

Israel at 60



1948 - 2008

SOUTH AFRICAN

Jewish Report

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SOUTH AFRICAN

Jewish Report

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Israel - a work in progress

FOR THOSE who want the best for Israel, marking its 60th birthday means both marvelling at the incredible achievement of creating this old-new state and the dynamism that characterises it and also looking squarely at the huge problems that continue to threaten its nature and existence.

There are accomplishments that would make the early Zionists, from Theodor Herzl in the late 1800s onwards, gasp with pleasure at what has been built since their time. But the problems remaining would also alarm them, as the society attempts to reconcile diverse and opposing forces within it, and hold off the foes who would destroy it.

South African Jewry has had a passion for Israel and has been part and parcel of the Zionist movement since its creation. South Africans have played a significant role in the defence and development of Israel, ranging from the Machalniks in the War of Independence, the volunteers in the Six Day War to Zionist youth movements like Habonim, Betar and Bnei Akiva and myriad other forms of involvement.

Indeed, working for Israel has been one of the glues holding the disparate elements of this Jewish community together, including people from across the political and religious spectrum.

This special supplement, in its first part, looks at Israel from the perspective of its links with South Africa and South African Jewry. The second part looks at the nature and challenges of Israel itself.

Notwithstanding the fact that Israel is thriving and growing and is a remarkable success story in numerous ways, it has never been, and will never be, a simple or easy place. Many idealists from the Diaspora have gone there and had their dreams broken or have left out of fatigue. Others, however, have stayed and thrived in ways they would never have imagined.

Israelis themselves continue to endeavour to consolidate the identity of a fast-changing society made up of people from all corners of the world, in a place loaded with significance for billions of non-Jews worldwide - Christians and Muslims - who also lay claim to various forms of "ownership" of it.

Israel is strong. But few Israelis today feel that peace is around the corner. Many have come to feel that the most that can be achieved at this time is "co-existence" with the Palestinians, as described by Israel's ambassador to South Africa in the interview on page 14.

South African Jews live today in a context in which Israel is simultaneously admired and maligned. The ANC government's official policy is recognition of Israel and diplomatic relations with it, and support for the two-state solution to the conflict with the Palestinians.

In the broader society, there are many voices condemning Israel, rejecting its existence and maliciously attaching the word "apartheid" - which has particular potency in this country - to it as a weapon in their arsenal.

What we are celebrating about Israel has to do with its dynamism - the fact that as Jews and Israelis, we are not passive and powerless today, but active players in addressing our own reality and that of the world. It was not always so for Jews, who have known many times in their history what it is to be a powerless victim. The Holocaust still hangs like a shadow over Israel. The primary impetus for Israel's creation was as a safe haven for Jews. Its turbulent history has placed it right in the centre of the world's critical gaze.

It is in numerous ways a testing ground for many values and ideas of modern mankind - a work in progress. We cannot say that Zionism or Israel has achieved all their goals - or that the goals themselves have been fully articulated and agreed upon. But the "work in progress" is flying ahead at full steam.

Geoff Sifrin - Editor



ISRAEL @ 60

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GREETINGS

Israel - risen from the ashes of the Holocaust

MAZELTOV, Israel, on the occasion of your diamond anniversary. Mazeltov to you, a little feisty, gutsy country that has proverbially risen from the ashes of the Holocaust to become an icon country of the 20th and 21st centuries; that has defied all expectations and developed into a world leader in so many areas: technology, science, agriculture, medicine and the environment.

Mazeltov, too, on having lived through and survived, though not without great pain and suffering, six wars and two intifadas; the loss of many young lives in their prime, fighting for your right to exist; the maiming and deaths of so many innocent citizens targeted by those who hate you and would see you destroyed, driven into the sea.

Mazeltov for your strides in education, in research and development, in hi-tech and biomedical innovation, in environmentally friendly innovations, and in the humanitarian programmes you conduct around the world.

Mazeltov from one of your staunchest admirers, the South African Zionist Federation.

Through our SAZF, which began in 1898 shortly after the first World Zionist Congress in Basle under the leadership of Theodore Herzl, the South African Jewish community has a long and proud tradition of support and love for Israel.

Ours is a community that has walked the talk: our links to Israel are strong and indestructible, our record of support and assistance impressive and laudable.

The SAZF was the first South African Jewish body to form an umbrella organisation for the entire SA Jewish community, proving how Zionism served as the unifying factor in a community single-mindedly loyal and responsive to Israel's needs.

The SAZF has always been the driving force, encouraging Jews wishing to emigrate from South Africa to make their new lives in Israel; and the establishment of Telfed - the SA Zionist Federation in Israel - bears testament to the



AVROM KRENDEL
SOUTH AFRICAN
ZIONIST FEDERATION



success of our efforts.

In their thousands, youngsters from the age of 10 upwards, make their annual pilgrimage to Betar, Bnei Akiva, Habonim and Netzer machanot every December and return home invigorated and imbued with strong Zionist ideals and objectives.

At the same time they learn the values and principles that are an integral part of the Jewish soul; they become menschen in the true sense of the word.

Our newest associate body, only six years old, is the Israel Centre, an initiative of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which deals with Zionist education in our day schools and with the youth movements. Great inroads have been made in these two areas, thus reinforcing our links with Eretz Yisrael.

And in the always-fragile area of the media, the Media Team Israel works tirelessly to achieve a balanced picture of Israel in newspapers, on radio and on television.

As current (and youngest) chairman of the SA Zionist Federation, I walk in the footsteps of giants, like Mockie Friedman, Abe Abrahamson, Solly Sacks, Julius Weinstein, Joe Simon and others who nurtured the community and enthused it with knowledge, belief, passion, dedication and a deep and abiding love of Israel which endures today.

We wish you, our spiritual home, many happy returns of this day and may there be thousands more. You carry with you the hopes and dreams of 14 million Jews worldwide - you are truly our guiding light.

Mazeltov!

May G-d bless our beloved State of Israel

THIS YEAR we celebrate 60 years since the birth of our beloved State of Israel. It is a remarkable milestone in the grand and miraculous sweep of our history.

Recently, Israeli Air Force F-15 fighter jets staged a fly-past at Auschwitz in memory of Holocaust victims. The Star of David emblazoned on the jets could be seen from the ground. And the Israeli pilots were all descendants of Holocaust survivors.

Can you imagine what the death camp inmates would have said had someone told them during the darkest days of the Nazi genocide that one day their descendants would be flying a Jewish state's fighter jets over Auschwitz? What would they have said had they been told that out of the death camps the Jewish people, with G-d's help, would rise up and establish the State of Israel?

As Jews at such a time, we humbly acknowledge and give thanks to G-d for His many miracles over the last 60 years which have enabled Israel to survive and even thrive.

We give thanks, too, for all the miracles which ensured our survival in exile for so long and against all the odds. We humbly give thanks and acknowledge the enormous sacrifices, dedication and commitment of generations of Israelis to the defence of our Holy Land.

Parents have lost children, wives have lost their husbands and children have lost their fathers in the six decades since the establishment of the State of Israel. We acknowledge the pain and suffering of not only those who have fought in the Israeli Defence Forces, but also those who have been brutally injured, bereaved and murdered by barbaric terrorists.

We also acknowledge the agony of those soldiers, still in captivity, and the horror that their families endure every day.

As we look forward at this time, we do so with confidence. We can never give up hope or become despondent about the future of the Jewish people. We need "tikva" - hope - more than ever; we need "bitachon" - faith in G-d - more than ever. We as the Jewish people have seen much worse than this, and we, with G-d's help, have survived.

We survived the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Spaniards and the Nazis and we will survive this struggle too. Many of the dire threats



CHIEF RABBI WARREN GOLDSTEIN

we face are new, but as we all know, they are not unprecedented - a fact the Pesach Hagaddah recognises: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, and the Holy One Blessed is He saves us from their hands."

And so at this crucial and difficult time in Jewish history, let us be courageous. To survive and thrive on our journey through history we need to live with courage and strength.

Fear of the future and the uncertainties of life is part of the human condition. The Torah describes how G-d had even to reassure our great founding fathers because they were concerned for the future.

One of the most supportive and encouraging of these assurances was given to Joshua after Moses' death, and shortly before he led the people into the Land of Israel. At the time he was new in his position as leader and the conquest of the land lay ahead as a steep mountain to climb.

G-d said to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous for it is you who will cause this people to inherit the land..." (Joshua 1:6).

And then again said: "Only be very strong and courageous to observe to do according to the entire Torah..." (Joshua 1:7).

Rashi says that the two statements reflect the two areas of Joshua's mission: first, to be an effective political and military leader and second to be an effective moral and spiritual leader. Both missions required courage and strength.

At this momentous time we call on our loving Father in Heaven to continue to bless our beloved State of Israel and all her people with His abundant goodness, and that He bring the final redemption speedily in our days.

SAJBD salutes Israel on a glorious 60

THE SOUTH African Jewish Board of Deputies, in common with the wider Jewish community, celebrates with the Israeli people on the occasion of Israel's 60th anniversary.

The Jewish community of South Africa has wholeheartedly supported the Zionist enterprise from its very inception, with countless men and women dedicating themselves with love and devotion to making the Jewish return to their ancestral homeland a reality.

We are proud of Israel's many wonderful achievements in its short history and equally proud that the SAJBD has been able to be a part of this great



ZEV KRENDEL
NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, SAJBD



endeavour.

May the next sixty years be ones of further prosperity and, above all, peace.



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On the birth of the Jewish State

Sunday May 16 1948, just two days after David Ben-Gurion had declared the birth of the State of Israel, Jews gathered in celebration at the Wolmarans Street Synagogue in Johannesburg.

PROF MILTON SHAIN

THE *SOUTH African Jewish Times* reported: "Long before the service began thousands of people crowded the surrounding street, and outside the synagogue traffic was brought to a virtual standstill.

"Every available seat was filled in the synagogue; people stood against the walls and in the aisles; and a solemn atmosphere prevailed. A hush fell upon the murmuring crowd as Chief Cantor Alter began the rendering of the service.

"His peerless voice swelled to the great hope of Israel, realised after so many centuries; his magnificent rendering of the songs and prayers of dedication brought, to the full, the significance of the occasion...

"Throughout the country, thousands sat at wireless sets, listening in to the memorable service,

which was broadcast in full by the South African Broadcasting Corporation."

The service began with the singing of Hatikvah (the Zionist anthem) by the whole congregation, led by the choir. This was no ordinary singing, but a great rejoicing at the rebirth of Israel. Older members of the congregation wept unrestrainedly, while the youth stood firmly to attention as the strains of the Hebrew National Anthem rang out.

• *Extract from The Jews in South Africa. An Illustrated History, by Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain. The book has just been published by Jonathan Ball and is available at all bookstores.*

Right: Midnight service at the Old Synagogue in Pretoria, for the birth of the State of Israel.



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Above left: Zionist youth conference, 1970.
Above: Delegates to the SA Women's Zionist Conference, Bloemfontein, 1939.

The fascinating road of Zionism in South Africa

It says much about the profound appeal of Zionism within the South African Jewish community that even before establishing an organisation to address their local interests, South African Jews set up a representative body to co-ordinate the burgeoning of Zionist activities.

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DAVID SAKS

WITHIN SIX months of the inaugural World Zionist Congress in 1897, Zionist organisations were mushrooming in South Africa, and even in the nascent colony of Rhodesia.

On December 11 1898, representatives of these societies met in Johannesburg to form the SA Zionist Federation (SAZF). As Gideon Shimoni observed, this was "the first Jewish body to achieve a countrywide organisational framework in South Africa".

By contrast, the first branch of the Jewish Board of Deputies was founded only in 1903 while the formation of a national Board had to wait until after Union, in 1912.

Even before the launch of the world Zionist movement, the ideal of settling and rebuilding the Holy Land had taken root in the Jewish world, particularly among East European Jewry. The Chovevei Zion ("Lovers of Zion") movement had done much to foster a favourable climate for Theodor Herzl's revolutionary new programme, and many of the new immigrants to South Africa will have been imbued with its ideals.

While Zionism was for a long time viewed with suspicion in Western and Central Europe, the original leadership of South African Zionism was largely drawn from the Anglo-German Jewish elite. Anti-Zionist sentiment was never to take root in the Jewish community to any significant extent.

For most of the 20th century, the SAZF was the senior partner in South African Jewish affairs. In the early years in the Transvaal, it even assumed responsibility for dealing with issues specific to the local Jewish community, such as immigration, liquor licensing laws that discriminated against Jews and lobbying for the recognition of Yiddish as a European language for entrance and naturalisation purposes. With the establishment of the SAJBD, its focus became primarily Zionist related.

The number of Zionist societies, which soon included women's and youth groups, grew dramatically as the new century progressed. In time, Young Israel societies were replaced by youth movements with their own particular ideological bents - Habonim, Hashomer Hatzair, Hashomer Hadati (later Bnei Akiva), Betar, Dror and Maginim (today Netzer) all made their appearance from the 1930s onwards, contributing significantly to the

fostering of Jewish identity, education and Zionist loyalties as they do to this day.

Despite the decline of the Jewish population, it is noteworthy in this regard that end-of-year camp attendance figures for Habonim Dror and Bnei Akiva have reached an all-time high in recent years.

Understandably, there was not much emphasis on making aliyah in the first five decades (although several hundred Jews did settle in Palestine in the years prior to Israel's establishment). Zionist activity was essentially cultural and fund-raising driven, and in both areas the Jewish community excelled itself.

As early as the third SAZF national conference in 1909, the claim was made that South African Zionists were per capita the largest contributors to world Zionist funds. This outstanding record would continue until well into the 1970s, after which the decline of the Jewish population and devaluation of the local currency saw these proportions begin to drop off.

South African Zionism was truly a nation-wide phenomenon. There was no city or dorp with a functional Jewish community of any size that did not have at least one active Zionist organisation.

As John Simon put it in his essay "The Roots of South African Zionism" (*Jewish Affairs*, Winter 1998), the records of the various Zionist societies "are replete with accounts of fêtes, lectures, addresses, conferences, days in the coun-

try, sports meetings, concerts and a host of other activities which kept the Zionist societies and individual adherents of the movement busy and involved month after month, year after year".

The SAZF, as the national umbrella body, provided a vital co-ordinating role, regularly sending speakers, literature and educational programmes to the various regions.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 introduced a new dimension onto the local Zionist scene. In addition to fundraising, there was now the aspect of promoting Jewish immigration to the new state. At a time when the local Jewish community was still growing, and long before "push factors" like political unrest, economic instability and crime became an issue, significant numbers of South African Jews were going on aliyah and today, the former-South African community in Israel is estimated at over 20 000.

The establishment of Telfed - the SAZF's Israel office in Tel Aviv - was another important development. Telfed has since played a major role in helping South African olim integrate into their new country.

Another, more controversial, development was the introduction of Zionist party politics. The first local Revisionist organisation was formed in 1929, and in that year party lists of candidates were introduced to represent South Africa's shekel-holders at the World Zionist Congress.

Continued on page 5



Top right: Bnoth Zion fete, Cape Town, 1906.

Right: Betar camp group, Lakeside, December 1940.

The fascinating road of Zionism in South Africa

Continued from page 4

In 1943, it was decided that henceforth parties would have direct representation on the SAZF national executive. A total of 28 000 votes were cast for parties representing what were then the four principal ideological streams within Zionism in the first national elections in 1946.

The results were General Zionists - 36 per cent, Revisionists - 32 per cent, Socialists - 27 per cent and Mizrachi - 5 per cent. Despite the potential for fragmentation, the SAZF was able to maintain unity.

As former SAZF executive director and historian, Marcus Arkin put it, it accomplished this by allowing "the fullest scope for ideological debate and differences of opinion, while ensuring that the movement as a whole did

not splinter into warring factions".

For the next half century, despite mounting opposition to the party system, the dominant ideological groupings largely controlled the SAZF's affairs, including selecting who would represent the community at international Zionist conferences.

The SAZF's impressive accomplishments saw it deservedly come to be regarded as a model for other Diaspora communities. Its power only began to seriously wane in the 1980s, the reasons for this being primarily budget-related.

Local Zionist activities have always been funded through an allocation from the World Zionist Organisation, but institutional squeezes within the latter saw these being increasingly inadequate for the local organisations' needs.

These and other factors, including increased Jewish emigration and the virtual disappearance of once vibrant country centres, saw the SAZF steadily shrink, from the confident communal juggernaut of its heyday to the relatively small organisation it has since become.

Casualties included the SAZF's 85-year-old weekly organ the Zionist Record and its regional offices in Bloemfontein, East London and Pretoria.

At one stage during the late 1990s, the SAZF's financial difficulties had become so acute as to call its very existence into question. Fortunately, the crisis was averted and the organisation was established once more on sound financial grounds.

The SA Zionist Federation today has its national headquarters in Johannesburg,

regional offices in Cape Town and Durban and a desk in Port Elizabeth, with Telfed as its Israel arm. It remains responsible for all aspects of Zionist endeavour, including running an active Information (hasbara) department.

The latter is responsible for, among other things, promoting a positive image of Israel in the media, the promotion of Israeli culture in South Africa, running Hebrew language "ulpan" courses and for the dissemination of Zionist and Israel-related education, information and policy.

Its affiliated organisations, in addition to the youth movements and SAUJS, include the Israel Centre and aliyah department, IUA-UCF, Women's Zionist Organisation of SA, Jewish National Fund, the Zionist political parties (Likud, Mizrachi, SA Friends of Labour Israel, SAUPJ, United Zionist Association and Arzeinu) Maccabi SA, and the SA-Israel Chamber of Commerce.

SNIPPETS

Quotations taken from Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910 - 1967) - by Gideon Shimoni (Oxford University Press 1980)

COMPILED BY LIONEL SLIER

THE FOLLOWING story is probably apocryphal - but what the heck! Muizenberg along the Cape False Bay coast was the favourite holiday place for South African Jews from the 1920s onwards.

Every December and January there would be an influx of up-country Jews to the hotels in Muizenberg and so popular was this resort that many people booked a year in advance for their annual holidays. Simply put, Muizenberg was the place to be for Jews over the summer holidays.

On May 14 1948 Israel's independence was announced in Tel Aviv by David Ben-Gurion. A general election was due to be held in South Africa on May 26 and the Jewish Board of Deputies approached General Jannie Smuts, the prime minister and asked him whether he intended recognising the new Jewish state. "I will," said Smuts, "but there is a condition. I will recognise Israel if the Jews give us back Muizenberg!"

For the record: Smuts gave "de jure" recognition to Israel on May 24, the first British dominion to do so, but we don't know whether the Jews gave back Muizenberg!

A cynical view of Zionism in South Africa: "One Jew collecting money from a second Jew to send a third Jew to Israel."

A NOT inconsiderable part of the Zionist leadership settled in Israel. By 1961 they included some 26 persons who had served on the executive council of the Zionist Federation after 1948, one of whom was Israel Dunsky, who set an example by capping his term of office as chairman with the act of aliyah.

They also included Orthodox Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz and Chief Minister of the Union of Progressive Judaism, Rabbi MC Weiler. A few years later Chief Rabbi I. Abrahams of Cape Town also settled in Israel. Thus a considerable part of the community's spiritual leadership as well as the Zionist leadership personally fulfilled the ideal of aliyah.

IN 1953, visiting South Africa for the first time, Menachem Begin received a hero's welcome from the large segment of South African Jewry which had long sympathised with his cause.

IN A NUMBER of statements, Prime Minister Dr DF Malan, expounded a pluralistic conception of (white) South Africanism very different from the references to Jewish unassimilability which he had voiced in former years.

When, on their private initiative, J Nossel and a group of his associates honoured Dr Malan in 1955 by inscribing his name in the *Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund*, he again praised the Jews for the tenacity with which they maintained their group identity.

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Machalniks - there when Israel needed them

On May 15 1948, corresponding to 5 Iyar 5708, at 16:00 Tel Aviv time, the world changed for every single Jew. David Ben-Gurion, leader of the People's Council in the Yishuv (Jewish settlement in Palestine) stood up in the Tel Aviv Museum, former home of first Tel Aviv mayor, Meier Dizengoff and made an announcement before 200 delegates. He was standing beneath a large photograph of Theodor Herzl and the Star of David flag.

LIONEL SLIER

"THIS IS the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal 'Book of Books'.

"After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with the land during all the years of their dispersal and never ceased to pray and hope for a return to it and the restoration in it of their political freedom. We, the representatives of the Jewish community, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish State in the Land of Israel to be known as the State of Israel."

Remarkably, Herzl had said at the Zionist Congress in 1897: "At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years and certainly in 50, everyone will know it." He was out by eight and a half months!

For the Jewish people 1 878 years of exile had come to an end

and Jews everywhere were reciting "shehechyanu" - a prayer of thanks to G-d "for having let us live to see this day". In Johannesburg, Chief Rabbi Dr Louis Rabinowitz sounded a warning: "Israel was born in an atmosphere of rejoicing with trembling; not many were able to express that sense of jubilation which in happier circumstances this historical moment should have evoked."

Rabbi Rabinowitz was referring to the almost immediate response of the Arab world. The next day the new nation was at war. Egyptian planes bombed Tel Aviv and five Arab armies gathered on the borders "to wipe Israel off the map".

Poorly equipped, the various Israeli groups joined the battle but they were not alone. Nearly 5000 Jews (with very many Christians) rushed to help. They were the Machal (Volunteers from Beyond the Borders). Nearly 800 came from South Africa, some of whom had acquired military experience in the Second World War which had ended a short three years previously.

These veterans were absorbed

into the Israel Defence Forces units and they fought on all fronts. They contributed quality and experience to the local fighters who had only fought in underground groups. The Machalniks made a major contribution in the airforce, medical corps, armoured units and artillery.

A former mayor of Johannesburg, Eddie Magid, was in the first tank unit which consisted of two British war surplus Cromwell tanks. Later a Sherman tank joined them and there were nine non-Jews in the group. Magid was a gunner and a wireless operator.

Chaim Rachman was a member of Betar. In 1948 he went with a group via Italy, in a chartered plane to a base camp in Israel. He later saw action in the Negev. He commented: "Without Israel we have no future."

His brother, Abe went to the Mavhanim camp near Sfad. He was attached to the Kfar Saba Battalion 113. He said: "I would die like a man for Israel."

Abe Nowikow was sent by the Zionist Federation after they called for volunteers. In his group, 45 South Africans flew out disguised as businessmen. The absorption camp to which they

were sent consisted mostly of South Africans.

Literally towering above all the South Africans was David Teperson from Vryburg in the (then) Northern Cape. Towering he did - he was nearly seven feet tall and earned the nickname Migdal (a tower). He fought in an armoured unit which saw action in Bersheeva and also against the Egyptians in the Sinai.

Lt-Col Cecil Margo was the highest ranking of the 10 000 Jews who served in the South African forces in the Second World War. He helped to organise the Israeli Air Force for which he received unstinting praise from Ben-Gurion. (Margo later became a judge in South Africa).

Mendel Kaplan said of the Machal: "They brought us action and as a result of that action they taught us that we could now make our own decisions. Previously this was denied us.

"They taught us that the Jews could make it by themselves. The Machalniks helped to create a state which changed the lives of all Jews. It gave us dignity."

Yitzhak Rabin is on record saying: "They came when we most needed them."

Jacob Perry, a past-director of the Israeli General Security Service, paid this tribute: "I can never forget the 5 000 Machalniks who joined the ranks of the Palmach, Haganah and Israeli army to fight shoulder to shoulder with Hebrew soldiers. Among the 800 who came from South Africa were the founders of our air force.

"I salute them for the brotherhood they forged with us. I salute their sacrifices and I salute their achievements."

Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz wrote of the Machalniks: "They have done a magnificent job that will ever add glory to the Jewish people. We are proud of them."

Israel lost nearly 6 000 lives in the War of Independence, an enormous percentage of its (then) youth. All in all 119 Machalniks lost their lives, among them eight South Africans, nine non-Jews and four women. There is a monument to them at Sha'ar Hagai.

They had answered the call of their hearts, their consciences and their beliefs. They had heeded Isaiah (43: 6) "Bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

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South African Machal pilots: Boris Senior, Lesley Shagam, Arnie Ruch and Syd Cohen.

Machal - the 'Volunteers from Abroad' who came to help

PROFESSOR MILTON SHAIN

EIGHT HUNDRED young South African Jews served in Israel's armed forces during the War of Independence as part of Machal, the "Volunteers from Abroad" programme. These numbers were exceeded only by the number of volunteers from the much larger Jewish communities of the United States and Great Britain.

This level of enthusiasm and support was indicative of the power of the Zionist idea within South African Jewry.

Most of the volunteers were ex-servicemen who had fought in the Second World War. Those too young to have served were also eager to volunteer and thousands were trained at K Bacher's farm near Krugersdorp and at Wemmershoek outside Cape Town.

One of the volunteers, Joe Liebowitz of Johannesburg, an air gunner during the Second World War, became a bomb "chucker" in the infant Israeli air force.

"I had a strong feeling that we had a moral pact with the slaughtered Six Million of Nazi Europe," he later recalled. "This was the first chance to fight back against a world that hadn't cared."

Dr Harry Feldman of Brakpan, a medical officer in the South African forces during the War, felt equally strongly: "I was never a Zionist in the conventional sense," he reminisced years later, "but I was always Jewish, very conscious and proud of my tradition. The idea of a Jewish Land took hold of me."

South Africa's contribution to Israel's nascent air force and medical corps was particularly striking. Syd Cohen, the bearded "flying Rabbi of the Second World War", Boris Senior, Rolfe Futerman, Leslie Bloch, Leslie Shagam and Arnold Ruch were

among the South African pilots who flew Israel's handful of planes that included, ironically, Messerschmitts they had fought a few years earlier.

At David Ben-Gurion's personal request, Cecil Margo (the later Mr Justice Margo) prepared a plan for the new air force.

Seventy-one South African doctors and nurses served in the medical corps. These included Jack Penn, the renowned plastic surgeon, who performed operations on war casualties under very difficult conditions.

Lionel Meltzer, who had won a Military Cross and an OBE in the Second World War, played a key role in organising the new medical corps, serving as its deputy commander.

Of the 800 volunteers, about 300 remained and settled in Israel at the end of the war.

Extract from The Jews in South Africa. An Illustrated History, by Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain. The book has just been published by Jonathan Ball and is available at all bookstores.

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From pink-faced kids, to hardened men

LIONEL SLIER

NAHAL IS the Hebrew acronym for "Noar Halutzi Lohem" - "Fighting Pioneer Youth". The movement was founded by David Ben-Gurion soon after the establishment of the State of Israel in May, 1948.

It combined military service with agricultural duty in a moshav or new kibbutz and were situated mostly on strategic border sites and were locked into Israel's security and military needs.

Nahal units were often developed by "garinim" (groups of young boys and girls) who wanted to remain together for the period of their military service and also, if possible, to stay together as kibbutz members, after their army

commitments were completed.

They either founded new settlements or strengthened existing ones, often affiliated to youth movements of which they had been members. Their further education, as such, was in the disciplines of agriculture while at the same time maintaining their military preparedness.

To remain on the kibbutz after their army obligations were completed, was voluntary. Many did choose to stay on. Nahal settlements also played an important part in accepting new olim and socialising them into the Israeli way of life.

The South African Zionist Federation started a scheme whereby local youth could go to Israel and join a Nahal unit, but having a shorter period of military service, 15 months instead of the three years that Israeli boys served.

The underlying purpose was aliyah and it would help the South Africans to integrate more easily into life in Israel, having learnt Hebrew in the army and also being used to Israeli norms.

Having completed their Nahal time the South Africans could then choose to remain on the kibbutz settlements or make a life for themselves as civilians.

Roy Chweidan wrote in *Telfed* Magazine in December 1997 about (the late) Simie Weinstein: "He made a fantastic contribution to the South African volunteers who served in the Nahal units in 1956.

There were about 150 South

Africans serving in Nahal.

"Simie was totally responsible for their welfare. He arranged for us to store our private suitcases in the basement of Telfed offices in Hayarkon Street and organised free sleeping accommodation in the Eden Hotel.

"He arranged for Telfed to pay each of us 25 lira extra a month as the army pay was 14 lira per month." There is a photograph of Simie conducting a wedding service in 1958 of Nahal volunteers, Perla and Roy Chweidan.

In October 2006, 300 Nahalniks attended the 50th reunion of Nahal at Pardess Hannah. The chairman of the organising committee, Tzemach Bloomberg said: "It upsets me that in modern Israel, people don't know enough of the history of this wonderful country and the part played by the volunteers from abroad."

Smokie Simon, head of World Machal, recalled Yitzhak Rabin's words: "You gave us not only your experience but your lives as well."

Simie was Telfed's liaison officer for the Nahalniks and was honoured for his devotion to his "boys in uniform". The spouses and children of deceased Nahalniks were presented with certificates, while the rest received theirs in envelopes together with a commemorative CD and a booklet of stories put together by Les Amdur.

Lionel Noach of Johannesburg joined Nahal in 1963. He still has the air ticket issued by El Al for his flight to Israel on June 7 1963. The cost of the flight was R230, equivalent at the time to \$322.

Israel attracted many young and adventurous South Africans and by joining Nahal they had an opportunity to get to Israel and see the land. They received help and information from Jack Shapiro at the Zionist Federation

offices, at that time in Zion House in De Villiers Street in Johannesburg.

"We could either do the summer course or the winter course in Nahal and I went in June to the summer course. Our basic training in the unit was for three and a half months with boys from South Africa, Australia, England, America and even one Filipino.

"It was tough, really tough, and some guys ran away; they could not take it, but it made us into soldiers. We trained for 14 hours a day at the base camp. All the orders were in Hebrew and there was a woman teacher there who taught us to read and write Hebrew.

"I must mention the group of wild and uncivilised Moroccans who joined the unit; the army had to educate and discipline them. I don't want to boast, but I won an award for being the best soldier in that basic training course.

"After 3½ months we moved to Macheneh Shmonim for further advanced training. This consisted of long hikes, camping, exercises in shooting consisting of firing 'yavesh' (dry) blank ammunition and also 'ratoov' (wet) live ammunition.

"On one manoeuvre, I remember, a South African was shot in the stomach, but fortunately he survived. We were also taught to use bazookas and mortars. It was exciting but also a challenge. At that time, for me, the Israeli army was the place to be.

"After about three months we were sent to a border kibbutz, Palamchim, where we did guard duties, but we also worked in the fields, had to help in the kitchen and clean the toilets in rotation. Coming from South Africa, where we had been spoon-fed and spoilt, some of it was... well, you can imagine!

"But the Zionist Federation looked after us South Africans... They took us on tours to Jerusalem and to other parts of the country. We also went to the early excavations on Masada where we worked with Yigdal Yadin.

"We actually went through the Mandelbaum Gate at that time; Jordania ruled Jerusalem, and up to the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus and the (former) Hadassah Hospital which were isolated from the rest of Israel, cut off in the 1948 war.

"We spent six weeks there on guard duty. What a fascinating, amazing experience it was! Hadassah was the finest hospital in the Middle East then. There was the famous Magnus Library where, can you believe it, there were copies of the SA Zionist Record of the 1940s.

"After that we went for more training to Tel Nof in the south, Gedud 50 it was called. We were in a parachute division and we jumped from planes all over the country including onto Carmel. It was an elite unit and we had the red berets of which we were very proud.

"I spent 15 months in Nahal and for me it was a very special period. It was stimulating to meet people from all over the world who came to Israel for the unbelievable experience of being there. The country was peaceful, there was no stress living there and I was privileged to have had that opportunity."

The SA Zionist Federation office reported in 1964 that of 453 participants in their scheme, 208 had remained in Israel.

* Nahal is having a reunion in Israel on May 5 and Lionel Noach will be there to renew old acquaintances and re-live memories.



Lionel Noach

From the harsh veld of the Western Transvaal, to the Promised Land

Eyes of the Beholder, by David 'Migdal' Teperson

REVIEWED BY LIONEL SLIER

DAVID TEPERSON grew up in the (then) Western Transvaal platteland in the 1930s, a solitary, dyslexic Jewish boy whose friends were the local Boer children and the San tribesmen in the area.

From the Boers he learnt skills in farming, and the trades necessary for a farmer to know (a fix-it-yourself ethic). From the San he learnt the art of tracking and surviving in harsh conditions. He carried a gun from the time that he was eight years old.

"Living there," he was fond of saying, "you are reminded every day that you are a Jew." But he proudly calls himself a Boerejoed.

In May 1948, Teperson went to Palestine illegally via a displaced persons' camp in Europe where Holocaust survivors stayed before they could be taken to (then) Palestine. "illegally" because the British blockaded attempts by the Haganah to bring these traumatised unfortunate people to Eretz Yisrael.

Teperson arrived on May 14, a day before David Ben-Gurion declared independence. Two days later he was in the Alexandroni Armoured Car Unit facing the Egyptian army. He was later

attached to a Jeep unit.

Teperson went on to become a legend in the Israeli Defence Forces. He fought in every subsequent war that involved Israel, in action at times together with his two sons and later, with his grandsons. After 1957 he served in the Egrof Varomach Reserve Armoured Brigade, reaching the rank of Colonel in 1997. Teperson is over six feet six tall (1,96m) and became known, familiarly, to everyone, even his soldiers, as "Migdal" (tower).

Today his passion is collecting, collating and recording all Israel's battles, particularly the part played by South Africans since the Mahal and Nahal days, to the present. He is actively involved in the Palmach Museum at Latrun.

"Eyes of the beholder" is the first in a series which he has planned about Israel's battles. It is the story of the 9th Battalion Jeep Commando Company in 1948/9. Sixty per cent of the soldiers were Mahalniks (volunteers from abroad) the majority of them South Africans.

The Company was made up of 17 Jeeps with mostly three men to a vehicle, which were able to operate far from their home base for days on end often behind enemy lines. Ever conscious of his roots, Teperson makes a point of regularly mentioning South African

fighters by name.

It is a book of only 100 odd pages but it is packed with information of the campaign in the Negev, the capture of Be'ersheva, the relief of Eilat, the capture of Dimona and Sodom and the elimination of the Egyptian troops from the Negev and Gaza. They also saw action against the Jordanians who had no stomach for a fight.

Teperson asks the eternal question: "Why do people go to war?" He answers it himself: "People run to join the army in times of emergency and most young people are looking for action and volunteering to join elite fighting units and of course the belief in the cause that you are fighting for and the wish to be part of that cause.

"There is no such thing as not being afraid, but when in action the fears are brought under control."

Elements of humour course through the book. The South Africans in the Jeep unit taught the Israelis to sing, "Hold him down, you Zulu warrior, hold him down, you Zulu chief".

One of the first Hebrew phrases that Teperson learnt was "Let's go and wash our eyes out", which means "Let's go and see the girls". Then he adds rather roguishly, that the Palmach girls wore very short shorts.

Then there is the incident when

the supposedly neutral British sent Spitfires from Egypt to attack Israelis over the Negev and lost five aircraft. Two British pilots were captured by the Israelis and they were sent back to England.

Surprisingly Teperson makes excuses for the British losses, saying that their pilots "were inexperienced". What, one must ask, about the Israeli air force with its make-do-and-mend planes, although the crews were mostly Machalnik Second World War veterans?

Teperson concludes his book: "I was lucky to come out of the 1948 War with only slight wounds of shrapnel - I never went to hospital. For a dyslexic boy who walked barefoot in the African veld, I didn't do so badly.

"Although I am tall and everyone said I would get a bullet in the head, the only place I did get some shrapnel was on my legs.

"This is my story of the famous Jeep Company honouring my comrades from all over the world, including Israel."

There are numerous photos in the book, all of historic value and many of them of sentimental value to those who were involved. In time this book will be invaluable to a military historian writing the definitive history of Israel's wars, or should I say Israel's never-ending war.



David Teperson in 1948 (above) and today (below)



The Six Day War and South African Jewry

The Six Day War of June 1967 demonstrated the depths of South African Jewry's attachment to Israel. In the tense weeks before the war, offers of assistance - even from people not previously involved in communal work - began to arrive at the offices of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and the Board of Deputies.

PROFESSOR MILTON SHAIN

THE COMMUNITY launched an Israel Emergency Campaign at the end of the month to raise funds for the beleaguered state and the SAZF put together a programme for those wishing to volunteer for six months of non-combatant service in Israel.

The volunteers would replace mobilised soldiers in the towns and kibbutzim, helping to gather the harvest and maintain industries and vital civilian transport and medical services.

Some 1 800 individuals applied for the programme, with an initial contingent of 782 volunteers setting out two days before the outbreak of the war. In relative terms, the South African group was the largest of any Diaspora Jewish community.

Among the volunteers were nearly 100 university students who were sacrificing an academic year for the Jewish cause. South African Jewry also led in the realm of fundraising. Within weeks, R20 million (at that time the equivalent of more than \$27 million) had been collected from some 25 000 contributors.

Israel's Magen David Adom made an arrangement with the South African Blood Transfusion Services to have blood plasma sent to Israel on condition that the South African Jewish community would rapidly replace it. The response was enormous.

With the outbreak of war, "a wave of public sympathy for Israel swept over South Africa", reported the *South African Jewish Times*. Jews were glued to their radios, anxiously awaiting the news bulletins.

All Hebrew congregations were requested to hold special prayer services - the first one taking place at Temple Israel in Johannesburg two days after the outbreak of the war. Huge crowds heard Rabbi Arthur Super announce that Israeli forces had taken Jerusalem's Old City and that the chief chaplain of the Israeli army, Rabbi General Shlomo Goren, had sounded the shofar at the Western Wall.

"In kinship with our brethren in Israel," exhorted Rabbi Super, "it is proper that we start this service today with the blowing of the shofar." These were electrifying times for South African Jews, who flocked to thanksgiving services throughout the coun-

try. In Cape Town alone, 26 hugely attended services were held simultaneously.

Although South African government policy was formally neutral, many non-Jews made contributions to the SAZF's fundraising effort. More importantly, the government responded sympathetically to a joint Board and SAZF delegation that requested special permission to transfer the proceeds to Israel. This was agreed to, on condition that the funds would be used by charities solely for humanitarian purposes.

"Israelis Fight for Peace", as an editorial in the Board's journal, *Jewish Affairs*, put it, had rallied world Jewry as never before. Jews realised, the editorial continued, "that the Arab threat to Israel was in fact a challenge to the right of Jews everywhere to exist as free men".

Notwithstanding its melodramatic tone, the editorial was correct in its assessment that the war had been perceived by Jews worldwide in apocalyptic terms. It had conjured up images of destruction that, for South African Jews at least, had resonated powerfully; they shared with world Jewry a sense of cataclysm.

Few South African Jews remained uninvolved in the war. Fundraising activities were extensively publicised and lavishly illustrated by photographs in the popular press. The war eroded the tensions surrounding Israel's participation in anti-apartheid actions at the United Nations.

The obvious sympathy of the white population in general, and of Afrikaners in particular, also ended any lingering bitterness of the memories of the 1930s and early 1940s.

Helen Suzman, arch-critic of the Nationalist government, was greeted in parliament with the words, "Mooi skoot, Helen" (Well done, Helen). The South African government's gesture to facilitate the transfer of funds was viewed by *Jewish Affairs* as a particularly hopeful sign that "a new chapter (would) be opened in relations between Israel and South Africa".

Extract from The Jews in South Africa. An Illustrated History, by Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain. The book has just been published by Jonathan Ball and is available at all bookstores.

The founding of Tel Aviv



A group of Jews gather on the sand dunes north of Jaffa on April 11, 1909 to take part in a lottery for plots of land for the future city of Tel Aviv.



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Southern African aliyah - a story of achievement

“What have South Africans not touched and developed in Israel? They are agricultural pioneers in the classic kibbutz mode and pioneers in industry.”

**DORRON KLINE
RA'ANANA**

“THEY HAVE given Israel excellent physicians and veterinarians. They are sportsmen and influence others to engage in sports, notably tennis, which has become a democratic, popular sport among us. They have enriched Israel by their concern with the arts, their splendidly organised volunteering, their innovations in medical care...” (Late president of the State of Israel, Chaim Herzog Z”L).

Wander around the streets of Ra'anana and ask your average Israeli how many South African olim live in this city of 78 000 inhabitants. The answer, usually given with typical Israeli conviction, will normally hover at the 20 000 mark. You will stun your questioned Israeli by informing him that the total number of Southern African olim in Israel is 22 000, with only one-fifth living in “Ra'anafontein”.

What causes this misconception? The answer lies in the above statement by Chaim Herzog: “What have South Africans not touched and developed in Israel?”

The influence of the relatively small number of southern African olim, (and I use the word “southern” purposely in order to include our Zimbabwean olim), is completely disproportionate to their numbers.

This points to the quality southern African aliyah that brings exceptional people with unique talents. In no small part, these olim played significant roles in transforming Israel from a tiny developing country to a highly developed First World “giant”.

In 1948, 800 southern African olim volunteered for Machal, the programme that brought volunteers to fight in the War of Independence. This was the largest group of volunteers from any country in the world!

These soldiers, many of them

Second World War veterans, helped establish the Israeli air force, navy and ground force units. The South African Zionist Federation of the day, displayed much foresight and sent shlichim from South Africa to Israel, in order to set up a branch of the SAZF in Israel, which looked after the needs of this large group of volunteers.

Today we enjoy the fruit of their wisdom, as Telfed, the South African Zionist Federation (Israel) trains the 25 Jewish Agency Israeli shlichim who work in South Africa.

Eight thousand people live in the town of Efrat in Gush Etzion. In 1983 I remember helping the Cohen family lug their heavy suitcases into their new home. They had just made aliyah from Johannesburg, to this one row of houses on a barren hill. Few of the inhabitants today, living on the over 4 000 dunam of built-up areas, will recall that this was a South African project, pioneered by Telfed and settled by South African olim.

The same applies to Kochav Yair, Tzur Yigal and Moshav Manof. South African garinei aliyah (groups of olim making aliyah together) helped set up Kibbutzim Barkai, Hatzor, Kfar Darom, Kfar Etzion, Ma'ayan Baruch, Nachshonn, Nir David, Shluchot, Shoval, Timorim, Tuval, Tzora, Yizrael Zikim and Moshavim Habonim and Talmei Yosef.

The latest Telfed building project in the city of Modi'in, the “Dimri Towers”, has attracted over 100 southern African families in the past four years.

Next time you make a purchase at your family grocery store, check your bill, not only to see if you were charged the correct amount, but in order to discover which software company powers the cash register. In all likelihood it will be “Retalix”.

When Barry Mandel made aliyah in the early '80s from Johannesburg, he worked as a

delivery boy for “Burger Ranch”, the highly successful South African hamburger chain in Israel. Delivering burgers while still hot, taught Barry about customer service.

He joined up with fellow South African oleh Brian Cooper, Hebraised his surname from “Mandel” to “Sha'ked” (“almond” in Hebrew) and built an empire spanning the globe. Retalix today is one of the largest software companies in the world, providing cash register solutions. Where else would they be situated than in... Ra'anana?

Look up “Underwater Aquarium” in Israel's Yellow Pages. You'll find it in Eilat. I'm sure that many of you have enjoyed the spectacular vistas of brightly coloured fish in their natural habitat - the Eilat Coral Reef.

Why look in the Yellow Pages? Because the man who brought the Yellow Pages to Israel, built the architectural wonder in Eilat's sea and set up Amdocs, one of the world's largest billing companies, is none other than South African oleh, Morris Kahn. (By the way, the world centre of Amdocs is in... Ra'anana).

When Hillel and Tzemach Bloomberg made aliyah in 1961 from Brakpan, they found four squash courts in Israel - two in the YMCA in Jerusalem and two on the Tel Nof air force base.

“We couldn't imagine life without squash,” said Tzemach, “so we started building courts.” Today there are over 100 squash courts in Israel, the vast majority of them built by Hillel and Tzemach. The Israel Squash Centre is in Ra'anana and has hosted the European Championships numerous times.

Shahar Peer is Israel's tennis champion. She is ranked 17th in the world. She appears on the Telfed data base, since her father is South African.

Besides the biological connection, Shahar owes much to South Africa, since it was Dr Ian



Steven Jaffe, a graduate of Habonim who now lives in Ra'anana and coordinates 'birthright' trips to Israel, seen here in Tel Aviv.

Froman, a successful dentist and Davis Cup tennis player, who made aliyah from Johannesburg and established the Israel Tennis Centre and Tennis Academy in Ramat Ha'Sharon. It was here that Shahar practised and rose to stardom.

If you are a rugby fan, you just missed the exciting national match of Kibbutz Yizrael vs Haifa. Since the early founders of Kibbutz Yizrael were South African olim, it is only fitting that they hold the 2008 title of Israel National Rugby Champions.

We haven't even touched on the enormous contributions in the fields of education, academia, science, arts and volunteerism that

are part and parcel of the southern African aliyah. That will have to wait for another article.

I end, as I began, with the words of Chaim Herzog, as quoted in the book *Seventy Years of Southern African Aliyah*, published by the South African Zionist Federation (Israel): “This relatively small aliyah is profoundly influential. And life here, with all its difficulties, has given these one-time southern Africans an opportunity for self-fulfilment and the stirring sense of participating in history.”

“May many others in these problematic days follow them to Israel, sharing their commitment to Zionism, their talents and their effectiveness.”

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Mazel Tov on Israel's 60th Birthday

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Four South Africans who have settled in Israel

PAULA SLIER
TEL AVIV

WHEN TZIONA Agulnik was 12 she was inspired to immigrate to Israel after reading Leon Uris' *Exodus*.



"I bunked school for two days to finish the book. I remember eating raw potatoes so I could get a temperature. I told my dad I'd go to Israel and marry a man from the *Exodus*."

It was only on her wedding night that she found out that in fact her fiancé, Eli, had been aboard the ill-fated ship.

Tziona, 64, remembers those first years in Israel with nostalgia.

"For seven years I was an army gypsy wife following my husband around to every nearest town he was posted to. Each time there'd be an addition to the family. My eldest son was born during the Six Day War and my youngest daughter in Nazareth."

Life became really difficult when Eli drove over a land mine during the Yom Kippur War and was wounded.

"I was in a terrible state. I decided I needed a trip back home to get some real South African tender loving care. My holiday lasted for 24 years and my husband fell in love with South Africa."

But Tziona always wanted to return to Israel and as a 50-something she volunteered for the army as part of the Sarel programme.

"It started as a joke because my husband said I wouldn't get a job in Israel because I hadn't served in the army. While I was on Sarel, Rabin was killed and I went to his funeral as a representative of my unit. Portuguese TV asked me until what age women served in the army. The night of the funeral I phoned my husband and said I didn't know about you, but I'm coming back."

The family returned 12 years ago and Tziona is today a celebrated Israeli artist.

"This was - and is - my home. Israelis don't realise what's been achieved in this country. We never have time to see the positive things. We've made the desert bloom. So a birthday bash is appropriate. My dream is that we can export our know-how and learn to live in peace."

Russell Harris

Marketing writer, Russell Harris (pictured), 42, moved to Tel Aviv four years ago without a job.

"I came to Israel because I felt my life in South Africa was not going anywhere and Israel offered more opportunities. I'd also always had a desire to come and live here. But when I first arrived it was very disappointing."

"The entire absorption process was a let-down because I felt I'd been typecast. The social workers at the absorption centre didn't speak English and were not that clued up to people immigrating from First World countries. They told me one day I'd get to work in a supermarket and pack boxes."

"Telfed, on the other hand, were very supportive. Because the economy was so bad, they advised me to look for a job and not worry about the immigration process. In the '90s they were telling people the opposite."

Russell confirms life in Israel is more difficult than in South Africa.

"Things could meet my expectations but unfortunately I am caught up in the daily grind of finding work, speaking the language, making a living. As long as one has

the right attitude, life in Israel can be really good.

"As an English-speaker you're likely to do fabulously here and it's perfectly realistic to expect to carry on with the career you had in South Africa. The social life is also great - as long as you make the effort."

"Sixty years is a remarkable achievement - and there is so much further to go. I don't want Israel to turn out like South Africa where everything was "thrown away" for "racial harmony", including people's respect for one another."

"The leaders here don't have the strength and vision to take the country to where it needs to go, but ordinary Israelis respect each other - you see it every day everywhere - and there is a sense of humanity and potential here."

Sara Eisenstein

Sara Eisenstein, 35, made aliyah immediately after matric and is today married with five children, in a religious city next to Modi'in.

"I love living in Israel. You feel a direct connection with G-d here that is much harder to capture and build somewhere else."

When Sara first arrived, she thought she was coming for Zionist reasons but now realises it was her neshama (soul) pulling her.

"I felt I belonged. We were given Israel around 3 000 years ago, but were then kicked out. I'm very thankful that G-d has let us come back. Every day that I get to be here I feel is a gift from Hashem. It's a glorious merit to live here."

One thing she finds very unfortunate about Israel, though, is that unlike South Africa where everyone is happy to be next

to a fellow Jew, in Israel there is more division and even negative feelings between religious and secular.

Coming from a secular background herself and understanding both mindsets, she finds the negative feelings from the secular community towards religious Jews very sad and unnecessary.

"A good proportion of those in charge are trying to make the state as secular as possible by getting buses to run on Shabbat and opening non-kosher restaurants and so on."

Sara says the Gemora points to this as one of the signs of the Mashiach's imminent arrival.

Beverley Penkin

Two months after Beverley Penkin, 45, made aliyah, the first intifada broke out. Two years later she experienced the Gulf War.

"It was very frightening but I felt the kinship between people, how Israelis care for one another during times of war. If someone was going to the supermarket - which in those days wasn't safe - he'd always ask all his neighbours what they needed."

She has three children, with her eldest daughter having just started her army service.

"I feel proud and insecure at the same time. Seeing my daughter in the army is the culmination of my aliyah. Now my feet are entrenched in the earth. If you'd asked me two years ago I might have said I could leave Israel. But now, the answer is a definite 'no.'"

Trying to understand Israeli mentality has been one of her biggest challenges. But the camaraderie people feel for each other makes up for it.

"I've also found a niche in pluralistic education where it doesn't matter if you're reli-

gious, secular or conservative, you're always accepted as one of the family. In South Africa it is black and white - you're either religious or Reform."

Beverley works in production at the Jerusalem cinemateque and says that for every event they produce, Palestinians from the West Bank are invited to attend.

"Very often they don't turn up because of the threats they get. So how can co-existence work? There is too much aggression."

"The children - and I believe more on the Palestinian side - are being fed hatred. My youngest daughter often says to me: 'You see, mommy, there are nice



Beverley and her three daughters - taken on the day her eldest, Gabriella, went to the army

Arabs'. I'm not sure Palestinian kids are given the opportunity to think there are nice Jews.

"I don't believe our neighbours really want peace - they want Israel. I hope the next 60 years will be more harmonious and my youngest daughter, who is nine, won't have to serve in the army."

Mazel Tov on your 60th Anniversary

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DURBAN REUNION

27th - 29th JUNE 2008

In celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Carmel College, we are proud to announce the first Carmel College reunion to be held in Durban over the weekend of 27-29 June 2008.

The event will comprise a weekend of activity commencing with an Oneg Shabbat at the Great Synagogue on Friday night (27 June), a special service at the Synagogue on the Shabbat morning followed by a Kiddush, a Braai at the new Young Israel Centre on Saturday night (28 June), a fun run / walk and other activities at the old Carmel College campus on Sunday morning (29 June) and culminating with a lunch at the Durban Jewish Centre later that day.

This promises to be a fantastic weekend where we hope the different generations of those who attended the school can get together with some of the former headmasters and teachers. We would appreciate it if you would indicate your interest in attending the event by replying to dhsa@telkomsa.net as soon as possible. At the same time, we would also appreciate it if you would kindly send this to as many of your ex-Carmel school friends as possible so that we can make this a truly memorable event.

SA-Israel relations

LARRY BENJAMIN

ON JUNE 19 2007, Smuts Ngonyama, in his (then) capacity as national spokesman and head of the presidency for the ANC, wrote an official letter that, inter alia, was addressed to the South African Jewish community.

In that letter the policy of the South African government regarding Israel and the Palestinians was reiterated explicitly and without ambiguity. It also amounted to a declaratory policy, predicated largely upon even-handedness and a desire to be engaged and constructive.

While lamenting the "tragic and visible human suffering on both sides", the letter also acknowledged that this protracted conflict is an emotive issue for many South Africans.

The South African government, which Ngonyama claims has a "deep appreciation" of this conflict both for the "history and the opposing arguments" is committed to continue to "fairly and constructively" promote a process for peace.

The lodestars of South Africa's policy towards this conflict are enumerated in the letter as follows:

- (1) The ANC categorically supports a two-state solution as a model for peace
- (2) The ANC recognises the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state.
- (3) The ANC will similarly promote and encourage the establishment of a viable Palestinian state at the earliest possible time.

In restating this official position, the South African government is, in my view, maintaining a policy that has been largely consistent and enduring, but one that has also been at sharp variance with the mutterings and utterings of some influential individual including some government ministers and political allies.

It is also a posture that marks a fundamental departure from the policy of the apartheid government towards the Jewish State.

That politics makes for strange bedfellows, is both oft-stated and axiomatic. However, during the final years of apartheid the bilateral relationship between Pretoria and Jerusalem was in fact based upon a perception of shared interests and, at least to some extent, a shared identity of being international "political pariahs".

In this era in which South Africa was diplomatically isolated by most of the international community, Pretoria saw Israel as a potential friend. For its part, the Jewish State, similarly excoriated by the so-called Afro-Asian bloc in the UN General Assembly, saw certain strategic and economic advantages in forging closer ties with apartheid South Africa.

The burgeoning relationship - some called it an "unholy alliance" - has been well documented, although some of the defence/military aspects of the relationship remain shrouded in secrecy.

This bilateral relationship also rested upon a shared belief in the principle contained in article 2.4 of the United Nations charter - namely that of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states.

Israel by the mid-1980s was, however, compelled to abandon the "turning of a blind-eye" and also imposed sanctions against the increasingly isolated racist regime.

However, up until that point South Africa had sympathised with Israel vis-à-vis both the Arab world in general and the Palestinians' in particular. From Pretoria's viewpoint the PLO, like the ANC and the PAC were communist lackeys and terrorist organisations.

In contradistinction, the ANC believed that there were clear parallels between their liberation struggle and that of the PLO. Indeed, they were essentially "sister organisations" both fighting "colonialism of a special type".

When democracy came to South Africa in 1994 and the ANC assumed the reins of power, many expected a complete shift that would lead to an overtly pro-Palestinian (and anti-Israeli) shift in policy.

Indeed that this did not eventuate is on one level surprising given the ANC's fraternal relationship with the PLO, juxtaposed with apartheid South Africa's "special relationship" with Israel.

However, international relations never occur in a lacuna. In this instance it is especially important to be mindful of changes occurring in the broader international system.

By the early 1990s the Cold War was over and Israel and the PLO's once bitter, seemingly eternal, enemies had also begun their own tentative search for a way out of the political vortex of violence and counter-violence.

The Oslo Accords suggested to many that just as a historic political compromise was leading to a bright new world for South Africa, so a similar negotiated and just settlement would soon descend upon two of the Middle East's long-time protagonists.

The euphoria and hopes that this generated were, however, to lead to a subsequent crisis of unfulfilled expectations and despair due to an admixture of weak leadership, a legacy of mistrust and the pernicious acts of religious and secular extremists on both sides of the political divide.

Thus the ANC government believed that it should adopt a magnanimous even-handed policy that would promote peace, but that would also speak out against moves or actions that diminished the prospects for a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. Consequently South Africa has praised actions such as the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and Pretoria invited Ehud Olmert, then deputy prime minister, to visit South Africa in 2004.

I would hasten to add that Pretoria has also not only been relatively even-handed but desires to be seen as such, because any overt bias could conceivably jeopardise South Africa's future hopes of eventually achieving a permanent seat on a reformed and enlarged UN Security Council.

Additionally economic imperatives and the desire to expand trade has also led to a very strong economic relationship between South Africa and Israel.

However, Pretoria has condemned Israeli actions that it sees as cynical and damaging to the hopes for peace. These include continued Israeli settlement activity, the building of the "apartheid wall" and human rights abuses.

Pretoria has also been critical of terror acts carried out by Hamas and others who are not willing to recognise Israel and make peace with the Jewish State.

There have, however, been some inconsistencies in these positions and while striving to appear even-handed, there have been instances which reveal an underlying and enduring sympathy with the Palestinians. I think it is both understandable and inevitable and a manifestation of a perceived similar historical experience.

What is more troubling is the cacophony of voices of those who remain ideologically strait-jacketed and wedded either to a notion that either rejects Israel's right to exist, or that at the very least disavows the idea of partition and a two-state solution.

The views of those who argue that the South African paradigm should be exported and that Israelis and Palestinians should get married and live together harmoniously in one state, is both short-sighted, devoid of historical understanding and simply out of touch with the overwhelming global consensus that an amicable divorce and the creation of two states living side by side in peace and security, is the only sustainable solution.

Given criticism from within the ruling party and its allies in Cosatu, one may legitimately ask whether the policy of even-handedness will endure and whether the guiding principles encapsulated in Ngonyama's letter will continue to remain as the underpinnings of future South African relations with Israel.

With South African politics currently in a state of flux, one has to ponder whether the new incoming political order could shift gears in this regard. If Israel and the Palestinians move - in accordance with the "road map" - towards an eventual accommodation, then expect little change in South Africa's policy.

However, if endless attrition, marked by increased violence, remains entrenched, then the needles of Pretoria's Middle East political compass may shift inexorably away from Israel towards an avowedly more critical and less balanced position.

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