioned during the raid, or whom they considered potential terrorists.

What I question is the abject stupidity of providing ammunition to Israel's enemies and to other Jew-haters across the globe who will unquestionably use this "incident", to use the IDF's term, as yet another cudgel with which to beat up on Israel, Israelis, and Jews generally.

World Jewish Congress president Ronald Lauder, my former boss, recently noted that as good as Israel is militarily, "that's how bad it is on public relations, and it's losing the information war in the age of media-driven politics. Everyone has a computer in their pocket with the most vicious smears that will spread around the world and circulate instantly. Israel cannot afford to ignore its public relations."

> JUST AS WE CONDEMN THE VIRULENT HATRED DIRECTED AT ISRAELIS, ZIONISTS, AND JEWS GENERALLY BY HAMAS, HEZBOLLAH, IRAN, AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL ACOLYTES, WE MUST DO SO AS WELL WHEN THE DIGNITY OF PALESTINIANS IS VIOLATED.

Except that the numbers written on Palestinians' foreheads are neither smears nor lies. They constitute an unforced error of monumental proportions and a self-inflicted public relations catastrophe.

One example of antisemitism set forth by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis". Which is one of the reasons Tibi's characterisation of the writing of numbers on Palestinians' foreheads as "an image reminiscent of dark periods" resonates so profoundly and inexorably.

I am writing as a law professor who has continuously defended Israel against the charge of "genocide". I am writing as a lifelong Zionist who fights against the delegitimisation of the State of Israel by the likes of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Michigan Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed.

It is bad enough that we regularly have to denounce the racist obscenities emanating from the mouths of Israeli ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, or that we join US Ambassador Mike Huckabee in condemning extremist West Bank settlers as "terrorists".

What we should not also have to deal with is "incidents" like this one that cast a pall, to put it mildly, on the vast majority of IDF soldiers and officers who behave honourably.

Just as we condemn the virulent hatred directed at Israelis, Zionists, and Jews generally by Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and their international acolytes, we must do so as well when the dignity of Palestinians is violated.

In the final analysis, dehumanisation in any form is unacceptable.

• *Menachem Z Rosensaft is visiting professor of the practice at Cornell Law School and lecturer-in-law at Columbia Law School. His most recent book is* Burning Psalms: Confronting Adonai after Auschwitz.

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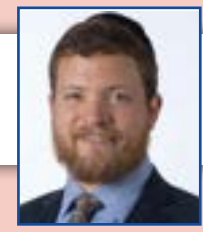
Torah Thought

Less oy, more joy



Rabbi Ari Kievman
Sandton Central Shul and director of the Chabad Seniors programme

I was privileged to be involved with organising the Avraham Fried concert this week, where nearly 2 000 people gathered for an evening of Jewish music, singing, and celebration.

And what an evening it was. People were on their feet, singing, clapping, and dancing. The atmosphere was pure joy.

Parshas Ki Savo speaks repeatedly about joy. When a farmer brings their first fruits, the Torah says, "You shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem your G-d has given you." The farmer doesn't simply enjoy their blessing privately. They bring it to Jerusalem, express their gratitude, and celebrate together with others.

Later in the parsha, when describing the consequences of failing to serve Hashem properly, the Torah says, "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and a glad heart, when you had an abundance of everything."

Why is joy so important? Can we really be held accountable for whether we are happy?

The Torah is telling us that joy is not just a reaction to what happens to us. It is also a way of responding to what happens to us. We might think, "When life is lekker, I'll be happy. When everyone is healthy, finances are comfortable, problems are sorted, and everything falls into place, then I'll have reason to rejoice." But the Torah doesn't ask us only to recognise our blessings. It asks us to rejoice in them.

And perhaps that is why song is so deeply woven into Jewish life.

There is a difference between feeling something and giving it expression. We can feel grateful without saying a word. But when gratitude becomes song, something changes. What is inside us comes out, filling our environment, and drawing others in.

We don't always sing because we are happy. Sometimes, we become happy because we sing. A *nigun* (melody) can lift someone who arrived feeling low. A familiar tune can bridge generations. And when a room full of Jews sings together, we are reminded that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

That is what we all experienced at the Avraham Fried concert. People from different backgrounds and generations singing and experiencing the powerful joy of being Jewish together.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, this is a message worth carrying into the new year.

While we can't control everything that happens in the coming year, we can choose not to let the "oy" drown out the joy.

But we don't have to wait for everything to be perfect before appreciating and celebrating the abundant blessings already in our lives.

Our community is especially looking forward to celebrating the high holy days together as we return to our newly renovated Sandton Central Shul premises. And with the incredible acoustics, it would be a shame not to put them to good use!

There is something special about a community coming together to *daven*, to sing, and to celebrate. So if you're looking for a warm and welcoming place to experience the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe), you are most welcome to join us.

Here's to a year of less oy, more joy, and plenty of reasons to sing.

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SA under pressure to keep combatting terrorism

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa appears to be on a path of significantly tightening laws around financing terrorism. This is because of significant international pressure for the country to stay off the grey list.

An Amendment Bill currently before Parliament would tighten regulations around non-profit organisations (NPOs) funding terrorism.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – the international organisation that sets global standards for combatting terrorist financing, money laundering, and financing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction – continues to push South Africa to stay off its grey list, according to terrorism expert Willem Els.

He says this pressure has forced the country to "up its game" in targeting financial crimes.

South Africa was placed on the grey list in February 2023 due to systemic shortcomings in stopping money laundering and terrorist financing. Being on the list for more than two years harmed investor confidence in the country. It was removed from the list on 24 October 2025, after 32 months of enhanced international monitoring.

The scene of the Kliprivier raid in 2020

Els believes there is a big drive and motivation within the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (known as the Hawks) and other law-enforcement bodies to tackle money-laundering and terrorist-related crimes. This is because amendments to South Africa's terrorism laws have given the authorities more power and backing to investigate and act.

"These guys are working hard and they're not afraid to ask for help," Els says, explaining that he is engaging intensively with authorities and experts, who want to abide by the FATF requirements and improve South Africa's legislation.

However, fellow terrorism expert Professor Hussein Solomon is less positive.

"Yes, South Africa doesn't want to be on the grey list. But the big problem is implementation and political will," he says. "The government meets with representatives of Hamas and Hezbollah. These are not terrorist organisations for them. Now, what do you do there?" he asks rhetorically.

In addition, "[The] Madlanga [Commission] proves that we don't have a department of homeland security," says Solomon. "What is very clear is that our entire security services are compromised."

He says organised crime and corruption have allowed terrorist organisations to exploit South Africa. "ISIS franchises on the African continent get money from these activities in South Africa. It makes us vulnerable, and I think our vulnerability still is there."

Therefore, he feels that South Africa's actions may be "window dressing".

"If you don't have the right people in the right places, you're in trouble, irrespective of what laws you tighten up," says Solomon.

But Els believes that several terrorism cases in the courts at the moment could have positive outcomes and prove that the state is acting.

The first is known as the "Sharia Law case". In June, South African authorities greenlit formal terrorism charges against eight suspects tied to an ISIS-linked "Sharia court" network in Johannesburg. The underground structure used religious dispute resolution and arbitration as a front to run extortion and kidnapping rings, which targeted foreign-owned businesses. The case is expected to move to the Gauteng High Court.

"This is a strong case, with the legislation backing it," says Els. "There may be more arrests."

The second case, known as the "Lichtenburg case", involves Ziyadh Hoorzook, who is accused of financing terrorism. The Hawks and the Financial Intelligence Centre allege that in November 2017, Hoorzook used a local platform to purchase and transfer Bitcoin worth R11 500 to a charity wallet overseas that was flagged as a front for a terrorist organisation in Syria.

He was granted R30 000 bail by the Lichtenburg Magistrate's Court in January 2025. Hoorzook is facing counts under the Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act (POCDATARA), alongside additional allegations regarding the Firearms Control Act and the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act. He intends to plead not guilty, claiming the crypto transfer was an innocent charitable donation.

However, Els says FATF pressure means the state is obligated to investigate the case fully, and it could be a key test of South Africa's financial compliance mechanisms.

The third ongoing case is known as the "Kliprivier case". In July 2020, security forces raided a smallholding in Kliprivier, south of Johannesburg, arresting suspects linked to a kidnapping syndicate and an ISIS funding and support network. Security sources tied the cell to the funding of international terrorism and local organised crime.

The defendants now face terrorism-related charges alongside counts of kidnapping, murder, and extortion.

The case has been transferred to the Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg, where the accused are scheduled to appear on 27 November 2026. Els is also positive about the outcome of this case.

However, he concedes that the fight against terrorism is sometimes being hindered "from the top". For example, in the case of murdered British couple Rodney and Rachel Saunders, charges of terrorism could easily have been brought against the perpetrators, he says. The killers gave Rachel's credit card details to an associate in Rotterdam, who purchased Bitcoin that was sent to ISIS. That associate has since been charged and imprisoned. However, the terrorism charges were dropped because of instructions "from above", says Els. The case would have been an ideal opportunity to show that South Africa takes terrorism seriously.

He says there are several other cases still under investigation. "It's slow, because of a lack of resources, and authorities are in the process of capacity building. But they are now equipped with better legislation, and the turnaround has definitely started."

The legislation that's been beefed up includes an amendment to POCDATARA at the end of 2022, updating anti-terrorism laws to meet the international standards set by the FATF and the United Nations.

Also in 2022, the Financial Intelligence Centre Act was significantly updated, expanding the list of accountable institutions like crypto asset service providers, and tightened beneficial ownership tracking, to meet FATF standards.

In January 2026, National Treasury published the draft General Laws Amendment Bill, in terms of the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing framework, for public comment in the Government Gazette.

National Treasury expanded on the draft Bill to incorporate amendments related to nongovernmental organisations and NPOs, and the conducting of lifestyle audits.

The draft Amendment Bill was developed together with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition; the Department of Social Development; the Financial Intelligence Centre; and financial sector regulators.

This Bill has been introduced to Parliament and resides with the Standing Committee on Finance (SCOF). That committee invited stakeholders, interested parties, and the public to submit further written comments by 10 August.

Els says if Parliament passes this Bill, it will further strengthen anti-terrorism legislation.

National Treasury's deputy director-general for tax and financial sector policy, Chris Axelson said in June that "South Africa's biggest risk of being grey listed again lies not in gaps in its laws, but in proving that those laws work."

He told the SCOF the country has entered an 18-month FATF mutual evaluation, with the first set of key reports due in July and October 2026, and an on-site visit in March 2027.

One focus of the draft Amendment Bill is the FATF's "Recommendation 8" on NPOs, where South Africa was rated only "partially compliant". The FATF found that not all NPOs exposed to terrorist-financing risk were covered by the NPO Act, that penalties were unclear, and that there was no enabling mechanism for action when suspicions arose.

National Treasury said the FATF doesn't want blanket controls over the whole NPO sector. Rather, it expects focused, proportionate, and risk-based measures aimed at organisations that may be vulnerable to terrorist-financing abuse.

Axelson said that if the Bill went through before November, it would assist South Africa's ratings with the FATF.

Extremist targets judge in antisemitism case

>>Continued from page 1

Outside court, one of Dag's supporters said, "We don't have a problem with Torah Jews, only Zionists" and Dag, too, reiterated that his only problem was with Zionists. He said his grandmother was born a Jew in British Mandate Palestine. When the *SA Jewish Report* asked why he then has a problem with Jews living in Israel, he couldn't answer.

In the case summons, the Cape SAJBD says Dag's statements describe Jewish people as "evil, morally corrupt, and wicked", and say that "Jewish people should be forcibly removed from South Africa". Dag also describes Jews as "illicitly and unjustly controlling the South African and global economy", and says that Jews "furtively use money, power, and influence to further their own interests and undermine the interests of others".

Dag also demands on social media that "Jewish people and their businesses should be boycotted or otherwise made to suffer reprisals".

He says "the Holocaust never occurred; Jewish people were not victims of genocide during the Holocaust; and Jewish people fabricated the Holocaust to pursue their own interests".

The Cape SAJBD argues that Dag's words "could reasonably be construed to demonstrate a clear intention to be harmful or incite harm and to promote or propagate hate".

It's asking the court to declare Dag's statements as "harmful, inciting harm, and propagating hate, amounting to hate speech". The organisation requests that the court order Dag to tender an unconditional apology to the South African Jewish community, donate R25 000 to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, and pay the costs of the legal application.

"We remain confident in the merits of the case and will allow the legal process to run its course," says Bloch.

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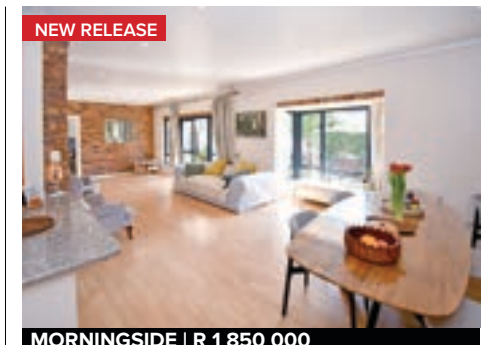
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Tefillin emerge intact from Sea Point fire

CLAUDIA GROSS

When Harel Iluz returned to an apartment destroyed by the recent Sea Point fire, he expected to find nothing intact. The roof had collapsed, the heat had destroyed most of the contents, and his belongings had been reduced to burned and damaged fragments.

Then he found his tefillin. Left inside a bag on his bed, the parchment scrolls had survived the blaze unscathed. Although the outer covering was badly damaged, the parchment scrolls inside were intact.

A rabbi subsequently confirmed that they remained kosher. "It was crazy," Iluz said. "Everything is burned from the outside, but the packet itself and the words, the tefillin, survived."

Iluz, an Israeli educator spending a year working in Cape Town's Jewish community, was one of the residents of the Dorchester on High Level Road when the building caught fire on 30 July. The blaze destroyed several apartments and displaced many residents. Iluz and his fellow educators lost almost all their belongings.

They were initially unable to return to their apartment because of the extent of the damage. "When we tried to go back, they wouldn't let us in," Iluz said. "So only a week later we went back to the apartment to see if anything had survived."

The scene he encountered was sobering. "The place is severely damaged. Nothing really survived. The heat was so strong. The roof collapsed."

While searching through the remains, Iluz remembered that he'd left his tefillin in a bag on his bed. He found the bag in the centre of the room, surrounded by the remains of his possessions, including his computer, which was a badly damaged mass.

He managed to remove the tefillin, the outside badly burned. However, the scrolls inside appeared to have survived.

Iluz didn't initially know whether the tefillin could still be used. A few days later, he returned to them and carefully opened the damaged outer covering. "The cover itself got damaged a lot," he said. "I broke it down, but the base itself and the shape of it still looked like it stayed."

The tefillin were partly burned, but there was enough of the structure remaining for Iluz to wonder whether they could be salvaged. He subsequently took them to a rabbi for examination.

Harel Iluz's bedroom after the fire

Harel Iluz's tefillin that survived the fire

The result surprised him. "All the scrolls inside perfectly survived. Nothing was affected, and the ink didn't go at all." The rabbi confirmed that the scrolls could still be used. "After getting checked, it's kosher for everything," Iluz said.

The discovery was particularly striking because of what had happened in the room. When Iluz arrived at the apartment, he'd found a satellite antenna on his bed. "I don't remember putting it there," he joked.

Most of his other belongings were destroyed. A few items that did survive were subsequently stolen, including important possessions from a drawer. A book was found intact among the remains. Its title also struck Iluz as significant. The book's Hebrew title translates to *The Power of This Moment*.

For Iluz, however, the tefillin were the most significant item to emerge from the destruction. "They shouldn't have survived," he said.

The discovery comes several weeks after Iluz and other residents fled the fire, in which 93-year-old Sam Strime died from smoke inhalation, and several families lost their homes and possessions.

During the blaze, Iluz returned to the burning building to help rescue a nanny and two young children trapped inside. The fire left him and his fellow *bochurim* temporarily without a home. They have since found somewhere to stay and are preparing to return to Israel in September.

Despite the destruction, Iluz said the discovery of the tefillin had given him something important to hold on to. The objects may be damaged on the outside, but the handwritten Torah passages inside remain intact and kosher for use.

For Iluz, that makes them more than one of the few possessions to survive the fire. They are the part of his Jewish practice that emerged from an apartment where almost everything else was destroyed.

Israel cricket team not bowled out by hostility in Finland

GILANA LAB

For Israel's national cricket side, with its South African team manager and two South African players, competing in Finland from 14 to 21 August meant dealing with far more than competition on the pitch.

There were anti-Israel protesters at every match and tight security was constant around the team, who were holed up in a hotel when not playing. Some opposing players were hostile towards them and they had a security scare.

Yet South African team manager Joanne Tankle says none of this diminished what it means to represent Israel or the determination to grow Israeli cricket.

"When I put on that kit on the first day, I actually cried with pride," Tankle says. "With all the hardships we went through there and the people not being nice to us, I would do it over and over and over again without even blinking an eye."

Israel finished sixth overall at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Europe Sub-Regional Qualifier C in Finland, doing so without some players it had hoped to field. "Two of our key players were injured and couldn't come, and some of our other top players couldn't get time off from the IDF [Israel Defense Forces]" Tankle says. "All things considered, we really did well. Israel made their mark."

Before Israel's opening match, Galina Frenkel, Israel's deputy ambassador to Finland, came to the ground to wish the team luck and present caps to the four players making their international debuts. Two of them were South Africans Josh Marks and Benjamin Lazarus. "It was wonderful to see her there and feel her support," says Tankle.

That warmth wasn't reflected in the team's interactions with its opponents. "There were nine other teams, and we all stayed in one hotel. We ate breakfast together, but nobody engaged with us," Tankle said. "We got a cold shoulder from everybody, except the organisers, who were unbelievable."

That treatment sometimes extended onto the field. After the toss before Israel's match against Germany, the Israeli captain offered his German counterpart a pennant. "He said he didn't want it," Tankle says. "I think that's quite poor sportsmanship."

Israel later faced Greece in a crucial game. "If we hadn't played the game, Israel would have advanced to third place. If we played the game and lost, we would have been knocked out of the playoff," Tankle said. "So we had to win that game." Israel won by one run, but Tankle said only eight Greek players shook hands with the Israelis afterwards. One Greek player later told one of Israel's South African-born players that the teams had been warned of a security threat surrounding Israel and advised to keep their distance.

Beyond the boundary ropes, pro-Palestinian protesters appeared at every Israeli match, according to Tankle. At one, children were given a loudspeaker and joined the chanting. "They called us war criminals, state killers, doctor murderers, journalist murderers," she said. The experience was particularly painful because a man accompanying the delegation for additional support and security had lost his daughter and son-in-law on 7 October. "This broken man was sitting there, and those people were chanting."

However, just metres away was a very different scene. "In the stand close to where we were sitting were Finnish Jews waving the Israeli flag. They were singing softly but beautifully, *'Am Yisrael Chai!'*"

At another match, a Finnish man walking past the ground stopped to speak to the Israeli security team. "He asked me, 'Are you with this team?' and I said yes," Tankle says. "He said, 'I commend you because I want you to know that not all people in Finland behave the way those people are behaving. We're not all against you.'"

Four security guards accompanied the delegation, there was a substantial police presence at all matches, and the Israelis were permitted to leave the hotel only to travel to games. One evening, while they were eating dinner, an ambulance parked outside raised security concerns. "We were evacuated to our rooms as a security precaution because the ambulance tested positive for chemicals, but it turned out that it was a false alarm," Tankle says.

Despite it all, she says the players remained focused. "They actually rattled our opposition more than they rattled us," she says of the protesters. "They just gave me a headache. That's all I can say."

For Tankle, that resilience matters because the bigger goal is ensuring Israeli cricket continues to grow. "Cricket is actually quite big, not as big as in other countries, but we've got a big programme with children," she said. "There are women in Israel playing cricket, and there are quite a few clubs. We just want to build on it and grow the game."

The national players aren't professionals, making that development difficult. "They've never had a full-team practice because these guys obviously aren't professional players, so they don't get paid," Tankle said. "They've got family to support, jobs, and also the army." Israel is also looking abroad for Jewish cricketers who may have the ability to play internationally but don't have that opportunity in their home countries.

Tankle became involved with Israel Cricket after the 2022 Maccabi Games and now works from South Africa, making contacts and connections for the organisation. "I'm passionate about it," she says. "I want Israel to succeed in cricket. In everything, I want Israel to succeed."

Finland demonstrated both the challenges facing Israeli cricket and the determination of those trying to build it. Israel must continue competing to improve its ranking, attract funding, find players, and increase the sport's exposure. "We have to keep playing tournaments," Tankle says. "We have to keep on going and going until we get to the top."

After everything they experienced in Finland, she remains convinced they will get there. "Their passion, resilience, and determination is unbelievable," Tankle said.

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Rugby fans walk from Glenhazel to Ellis Park

CLAUDIA GROSS

For observant Johannesburg Jewish rugby fans, getting to Ellis Park for the Springboks' clash with New Zealand on Saturday, 22 August, meant walking kilometres, joining friends and family along the way, and stopping at a synagogue for Mincha.

The walk has become an increasingly established part of the experience for some rugby fans. This year, between 70 and 90 people joined at different points along a planned route from Glenhazel to the stadium in New Doornfontein.

For people who observe Shabbat, walking offers a way to attend a major rugby fixture without travelling by car.

David Pimstein and his family began keeping Shabbat in 2010. Since then, family members have regularly walked to Ellis Park for big games, including Super Rugby finals.

He said the organised walk began to take shape in 2022, when SA Jewish Board of Deputies chairperson Zev Krengel and his partner, Rina Subotzky, arranged for a bakkie carrying drinks, snacks, and other supplies to follow the walkers. "Up until then, there were maybe 10 people that used to walk," Pimstein said. "I think there were lots of different groups that walked."

The groups were consolidated in 2022 for a major New Zealand fixture, when about 30 people walked together. Since then, the numbers have grown. A WhatsApp group with about 65 members was used to coordinate the walk.

Pimstein said the walkers are mostly people who keep Shabbat, but many who don't "come and walk with us for the vibe".

Dorrin Lewis, who has taken part in the walk three times, helped lead the group this year. He said about 30 people left Glenhazel and another 30 joined in Sydenham. There were scheduled meeting points along the route, allowing others to join. Lewis estimated that the group eventually reached between 80 and 90 people.

Subotzky said she and Krengel organised the follow car with drinks and snacks for everyone walking. She didn't participate in the walk herself this year due to another engagement, but her children joined the group.

One of the significant additions this year was a Mincha service at the Lions Shul, close to Ellis Park. The flyer for the service invited the walkers to join Mincha and also advertised l'chaims and snacks before and after the service.

Mendel Medalie helped arrange for the synagogue to be opened for the group and for someone to conduct the service, with his son also involved in the Torah reading.

Pimstein said some people who hadn't taken part in the walk also came to the old shul. "We had a full-on Mincha service in the Lions Shul, which was fantastic. There was a lot of spirit and singing."

Another man, who took part in the walk but asked not to be named, estimated that about 70 people converged at the Victory Theatre in Orange Grove after starting from areas including Illovo, Athol, Melrose, and Glenhazel.

"The vibe on the street was amazing and reminded me of 1995 *gees* [spirit], with cars hooting, l'chaims, and shouting for the Boks," he said.

Barnett described the Mincha as a "green and gold service", with singing and dancing. Comedian Nik Rabinowitz was also present and was invited to participate.

Pimstein's wife and two daughters joined him this year, meaning that six members of his family walked together. "It's a nice way of still making the effort to show that you're keeping Shabbat and still being able to go to these wonderful events while living in Africa," he said.

He acknowledged that the relationship between attending rugby on Shabbat and Jewish observance is not straightforward. "It's a tough one. The rabbis will tell you it's not necessarily in the spirit of Shabbat."

For Lewis, the experience is also about the social connections created by the walk. "There's no specific moment," he said when asked what stood out most. Instead, he mentioned people meeting others they might not otherwise have encountered.

"It just gets bigger and bigger the more people hear about it," he said. "For me, I love the rugby and the game's great, but a highlight is actually the walk."

The journey doesn't end with a return walk. Participants arrange alternative transport home after the game.

The combination of the walk, the Mincha service, and the match created a route between Jewish communal life and one of South Africa's most prominent sporting traditions. For the organisers and participants, the growing numbers suggest that the walk has become more than a practical way of reaching Ellis Park. It is a recurring part of the rugby experience for a group of Johannesburg Jews who want to attend games together.

The Moroccan thread in the Jewish tapestry

GILANA LAB

The smell of spices, the sound of *piyyutim* (Jewish liturgical poems and songs), tables crowded with couscous and tagines, and customs passed from one generation to the next are all part of a Jewish culture more than 2 000 years in the making.

Moroccan Jewry is one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world and though most if its members no longer live in Morocco, their food, music, religious traditions, and distinctive customs remain a vibrant part of Jewish life around the world.

Moroccan Jewry is one colourful thread in the theme for this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, Le Festival des Juifs: A Tapestry of Jewish Culture.

Photo: Howard Sackstein

Jewish presence in the territory of modern-day Morocco stretches back more than two millennia. The community was later transformed by the arrival of Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal from the end of the 15th century. These Sephardi newcomers, known as *megorashim* (expelled Jews), joined the established Moroccan Jews, the *toshavim* (residents), creating a community influenced by Jewish, North African, Spanish, and Arab cultures.

Over generations, that mixture developed into something distinctly Moroccan Jewish.

Food became one of the most enduring expressions of that identity. Couscous, slow-cooked Shabbat dishes, breads, preserved lemons, spices, and an abundance of sweets became entwined with Jewish celebrations and family traditions. Mimouna, celebrated immediately after Pesach, is perhaps one of Moroccan Jewry's most recognisable traditions. Tables are laden with sweet foods, including mufleta, a type of crepe, as families open their homes to neighbours and friends.

Yet this rich culture developed alongside a complicated history. There were periods in which Jews prospered as merchants, artisans, scholars, and advisers, as well as periods of violence and persecution. In a number of Moroccan cities, Jews lived in designated quarters known as mellahs.

One young woman came to embody Moroccan Jews' determination to hold onto their identity. Solica Hatchouel was born in Tangier in 1817 and raised in a deeply Jewish home. As a teenager, she was accused of having converted to Islam, something she steadfastly denied. Given the choice between renouncing Judaism and death, she refused to abandon her faith. Hatchouel was executed in Fez in 1834 at just 17 years old. She became known as "Sol ha-Tzaddikah" (Sol the Righteous), a symbol of courage and devotion whose grave in Fez became a place of pilgrimage. Almost two centuries later, descendants of Hatchouel's family live in South Africa and are carrying her remarkable story into another generation.

By the middle of the 20th century, Morocco was home to roughly a quarter of a million Jews, but that changed dramatically in the decades surrounding the establishment of Israel, when most Moroccan Jews left the country. Many settled in Israel, while others built new lives in France, Canada, and elsewhere.

They may have left Morocco, but Morocco didn't leave them. Recipes crossed borders, melodies were sung in new synagogues, Mimouna was celebrated in other countries, and family customs were handed from one generation to another. In Israel in particular, Moroccan Jewish culture has become an integral part of the country's religious, culinary, musical, and cultural landscape.

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south african Jewish Report

After trust is broken

Spending a weekend absorbing information from so many exceptional and learned people, as we do at Limmud every year, is phenomenal. Every year, I come home at the end of the weekend with new knowledge and fresh perspectives. It takes a while for the learning to sink in and find its place in how I understand the world.

And every year, I learn more in one weekend than I do in months. Sometimes, what I learn isn't easy to assimilate. But that's wonderful because I believe we should always be challenging our preconceived ideas and beliefs. How else do we keep learning and growing?

One of the many focuses of this year's Limmud, and one I was extremely interested in, was the coming Israeli election. Whatever my personal political preferences are is irrelevant because I don't get a vote. What interests me far more is to understand what matters to Israelis and how the events of the past few years have reshaped the national conversation.

It appears that for the first time in a long time, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces genuine competition. To date, the man has remarkable staying power, having served for a cumulative period of nearly 19 years across three separate stints in office. Other than monarchs, very few modern leaders have remained in power that long. Vladimir Putin, being one, has ruled Russia for more than 26 years, and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been in power for 23 years so far.

Many Israelis believe they are safe today only because of Bibi. Others are *gatvol*, to borrow the wonderful Afrikaans term, and frustrated with him and his extreme right and ultra-Orthodox governmental bedfellows.

While it was great to hear about the options at Limmud, it was clear that most parties with a realistic chance of success sit somewhere on the right of the political spectrum. I came to discover this weekend that talking about left or right wing, one is essentially speaking about where the party stands in terms of Palestinians and the future of the West Bank (or Judea and Samaria) and Gaza.

Considering this, the left, as it used to be, has all but disappeared from mainstream politics. Security concerns have dominated Israeli society since 7 October and made conversations about a future peace settlement almost impossible right now. It has, for most people, been pushed aside by more immediate fears and priorities.

For many among us, this may be frustrating. How can people not be considering peace? But listening to Israelis grappling with the aftermath of 7 October and the war reminded me that, for many, survival feels far more urgent than any long-term political vision.

One of the most memorable presentations I attended was by Israeli archaeologist and historian Dr Yoram Haimi. He is a kibbutznik from the Gaza border. He wasn't speaking as a politician or commentator, but as someone whose life and whose community was irreparably transformed on 7 October.

As he spoke, I found myself thinking less about politics and more about people. About loss. About grief, and about trust. Nearly three years after that fateful day, his emotional and psychological scars remain visible. What struck me most was not his anger, although he spoke about that, but his heartbreak.

This lifelong leftie and peacenik says he is still angry. He finds it difficult to move beyond what he sees as the ultimate betrayal by Palestinians whom he, his friends, and family trusted implicitly after years of working closely together on his kibbutz.

It wasn't just about taking sides, it was about them giving detailed, private information to the terrorists to enable them to commit the horrors of 7 October.

Haimi described a profound collapse of trust, and listening to him made me realise how easy it is for those of us watching from afar to underestimate the depth of the trauma caused. For people who spent decades building relationships, encouraging cooperation, and believing that shared humanity could overcome conflict, the events of 7 October were more than a tragedy. They represented a devastating betrayal.

Trust is an extraordinary thing. It takes years to build, but moments to destroy.

So many of the Israelis living along the Gaza border were committed supporters of dialogue and coexistence. Many still want to believe there is a path forward. They still want to believe peace is possible. But wanting peace and believing it is achievable aren't the same thing.

The most haunting question raised during the discussion was also the simplest: even if peace remains the goal, who do you trust enough to begin the journey?

I can also understand that Gazans who have felt the impact of the war are unlikely to trust Israelis, even if they hate Hamas. They've witnessed Israel destroying Gaza in order to take down Hamas. Clearly the pain is not one-sided.

Acknowledging that there are no easy solutions, no direct or obvious paths to peace, is hard to swallow, but a reality. What I realised at Limmud was that speaking of a two-state solution and sitting at negotiating tables are worlds away from Israel right now. We were left with many uncomfortable questions and difficult realities.

Security remains a dominant concern for Israelis. Ensuring that the vulnerabilities exposed on 7 October are never repeated is understandably high on the national agenda.

Many Israelis are also frustrated by the exemptions granted to large numbers of ultra-Orthodox men and believe the burden of military service should be shared more equally. Concerns about judicial reform and the balance of power within Israeli democracy continue to feature prominently.

Another issue that troubles many Israelis is violence by extremist settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. For those who believe deeply in the rule of law, such actions are morally indefensible and fundamentally at odds with the values they want Israeli society to uphold.

What I carried home from Limmud wasn't a new political position. It was something more valuable. A deeper understanding.

As I allow the Limmud learning to settle in my head, I still wish for peace, but have a better understanding of what the painful facts on the ground are – and they are complicated. There is nothing straightforward or simple about the situation Israel finds itself in.

Shabbat Shalom
Peta Krost
Editor

Israeli voters just want a leader they can trust

OPINION

PAULA SLIER

I overheard a group of political science students last week discussing Israel's coming 27 October election. In the middle of the conversation, one announced, "I'm a Bennettist." Everyone around the table laughed. So did I. Perhaps I'd heard the word before and simply hadn't registered it, but this time, it stopped me in my tracks.

It wasn't the support for former prime minister Naftali Bennett, who is seeking a political comeback, that caught my attention. Israelis have always backed politicians with passion. It was the language. Hearing someone casually define themselves by a politician's name made me wonder whether I was witnessing something bigger.

For years, Israelis have spoken about "Bibists", a term that's come to mean much more than people who vote for Benjamin Netanyahu. Depending on who's using it, the word is either worn as a badge of honour or hurled as an insult. Either way, everybody knows exactly what it means. "Bibist" has come to describe a political identity, carrying assumptions about a person's worldview, values, and loyalties. The term has become so embedded in Israeli political culture that it's not unusual to see cars with stickers reading "Bibist on board".

Whether "Bennettist" catches on or quietly disappears is almost beside the point.

I've heard Israelis argue about military strategy while sitting in bomb shelters. I've covered elections where they argued about peace. This time, I find myself listening less to what they're arguing about than to the language they're using to describe themselves.

After more than three decades as a journalist, I've learned that populations reveal themselves not only through how they vote, but through the words they invent. Political language often tells us what's happening beneath the surface long before election results do. Sometimes a single word captures a political mood better than an opinion poll ever could. This isn't just my observation. Political scientists have warned for years about the growing personalisation of Israeli politics. Their concern isn't that charismatic leaders exist, but that political parties risk becoming vehicles for personalities rather than institutions built around ideas and policies.

Photo: Israeli Government Press Office

When I first began covering Israeli elections some 18 years ago, people tended to identify first with parties. They were Labour supporters, Likud supporters, Meretz supporters, Shas supporters, or National Religious Party supporters. Leaders mattered enormously, but it was the parties that carried the history, the ideology, and, often, the loyalty. That balance has gradually shifted. Netanyahu became bigger than Likud. Yair Lapid built a movement, Yesh Atid, closely associated with his own name. Benny Gantz became inseparable from Blue and White. Bennett even registered a party bearing his own surname, Bennett 2026.

If politics is becoming more personal, the changing fortunes of Gantz, former defence minister and leader of the Blue and White party, and Gadi Eisenkot, leader of the Yashar party, help explain why. Both entered politics after distinguished careers as Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces. Both presented themselves as pragmatic alternatives to Netanyahu. Yet while Gantz's support has weakened in recent polling, Eisenkot has emerged as one of Netanyahu's strongest challengers. Those numbers may well change before election day. Israeli elections have a habit of humbling pollsters.

The polling is interesting. The question behind it is even more so: Why is Eisenkot resonating now?

Part of the answer may lie in the moment Israel finds itself in. After almost three years marked by the trauma of 7 October, the war in Gaza, conflict with Hezbollah, direct confrontation with Iran, and continuing political division at home, many Israelis seem less interested in political theatre than in judgement. Eisenkot also appears to retain something Gantz has found harder to hold onto, the perception that he remains relatively untouched by the compromises and disappointments that inevitably come with years in frontline politics.

At first glance that seems to reinforce exactly what political scientists have warned about for years, the growing personalisation of Israeli politics. But I wonder whether we have the cause and effect the wrong way round. I don't think Israelis are investing more faith in personalities because they care less about ideas. Rather, I suspect they're doing so because they have become less confident that parties and institutions can deliver those ideas. In a political system where parties regularly split, merge, and reinvent themselves, leaders become the only constant. Trust shifts from institutions to individuals.

That doesn't necessarily make personalisation healthy. Democracies are strongest when voters choose between competing ideas and institutions rather than investing too much hope in individual leaders. But Israel's recent history helps explain why personalities have become so important. After years of political deadlock, repeated elections, national trauma, and war, many Israelis seem to be asking a different question. Not simply "Who agrees with me?", but "Whose judgement do I trust?"

Perhaps that's why hearing someone casually describe themselves as a "Bennettist" felt significant. It wasn't really about Naftali Bennett. It was about the possibility that the language Israelis use is beginning to reflect a deeper shift in how they relate to politics itself.

Sometimes political change doesn't announce itself through election results. Sometimes it begins with a single new word. Perhaps the personalisation of Israeli politics isn't the cause of today's political uncertainty. Perhaps it's the consequence of it.

• *Paula Slier is a veteran journalist and foreign correspondent who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. She writes about media, geopolitics, and information warfare.*

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Nathan synonymous with the growth of SA golf

CLAUDIA GROSS

Just days after receiving a national lifetime achievement award, Selwyn Nathan is looking back on more than five decades in South African golf.

Nathan was handed the Steve Tshwete Lifetime Achievement Award at the 19th South African Sports Awards at Sun City on 23 August. He was one of three recipients of the award, alongside boxing official Siya Vabaza-Booi and veteran *Sowetan* photographer Veli Nhlapo.

Nathan has spent most of his adult life helping to shape professional golf in South Africa. Along the way, he helped build international opportunities for South African golfers and expanded access for women and historically disadvantaged players. Now, he's stepped down from his executive role, although he remains on the Sunshine Tour board as a non-executive member.

For Nathan, the story began close to home. He grew up near Observatory Golf Course in Johannesburg. As a child, he and his friend Gary Wilson would sit under a tree watching the Henning brothers play. "We would spend more time on the golf course than we would at school," he says.

That early fascination developed into a career that would take Nathan across South Africa and around the world. His first involvement with the Sunshine Tour came in 1969, when he was a young assistant professional working alongside Brian Henning and Helen Bland. He later became involved in promoting tournaments before serving as commissioner on several occasions.

The role of commissioner wasn't always a permanent position for Nathan. He repeatedly stepped back into the job when successors left or when the Tour needed his experience. He eventually became executive director, a position he held until June this year.

His career coincided with major changes in South African golf. Nathan was closely involved in the Unity Programme during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It brought together previously separate golf organisations during the country's transition to democracy.

He remembers the discrimination that existed within golf before that. One of the most painful examples was Sewsunker "Papwa" Sewgolum, the golfer who faced discrimination because he was an Indian South African. Sewgolum was prevented from entering clubhouses and, after winning tournaments, was sometimes forced to receive his trophy outside.

Selwyn Nathan

Nathan later helped establish the Papwa Sewgolum Class on the Sunshine Tour. The programme created opportunities for historically disadvantaged professional golfers to compete on the Tour. For Nathan, increasing access has been a recurring theme of his career.

He was involved in creating the Sunshine Ladies Tour about a decade ago. The women's professional circuit has since expanded its schedule and created a pathway for South African women to compete internationally.

Nathan points to the growth of the women's game as one of the developments of which he is proud. When the Sunshine Ladies Tour began, it had a small number of events and limited funding. It now provides professional opportunities for women golfers and includes tournaments co-sanctioned with the Ladies European Tour.

The development of young golfers has been another focus. Nathan says South Africa continues to produce talented players because of the structures supporting the game. He points to the success of junior and amateur programmes, as well as South African players progressing through international pathways. He describes this as a "conveyor belt" of talented young golfers.

That pathway has also been central to the Sunshine Tour's international development. Nathan represented the Tour at the founding meeting of the International Federation of PGA Tours in 1996. He later worked with international golf administrators, including three PGA Tour commissioners and four chief executives of the DP World Tour.

He was involved in developing the strategic alliance between the Sunshine Tour, DP World Tour, and PGA Tour. The resultant "runway of opportunity" allows South African professionals to progress through international levels of professional golf.

Nathan also played a significant role in the creation of the Nedbank Golf Challenge. He was part of the team with golfer Gary Player, tycoon Sol Kerzner, and promoter Sam Feldman that launched the tournament in honour of Player.

But among all his projects, Nathan identifies the revival of the Soweto Country Club as particularly meaningful. The project grew from relationships Nathan developed with black golfers and organisations during unity talks. He had long believed the golf course could be rebuilt into a proper facility. Eventually, he and others began raising money to renovate the clubhouse and then rebuild the course. International and South African support followed. The PGA Tour contributed funding, while South African companies provided financial support and other assistance.

The result was a rebuilt course in the heart of Soweto. The club now has more than 100 members and hosts golf days and professional tournaments. Nathan describes the transformation as extending beyond golf. The surrounding community has also changed. "People are very proud of it," Nathan says.

He says golf has created friendships and relationships that have lasted decades. Those relationships have often helped him find support for projects that benefit the sport.

Nathan believes this spirit of contribution is one of the strengths of South African golf. Many people involved in the game have served on boards and supported projects without being paid. Their motivation, he says, has often been their love of golf.

That environment has taken him around the world and allowed him to build friendships across the international golfing community.

His Jewish identity has also been part of that journey. The revival of the Soweto Country Club brought this into sharp focus when veteran anti-apartheid activist Dr Andrew Mlangeni initially questioned what Nathan, as a Jewish man, could achieve in Soweto.

Years later, Mlangeni stood on the revitalised course with tears in his eyes after hitting a drive. Gary Player was also present. For Nathan, the moment reflected what could happen when relationships, resources, and determination came together.

As he looks back, Nathan says his greatest source of pride is not one tournament or position. It is the foundation built over more than 50 years. He points to the international relationships established by the Sunshine Tour, the growth of the women's game, opportunities for young professionals, and the revival of the Soweto Country Club.

He believes the next generation of administrators can continue that work.

Nathan is now looking forward to playing more golf and spending time with his eight grandchildren. After a career that began under a tree beside Observatory Golf Course, he says he has few regrets. "I've got great friendships and great memories. I wouldn't change it for anything."

Anstey recognised with Alderman title

CLAUDIA GROSS

Errol Anstey has been awarded the title of Alderman after 16 years as a City of Cape Town councillor. It recognises a political career that began decades before he entered local government.

Anstey, who isn't standing for another term, says the honour is a fitting conclusion to his time on council. "It's nice recognition because I consider I did a lot of hard work over the past 16 years," he says.

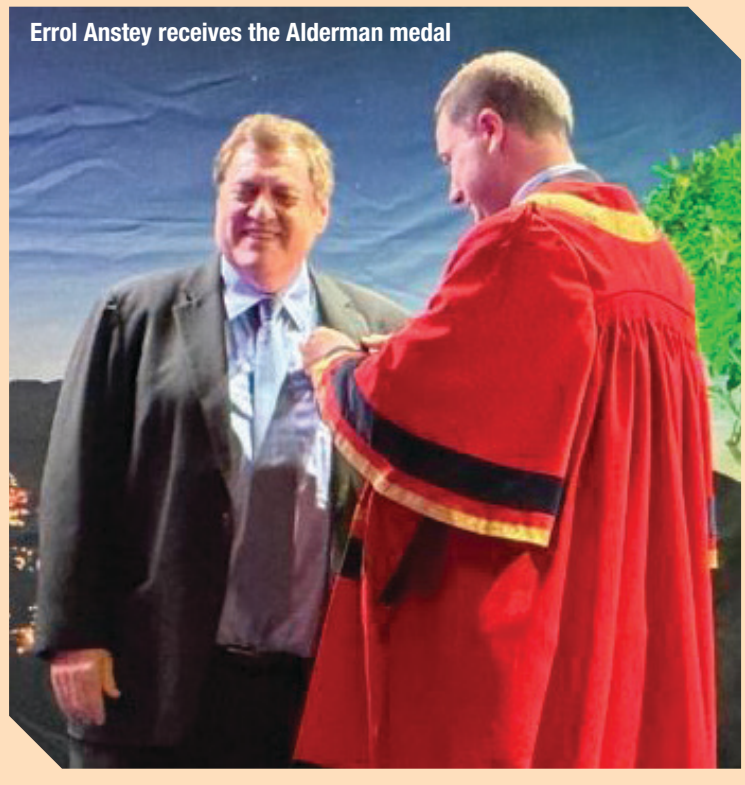
Ironically, he wouldn't have received the title if his own push for stricter qualifying criteria had succeeded.

The title of Alderman is awarded to councillors based on length of service and responsibilities held. Anstey says the system previously worked differently. Historically, serving as mayor automatically resulted in becoming an Alderman, but about 25 years ago, Cape Town introduced a points-based system. Now councillors who serve for 20 years can qualify through their length of service. Those with at least 15 years can also qualify by accumulating additional points through positions such as chairing a portfolio committee.

Anstey has served for 16 years and qualified through this system after earning additional points for his portfolio chairperson role. But for the past two, he had tried to change the rules, proposing that a councillor should serve at least 20 years before qualifying.

Had that amendment passed, Anstey would not have qualified for the honour himself.

"I was prepared to sacrifice being an Alderman to make it more prestigious," he says.


Errol Anstey receives the Alderman medal

Nevertheless, Anstey's political involvement predates his time in council by several decades. It began when he was a teenager. "The thing then was to end apartheid," he says. He became involved with the Progressive Party, which later became the Democratic Party, and remained committed to its political principles.

He has worked on every national election, by-election, municipal election, and two referendums since 1974.

Anstey became a city councillor in 2011 after being encouraged to stand because the caucus wanted more business people involved. He was elected on the proportional representation list.

During his second term, he was elected deputy chief whip. He was re-elected to the position during his third term and later became a portfolio chairperson responsible for innovation and ease of doing business.

Much of his work in council has focused on making it easier for residents and businesses to interact with the City. Anstey says his portfolio work involved reviewing systems and processes to make them more efficient and reduce delays.

Among the initiatives he highlights are online appointments for driving and vehicle licensing, faster processing of certain permits, and improvements to the City's reporting systems. He also chaired a task team focused on improving the collection of traffic fines. Anstey says the collection rate quadrupled over a period of about 10 years.

Another major focus has been the Cape Town Stadium, with Anstey involved in reducing its losses. Asked about the legacy he hopes to leave, he told the *SA Jewish Report*, "For the City of Cape Town, it would be turning the Cape Town Stadium into profit within two years."

His political career has also been closely connected to his Jewish identity. Anstey says his Habonim upbringing had a major influence on both his political involvement and his approach to community service. "My values come from Habonim and obviously from my Jewish background," he says. He believes the movement's emphasis on service, community, Zionism, Judaism, and social responsibility shaped his activism.

Michael Bagraim, a longtime political colleague and Member of Parliament, says Anstey's contribution extends well beyond his formal responsibilities as a councillor. He describes Anstey as an "unsung resource" for the Jewish community for many years. Jewish communal organisations regularly turned to Anstey when they encountered municipal or council problems.

Bagraim recalls an incident involving a major Friday Night Live event at the Gardens Synagogue in Cape Town. The event was expected to attract more than 1 000 people, but a planned electricity interruption threatened to disrupt it.

He contacted Anstey, who provided a contact who could help resolve the problem. Bagraim says the electricity was ultimately restored for the event. This was one of many occasions on which Anstey helped Jewish organisations navigate municipal issues. "He under-promises and over-delivers," Bagraim says.

Anstey's knowledge of City officials, departments, and processes also made him an important resource for both councillors and community members, Bagraim says.

He believes it will be a significant loss for the Jewish community when Anstey leaves council. Attempts were made to persuade him to stand for another term, but Anstey had declined.

Helen Zille, former premier of the Western Cape and a longtime colleague of Anstey, also praised his contribution. "Errol goes back to the early days of the Progressive Party. He was a stalwart in Sea Point since his youth."

Zille describes Anstey as someone with "staying power" who takes commitment seriously. She says he remained dedicated to advancing democracy in South Africa, with a particular focus on Cape Town. "He's made a major contribution to his city and country," Zille told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Errol thoroughly deserves the honour that has been bestowed on him."

For Anstey, the title is less about personal recognition than the work that preceded it. He says one of his mentors, former Progressive Party leader Colin Eglin, used to remind him that people are eventually forgotten. Anstey says this shaped his view of what constitutes a meaningful legacy.

"I left the place in a better situation than when I found it," he says. He believes that if people build on what they inherit and leave it in a better condition, they have achieved something worthwhile.

As Anstey prepares to leave elected office, the Alderman title provides formal recognition of a political career that began with anti-apartheid activism and continued through 16 years of local government service.

For a man who says he was never particularly interested in recognition, the honour marks the end of one chapter of public service. It also leaves the Cape Town Jewish community without a longstanding link to the City's corridors of power.

What justice sounds like

PERSONAL STORY

MICHALYA SCHONWALD MOSS

People often ask me what justice looks like. At Limmud Johannesburg, an archaeologist and survivor of 7 October taught me something else.

He taught me what justice sounds like.

Dr Yoram Haimi came to Limmud South Africa representing the Israel Antiquities Authority, to present on his life's work: excavating sites of mass atrocity. Co-directing the archaeological excavations at Sobibor in Poland from 2007 to 2020, his team uncovered thousands of personal objects, among them a small pendant engraved with the words "Mazal Tov" and a date of birth. Yad Vashem researchers eventually traced it to Karoline Cohn, a young girl from Frankfurt whose exact fate remains unknown. She was deported to the Minsk ghetto in 1941. Sometime before the ghetto was emptied in 1943, her pendant reached Sobibor and was lost along the path to the gas chambers.

For Yoram, this work is deeply personal. He understands that a fragment of evidence can return us from the enormity of mass atrocity to the individual. But this weekend, I discovered that the archaeologist who has spent decades recovering other people's stories was carrying a story of his own that he needed us to hear.

Yoram lives on Kibbutz Mefalsim, one of the communities attacked on 7 October. He had come to South Africa with his wife and adult daughter, their first time leaving Israel since the attacks.

He mentioned to me that Limmud Johannesburg hadn't asked him to share his 7 October experience. Then came the words that stopped me, "They're missing out. I'm missing out."

Almost three years have passed since 7 October, but for survivors, the past remains relentlessly present. Yoram and his family are still navigating the daily reality of its aftermath, and he wanted to tell us what had happened.

No survivor owes us their testimony. The question is never "Tell me what happened", but rather "Would you like to tell us?" Yoram's answer was yes.

I approached the Limmud organisers and, to their enormous credit, they listened. There was no empty slot on the schedule, but by the following day, a space had been made, and the room was packed.

Dr Yoram Haimi

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

That morning, Yoram had taken us into his excavations of the past. That afternoon, the archaeologist became the witness.

He took us through what had happened to him, his family, and his community. Photographs and footage of the destruction filled the screen. You could hear a pin drop. At the back of the room, his daughter stood with tears in her eyes. Something was happening that went far beyond a standard presentation. We were holding a family.

Yoram also showed how, after 7 October, the tools he used to excavate antiquity acquired a grim new purpose. His team helped search the shattered communities for human remains, including those of peace activist Vivian Silver at Kibbutz Be'eri. For weeks, her family had lived in the agonising belief that she had been abducted to Gaza. It took five weeks to formally identify her remains through DNA testing. It was a bone fragment, recovered from the ruins of her home by Yoram's team, that finally ended that uncertainty. A fragment gave her family the truth, and truth finally made mourning possible.

At October 7 Justice Without Borders, a pro-bono legal team representing survivors and bereaved families of 7 October across multiple jurisdictions, our purpose is to place them at the centre of the pursuit of justice: transforming their voices into legal standing, and their right to the truth into legal record. Justice for the victims of 7 October is not guaranteed. It must be established in a court of law, or it remains vulnerable to denial and erasure.

While this wasn't the first time I had witnessed a survivor share their story, I felt deeply honoured to play a small part in his healing. He needed a space where his pain was held.

That afternoon, I understood what justice sounds like. It sounded like a community listening: not debating, interpreting, or explaining, but bearing witness.

We are only now, approaching the three-year mark, seeing a surge of survivors ready to come forward. When justice is conducted reparatively, when testimony is received with dignity, helplessness transforms into agency. Survivors become authors of the historical record, not merely its objects.

As one 7 October survivor we represent recently told us, "When I stand before the court, I am no longer just a victim. I am reclaiming my story and my power. This is how I heal."

There is no peace without justice. If a victim is not heard, or their experience is denied, they cannot heal. Accountability must follow, but being heard is the foundation of it.

After Yoram finished speaking, he thanked me, simply stating, "I feel complete."

For that hour, the room held Yoram, his wife, and his daughter. We cannot all prosecute crimes, collect forensic evidence, or argue cases before courts. But within our broader legal strategy, maintaining a humane structure and direct communication with every survivor is something we hold close.

Each survivor is an individual story, an entire world, a life. We know how to do the legal work. But each of us has a part to play, including through what we say and how we speak about it. We can create communities in which victims do not become invisible and can rediscover hope.

Sometimes the most important session at a conference is the one that was never on the programme.

People often ask me what justice looks like. This weekend, Yoram taught me what justice sounds like.

It sounds like being heard.

- *Michalya Schonwald Moss is the chief advancement officer at October 7 Justice Without Borders, a pro-bono public-interest law firm providing direct legal representation to survivors and bereaved families across global jurisdictions.*

Talmudic lessons in *The Simpsons*

LEE TANKLE

The animated characters of Bart and Lisa Simpson are unlikely to be front of mind when considering the Talmud, but in one classic episode of *The Simpsons*, the siblings turn to Jewish texts to help reunite Krusty the Clown with his rabbi father.

At Limmud Johannesburg, Rabbi Dan Slipakoff, from Temple Israel in Boston and a staunch *The Simpsons* fan, used this classic season-three episode, "Like Father, Like Clown", to examine how the cartoon series incorporates Jewish tradition in its storytelling.

What begins as a light-hearted attempt to reconcile Krusty with his father soon draws on Talmudic teachings about honouring parents, forgiveness, and the importance of bringing people back together.

Slipakoff drew on the writings of Rabbi Noah Gradofsky, another fan of *The Simpsons*, who had a passing idea to turn an episode into a mock page of Talmud.

"Deep *Simpsons* fandom has a lot of similarities with Jewish tradition. Both are shared languages for those who speak it: you can quote a chapter and verse to your friends, and they know exactly what you're talking about," Slipakoff said. "You don't need to clarify further. It has a lot to teach us. And so, this idea of this inverted midrash is to go outside in, to see a piece of art, of culture, and say, 'Ah, I can connect this to Torah', thereby enhancing an appreciation of both."

In the episode of *The Simpsons*, viewers are introduced to the idea that the rather adult clown is descended from a long line of rabbis and has a lot of religious trauma.

This all starts when, at the Simpsons' dinner table, Krusty is asked to say grace and he surprises the family by reciting Hamotzi. He reveals that his real name is not Krusty the Clown but rather Herschel Krustofsky.

He says that when he was a child, he told his father, Rabbi Hyman Krustofsky, that he wanted to be a clown. His father disapproved and, after discovering his stage persona, shunned him, and they haven't spoken in 25 years.

"This is our origin story here. Krusty is a clown. His father doesn't approve of him being a clown. They are separated," Slipakoff said. "If you're taking Rabbi Krustofsky's arguments, he preaches obedience. Krusty got himself into this situation by not following his father's commands and not respecting his father."

The Simpson children take it upon themselves to confront Rabbi Krustofsky and try to reunite the two. They use three passages from the Talmud to try and break through to him, to no avail.

"In 1991, on prime-time Fox TV, *The Simpsons* was becoming one of the biggest shows in the world, and Bart Simpson was quoting the Talmud on prime-time television. Unbelievable. I think it goes over a lot of Jews' heads, and definitely over the heads of most of the non-Jewish community. But it's really something to marvel at," said Slipakoff.

However, what breaks through to Rabbi Krustofsky is a quote about the Jewish people from American singer and actor Sammy Davis Jnr.

"The first time, the rabbi slams the door in Bart's face. The second time, they're in the *shvitz*, a public place, so he can't simply ignore them. The third time is at the *bris*, which isn't the right setting. But the fourth time, he actually sits down to play chess with Bart. That's an open invitation to engage," said Slipakoff.

"I think the setting of the scene shows a softening, or at least an openness, towards them. And for the first time, they're bringing him texts that he isn't familiar with. Before, they're trying to out-Talmud a rabbi. Now, they're bringing him new material and forcing him to sit, think about it, and recognise that it's something he hasn't considered before."

Eventually, the father and son reconnect and sing a song.

Slipakoff said that throughout the series, though Krusty is filled with self-loathing and has many vices, in some sentimental moments, his Jewishness comes out.

"At the end of the day, Krusty is human first and Jewish second. He drinks, and he gambles, and he's a lecher. And in moments where he's doing good things, Judaism does come out just a little bit," he said. "And his Judaism doesn't save him from those pitfalls."

Rabbi Dan Slipakoff

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

See more Limmud stories in the Friday, 28 August, newsletter. Subscribe at https://bit.ly/sajrinbox

Filmmaking pioneer Schlesinger was ahead of Hollywood

GILANA LAB

Long before Hollywood became Hollywood, a Jewish immigrant arrived in South Africa with no money and an extraordinary ability to see opportunity where others didn't. Isidore William Schlesinger would go on to make some of South Africa's earliest films, create enormous movie sets in Johannesburg, and produce epics with casts numbering in the thousands.

"He came to South Africa from America in the late 1800s and had no money," says author Ted Botha, whose book *Hollywood on the Veld* tells the story of the entertainment empire Schlesinger built. While many Jewish immigrants were arriving from Europe, Schlesinger came from America and initially made his money selling insurance.

Within a short time, he was wealthy, but he had a bigger idea. "Everything they did in America, he was going to copy and do the same or do better in South Africa," Botha says. Playing on the American expression, "Go west, young man", Schlesinger's version was "Go south, young man".

It was an extraordinary time to make that bet. In about 1910 and 1911, Hollywood itself was still farmland outside Los Angeles, its studios little more than shacks and barns. Yet Schlesinger decided South Africa could build its own version. By 1913, Johannesburg was booming and audiences were becoming fascinated by moving pictures. Schlesinger began buying struggling theatres and bringing them under his control. "He loved monopolies," Botha says. But he wasn't content simply to show other people's movies. He wanted to make them.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Schlesinger created a news team that travelled around South Africa filming events for what became *African Mirror*, one of the world's longest-running newsreels. His cameramen even followed South African and British soldiers into German East Africa during World War I.

"I find it incredibly visionary of him because news just wasn't a thing in the movies back then," Botha says. Schlesinger's ambitions soon extended to a Killarney studio in Johannesburg, with editing rooms, costume rooms, and poster departments.

He preferred shooting outdoors rather than relying on painted studio backgrounds, and when reality didn't provide what he needed, he created it. For one enormous battle sequence, he bought two million gallons of water from Rand Water to create a river. For another film, when he couldn't find the enormous staircase described in the story, he built one. His productions grew into epics using thousands of extras. "He was using 5 000 to 10 000," at a time when productions might use hundreds, Botha says.

Schlesinger was different to American filmmakers in another significant way. He put black actors prominently on screen. "It was very unusual at the time," Botha says. "Americans were still using blackface for any black person they needed on screen. And here comes Schlesinger. He's got all these black people on the screen. Not only his extras, but his main actors." One of these was Archibald Songo Goba, known simply as Goba, whom Botha describes as Schlesinger's "most famous African actor". He became a prominent performer in Schlesinger's films and was praised in British newspapers.

Schlesinger's 1916 film *De Voortrekkers*, released in English as *Winning a Continent*, became a phenomenon, attracting people from across South Africa, some of whom had never seen a movie before. Ironically, the man behind these spectacles hated publicity. His Johannesburg office was reportedly hidden behind a maze of corridors ending at three unmarked doors, making him deliberately difficult to reach.

Eventually, Schlesinger became frustrated with South Africans' preference for foreign films. "South Africans don't want to see South African movies," Botha says of his realisation. "We still do this thing: South African stuff is second best."

Schlesinger increasingly turned his attention overseas, but his South African legacy had already been created. While Hollywood was still discovering what it could become, Schlesinger was in Johannesburg, building studios, recording newsreels, and creating cinematic spectacles. As Botha puts it, he was "incredibly visionary".

Libenson encourages openness to new ways of practising Judaism

LEE TANKLE

From a queer-centred yeshiva to an artist-driven synagogue and young adults turning their homes into Jewish gathering spaces, new models of Jewish life are challenging traditional ideas about what Judaism can, and should, look like.

For Dan Libenson, president of the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah and host of Judaism Unbound, one of the most listened-to Jewish podcasts, these experiments aren't a break from tradition, but part of a much older story: Judaism has always been changing.

Speaking at Limmud Johannesburg, Libenson said maybe we need to challenge our assumptions using the principle of *Ipcha Mistabra* (on the contrary).

"We have a lot of assumptions about what Judaism is, how Judaism has to operate, that may be right, but may be wrong, and it's valuable for us to imagine other possibilities simply to make sure that we're really looking at reality," he said.

"There's a notion that … Judaism is what it is. [That] our job is to preserve it. We don't want to be the last link in the chain. Our job is to receive what we have been given and to give that same thing to the next generation, more or less. An alternative conception to that is that Judaism will be what it becomes. That Judaism is always changing, has always changed, and that we don't have to be as focused on preservation.

"So, I wonder if we had a notion of Judaism that recognised that it's okay for it to change – that it always has – then the question becomes a harder one than simply asking what it is that we are preserving," he said. "I'm not here to give you an answer, but I think that if we're asking what we need to preserve versus what it's okay to change, then we're having a very different conversation in the Jewish community than we would otherwise be having."

Libenson posed ways to challenge assumptions. For example, many people believe that young Jews are standing on the edge of a cliff in terms of their Jewish connection, in danger of falling and being lost to the Jewish people forever.

"If you believe that then all your effort has to go into stopping people from going over the cliff. If Jews are standing at the edge, the only responsible thing to do is prevent them from falling," he said. "But what if they're not standing at the edge of a cliff? What if Jews are actually just milling around in a valley? They may not be doing anything extraordinary, but they're not in danger either. They're actually fine."

The people in the valley might be looking for ways to connect to their Judaism, but don't necessarily have ways that feel accessible to them. The community may need new, compelling forms of Jewish expression to engage them, said Libenson.

"Being Jewish is sticky. People like being Jewish. What they're looking for … [is] a reason to be more Jewish. And they're not getting it. They're not getting a reason because all the effort is being spent trying to keep them away from the cliff. And that's not a compelling Judaism. That's an emergency kind of Judaism. And that's not exciting to people," he said.

Using the concept of disruptive innovation, he compared new models to early cellphone cameras, which were inferior to traditional cameras but offered something valuable to people who weren't interested in conventional photography. Over time, they improved dramatically.

Libenson gave examples such as Svara, a queer-centred yeshiva; an artist's reinterpretation of Shabbat as a break from constant technological notifications; a project that regenders the biblical text to reveal new insights; and Lab/Shul, an experimental, artist-driven Jewish community. While these models may not appeal to everyone, and may initially seem less substantial than traditional forms of Judaism, they are compelling to people who might otherwise not participate at all.

"If they're just milling around in the valley, they're available. A version of Judaism that may seem less appealing to us can actually be compelling to them. We might look at some of these examples and think, 'That's not for me', but they are for someone."

By investing in and allowing these new approaches to develop, he said, they could evolve into increasingly meaningful and sophisticated forms of Judaism.

"If these models stayed exactly as they are, we might see them as *yeridat hadorot,* the decline of the generations, with Judaism getting worse and worse. But they don't stay that way. They get better over time, just as cellphone cameras did. If we're willing to invest in and appreciate new forms of Judaism that appeal to people for whom the current model doesn't, there's a possibility that, over time, a better Judaism will emerge for those who are not currently participating," he said.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

How Jews got their surnames

GILANA LAB

Goldsteins weren't necessarily in the gold business, Rosenbergs didn't come from a mountain of roses, and Eisenfelds certainly weren't growing iron in fields. Some of the surnames we immediately recognise as Jewish are, it turns out, not quite the historical clues we might imagine, Professor Sarah Bunin Benor said at Limmud Johannesburg this past weekend.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Bunin Benor, director of the Los-Angeles-based Jewish Language Project at Hebrew Union College, said, "If their name is Weisberg, it doesn't mean they grew up near a white mountain. It just means that these names sounded cool."

Most common among Ashkenazi Jews, these "ornamental names" could combine colours, flowers, animals, stones, mountains, and other words.

Behind these sometimes wonderfully random combinations lie centuries of Jewish history.

"Traditionally, Jews didn't have hereditary family names," Benor said. "They just went by their first name, son or daughter of their father." That began to change in the 13th century. "Sephardic Jews in Spain and Portugal did acquire hereditary surnames. That was the first group to do so."

For Ashkenazi Jews, the shift came much later. "It really was in the late 18th century, early 19th century that most Ashkenazi Jews acquired their names." Governments increasingly needed to identify individual families for "taxation, conscription, and education", and while families sometimes chose their surnames, "sometimes it was the authorities that assigned a name to a particular person".

Those names came from an extraordinary variety of sources. Some were based on fathers, with suffixes such as "ovich" meaning "son of", while others came from mothers. "You have Frumkin, child of Frumet, or Frumke; Dworkin, child of Dvorah; Rickles, child of Rivke; Beiles, child of Beile," Benor said. Occupations provided another source, including distinctly Jewish roles such as Melamed, meaning teacher; Gabai, a synagogue administrator; Chazan, meaning cantor; and Shochet.

Other surnames effectively provide a map of Jewish migration. Geographic names don't necessarily tell us where someone lived when the surname was adopted. "It's where they had previously come from," Benor said. Vilner could indicate a connection to Vilnius, while Iranian Jewish surnames include Hamadani and Tehrani. Among India's B'nai Yisrael community, many surnames are based on villages where families previously lived.

Even nicknames could become permanent. "If you had two different Yaakovs in a town, one was tall and one was short, they might be Yaakov Gross and Yaakov Klein. And so those became their surnames."

Religious identity is also embedded in surnames. Cohen and its variations are associated with the priestly caste, while Levi and Levine reflect Levitical ancestry. Sometimes the connection is less obvious. Kaplan, Benor said, means chaplain in German, but became a common name for Kohanim. Katz has an even more hidden Jewish meaning: though it also means cat, it is an acronym connected to "a righteous Kohen".

Surnames also reveal how Jews tried to fit into the places they went. "Sometimes people did this to make it easier to pronounce their names, but often it was a response to antisemitism," Benor said.

In the United States, changing an identifiably Jewish surname could help Jews overcome discrimination and improve their socioeconomic prospects. "They enabled upward mobility. They allowed Jews to choose when to identify as Jewish and when to not identify as Jewish," Benor said. This didn't mean turning away from Judaism. "There's this other myth that, 'Oh, they changed their names, that means they left the Jewish community.' That is not true."

South African families have their own stories of surnames being altered. During the Limmud discussion, one person described a family name, Kotanas, becoming Cotton, while another said Labovich had been shortened to Lab. Benor said such changes were often made to make names easier to pronounce, though antisemitism might also have played a role. She said she didn't know of any research specifically into South African Jewish name changes, leaving an intriguing part of our community's history still to be explored.

Today, a surname may not immediately identify someone as Jewish, but for those who understand its origins, it can contain generations of history. "Many Jews don't have identifiably Jewish surnames because of name changing and later because of intermarriage," Benor said. Yet "surnames remain important ways that Jews identify themselves and others as Jewish".

"There's also unity and diversity in Jewish naming practices around the world and throughout history," she said.

Leftovers are an acquired taste

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

I am convinced that the number of leftover-related deaths among the over-65s is dangerously underreported. I have no evidence for this. I haven't conducted research and I don't have access to secret hospital records. I just know people over 65. There seems to come a point in life when the fear of wasting food becomes greater than the fear of death.

I'm not sure when this happens. One day you're throwing out yoghurt because the expiry date was yesterday, and before you know it, you're standing at the fridge holding a piece of chicken from last Tuesday, sniffing it and saying, "There's absolutely nothing wrong with this."

Leftovers are complicated.

For a start, what exactly constitutes a leftover? A chicken breast clearly does. So does half a steak. Three roast potatoes probably qualify. But what about 11 peas? At what point did someone look at them and decide they deserved their own container, their own shelf space, and another chance at life?

And why are some foods leftovers while others aren't? Nobody has ever offered me leftover cake. Cake is just cake. It might have been served on Friday night and still be sitting there on Tuesday, but it retains its status. Nobody asks how old it is. You simply cut a piece. Pizza exists outside the normal laws of food safety. People who wouldn't dream of eating four-day-old chicken will happily find a slice of pizza in the fridge, eat it cold while standing at the kitchen counter, and regard the experience as a win.

But the bigger question isn't what a leftover is. It's why we keep it. Because most of the time, we already know we aren't going to eat it. Dinner ends on Friday night. There are two pieces of chicken left. Nobody wants them. Nobody is going to want them tomorrow either. But throwing them away feels wrong. So we put them into a container.

On Monday, we move the container to get to the milk. On Tuesday, we move it again. On Wednesday, we open it, look at the chicken, briefly consider it, then close it. By Thursday it has completed the required mourning period and may finally be thrown away without guilt.

Apparently leftovers need closure.

This is also where age becomes a differentiator. Young people demand information. "When was this made?" Older people don't understand the question. It's one of the rare occasions when it's the young who suddenly consider their mortality. The same people who might drive too fast, go bungee jumping, or forget to shower become health and safety officers when confronted by brisket from last Shabbos. People who can't tell "their" from "there" can apparently recognise salmonella from 20m away in a dark alley.

Older people, meanwhile, throw caution to the wind. One sniff and "It's perfect!"

"Perfect" is a strong word for six-day-old brisket.

The science, irritatingly, doesn't support this approach. Food-safety authorities generally recommend eating refrigerated cooked leftovers within three to four days, and harmful bacteria can't necessarily be seen, smelled, or tasted. Adults over 65 are also at greater risk of serious illness from foodborne disease.

In other words, precisely when we become most confident in our ability to assess chicken by smell is when we should probably stop doing it.

I suspect all this has less to do with food than with how we grew up. For generations that knew scarcity, or were raised by parents who did, throwing away food was almost immoral. You finished what was on your plate. You saved what wasn't. You didn't throw away perfectly good food simply because you didn't feel like eating it again.

And maybe that's why we struggle with leftovers. We don't like admitting that something that still has value no longer has value to us.

We do it with clothes we haven't worn in 10 years. Cables belonging to appliances we no longer own. We keep "good" boxes. And 11 peas.

We're very good at acquiring things. We're much less comfortable deciding when we're finished with them. So perhaps the fridge isn't really a place where we preserve food. It's a waiting room where we put things until enough time has passed for throwing them away to feel morally acceptable.

Which brings me back to the over-65s. If you visit your parents and they offer you brisket, don't ask whether it's still good. Ask what day it was made. And if the answer begins with, "There's absolutely nothing wrong with it", have the cake.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Aiming at the rapids

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

I was in my happy place last weekend. Together with hundreds of fellow participants, I attended the annual Limmud event in Johannesburg, following on from the Cape Town gathering a week earlier. We are blessed with a heterogeneous community, one that holds a wide diversity of political, religious, cultural, and social views, and nowhere is this better celebrated than at Limmud. Over the years it has become a cornerstone of our communal calendar. It is a rare space in which we explore the full breadth of Jewish thought, taking on issues with a depth and openness that few other forums allow.

Every year I am reminded of something conference chairperson Rabbi Warren Sher often says, that Limmud may well be one of the few places where people who differ greatly can enter into robust debate while holding onto the respect, inclusivity, and openness that define the gathering. It matters enormously that our community has a dedicated space in which to grapple with the cultural, religious, social, and political dimensions of Judaism in all their complexity.

This year, I was fortunate to present twice. Firstly, together with SA Jewish Board of Deputies national director Wendy Kahn on whether South Africa belongs to all who live in it, debating the place and belonging of our Jewish community within South African society and highlighting areas in which there is a need for us to claim our identity. Then on Sunday, I presented with King David High School principal Lorraine Srage on the Roedean affair, shedding light on some of the first-hand perspectives of the incident as well as its significance in the context of the greater antisemitism trends.

The Board was represented more widely too. President Zev Krengel asked whether we are living in a golden age of South African Jewry, and deputy national director Charisse Zeifert moderated the central debate on Israeli politics, "Bibi or Not Bibi". In Cape Town, the Board was also active, with Cape chair Simone Sulcas, director Daniel Bloch, and professional Mandy Allen sharing strategies and case studies with the community in what was an oversubscribed session.

Part of what makes Limmud so special is the range of speakers it draws together, many of whom are telling their stories in this kind of setting for the first time. A highlight of the weekend was Nik Rabinowitz, who shared the stage with fellow comedian Gili Apter and discussed their experiences of being "cancelled". Nik made a powerful point. He recalled a river-rafting instructor once explaining that when you find yourself in trouble on the water, you should turn towards the current rather than away from it. This, he said, was exactly the advice Krengel had given him at the height of the media storm that had engulfed him, urging him to meet the bullies head on. It is also why he named his latest show "Mountain Jew", placing his Jewishness front and centre and aiming himself directly at the rapids.

In many ways, to host and to attend a Limmud is itself to aim at the rapids. We don't grow by staying comfortable. We grow by leaning into what unsettles us, and it is so often the ideas that make us uneasy that stretch us the most.

I am deeply grateful to Limmud, and to the countless volunteers who make it happen year after year, for creating and holding this space for us.

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

Orthodox woman rabbi supports change, but slowly

LEE TANKLE

"We want to take the rabbis' authority seriously because the rabbis spend their lives immersed in and devoted to this law, trying, putting what they perceive as G-d's will above everything else."

These are the words of Meesh Hammer-Kossoy, a female Orthodox rabbi and Rosh Beit Midrash at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, a co-ed and non-denominational Jewish learning community. She was speaking at Limmud Johannesburg about rabbinic authority and the interplay between tradition and keeping up with changing times.

"And just like you ask your doctor hard questions, but ultimately you also refer to the doctor and his training that you don't have, so too the great rabbis, who have training that we don't have," she said.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Rabbi Meesh Hammer-Kossoy at candlelighting

As part of the first cohort of Orthodox women rabbis ordained in 2015, Hammer-Kossoy has seen how Jewish law can evolve. More than 100 years ago, for example, women weren't permitted to study Torah; today, there are Orthodox female rabbis.

"We're always changing things. Once upon a time, it wasn't clear what the rule would be about electricity on Shabbat. The Jewish community agreed on certain rules and that you can't close a circuit on Shabbat," she said. "And then you started finding out that you actually can't walk down the street without closing some sort of a circuit because the lights go on and off everywhere you go. And then the halacha revisits those things and comes to terms [with them]. So there's no question that the halacha, the rabbis, have been changing; the law has been changing."

However, she still believes the rabbis have the final say halachically.

"Stick with what the rabbis say. You have to follow what they say. [Although] there is actually a disagreement between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds over whether, if the rabbis tell you that left is right and right is left, you still have to listen to them. Some authorities believe that even if they tell you something that is clearly not true, you may still have to listen to them. But it's interesting to note that the Jerusalem Talmud says you don't have to listen to them blindly. You have to keep your common sense about you," she said.

But there are certain situations in which she believes a rabbi should see a person for who they are, and not what the Torah says they should be perceived as. For example, if a person tells a rabbi they are homosexual, the rabbi should treat them with dignity, not as someone who's committed a capital offence.

She also doesn't accept that women's traditional role in Orthodox Judaism needs to remain limited.

When she began studying to become a Jewish scholar in 1991, she did so because she loved Torah, not because she planned to become a rabbi. At the time, she knew she couldn't.

"But looking back now, I ask myself, why was that so obvious to me? I think that's what will change. I have faith in the Jewish people as a whole, what you might call the wisdom of the crowd. There is a dialogue between our holy tradition, those who interpret it, and lived reality. I believe that dialogue will lead to a slow evolution of the tradition in the way that G-d wants it to be," she said.

"I don't want things to change suddenly. If we gave things up too quickly, what would the point of being Jewish be? Judaism can't simply become whatever people wake up and decide it should be. We are in dialogue with a deep tradition and must be humble before its vision, while having faith that it will evolve."

Spiegel Wagner plays quiet and calculating in murder mystery

Sharon Spiegel Wagner is once again in an Agatha Christie mystery, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in Johannesburg. The *SA Jewish Report* caught up with her between rehearsals.

We fell for you doing musical comedy, but this is your second Agatha Christie murder mystery role in two years. Which is the real Sharon, and why?

Being ambitious, I never wanted to pigeonhole myself as only a comedian or a singer. Diversifying my skills was always a priority and also, being a one-trick pony doesn't cut it in a profession like this. Sure, I have a wheelhouse in which I'm comfortable, but I'm always stretching myself. Even I don't know who the real Sharon is. I wear a mom cloak, a wife cloak, a daughter dress, I play lots of parts. I'm a bag of goodies.

Which type of role do you prefer?

I prefer it all. When I'm singing, I miss acting. When I'm acting, I long to sing. When I'm being funny, I miss the mystery, and when I'm in a mystery, I miss making people laugh. I prefer to be working. As much as I can. Good work.

What is it about Agatha Christie that's drawn you to a second role in such a short space of time?

Agatha Christie's work is so well known and adored. She takes the scary out of horror. It's the ultimate puzzle game, a Cluedo on stage. I love her characters and the worlds she creates. They're nuanced, and quirky. She has a way of making murderers likeable, because they are driven by an underlying reason. They don't kill for the sake of killing. She explores a humanity in the horrific. What can I say, Aggy is the queen of this genre and this is actually my favourite Christie – so far.

Tell us about your character?

My character is the secretary of the murder victim. She's the one character who has a history beyond the walls of where the events take place. She's officious, professional, and a bit cold. Mostly because of a troubled past. She's certainly different to Sharon.

What appeals to you about this role?

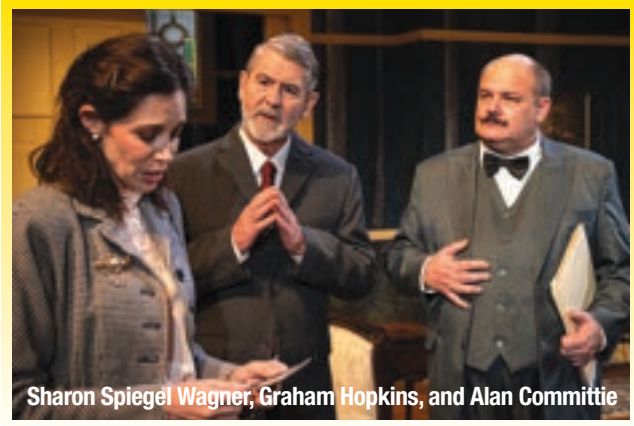
I took on this role more for the piece of the puzzle she plays in the story. It's an ensemble piece with lots of moving parts and I was intrigued by that mostly, and the knockout lineup of cast members.

What did you do to prepare for this particular role?

I needed to speak with a Received Pronunciation English accent, so I got straight onto that. I did my research on the play and when and where it's set.

How does it compare with the previous Agatha Christie role you played?

They couldn't be more different. In the last one I was the headliner, playing a German immigrant actress who kills her husband in a courtroom! Romaine was the ultimate femme fatale. I played a symbol of danger and powerful feminine enigma. There was a magnetism about her. In this Christie, my character would much rather disappear than be seen. She's quiet, calculating, and unassuming.



Sharon Spiegel Wagner, Graham Hopkins, and Alan Committie

What's challenging about this role, and is there something you love about it?

Every role has its challenges. Becoming a character; speaking like her, standing like her, walking like her, it all requires pedantic human examination, like dissecting who someone is and how they think and behave. I can't say I had any more challenges than I usually do. I'm quite impulsive and emotional and Helen Russel isn't – she's methodical and calculating. It was nice being a bit cooler than usual.

Tell us about the cast and working with them on this.

The cast is extraordinary. A cast in the theatre world becomes your family. On stage with me are legendary theatre vets Alan Committie, Graham Hopkins, Russel Savadier, the Richards (Louise and Michael), and Mike Huff. Dianne Simpson is one of my favourite actresses. She was in the last Christie with me too. And then we have some newcomers who are keeping the spring in our step. I've befriended them all, and I love them dearly. The wealth of knowledge, experience, and passion for theatre on that stage is inspiring.

Alan Swerdlow is once again directing. He seems to be a common denominator in a lot of your work. Is that true, and why?

Alan has been the common denominator in most of my life and career. He chose me for the children's chorus in La Bohème at the State Theatre in Pretoria when I was just nine years old, and again as a child of Siam in the King and I when I was 11.

Alan isn't only a legend in the theatre, a master in the arts, but he's also a kindred spirit and a neshama that has spanned lifetimes with mine.

Have you been writing scripts and if so, what?

I never stop writing, creating, but I can't say what until you buy the ticket to come see it.

When are we going to see you in musical comedy again?

Comedy is my first love. I'll always come back to it. Sooner than you think. Watch this space.

- *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is at the Pieter Toerien Theatre at Montecasino until 27 September.*

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