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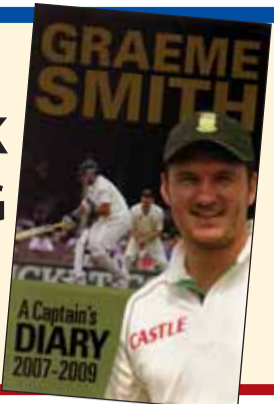
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SOUTH AFRICAN

Jewish Report



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Friday, 31 July 2009 / 10 Av 5769

Volume 13 Number 28

Jewish leaders to Obama: Pressurise the Arabs too

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IRAN, ME PEACE CONVERGE IN US-ISRAEL TALKS

Four senior US diplomatic and security officials are in Israel meeting with Israeli counterparts. Top Middle East negotiator George Mitchell (left) talks here to Israel Defence Minister Ehud Barak on Israel and the Palestinians. Mitchell is emphasising Syria as part of the peace package; drawing it into the Western sphere of influence would weaken Iran's influence. Israeli officials say they need to see results on Iran if they are to take risks on the peace front.

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PARSHA OF THE WEEK

Are we really independent?

TENS OF thousands of Jews will converge on Jerusalem's Western Wall this week as our people mark Tisha B'Av, our National Day of Mourning. On this day in history, both our Holy Temples were destroyed and a host of other calamities occurred throughout the centuries.

Some may wonder, why do we still mourn? Don't we have a sovereign state of Israel? Isn't Jerusalem united under Jewish rule today? Why are we still mourning?

The fact is that no Israeli rabbis have ever suggested that Tisha B'Av be deleted from our calendars. Nor have the staunchest, most zealous Zionists ever proposed doing away with the custom of breaking a glass under the chuppah.

This tradition has always reminded us that our personal joy is incomplete until our nation's joy is re-established. And that requires the total restoration of our national life, including Jerusalem rebuilt.

Thank G-d, since 1967, we are again able to visit the Western Wall. But as important as that sacred shrine may be, it is only a pitiful remnant of a glorious temple that once stood inside those walls. In fact, according to halacha, when we visit the Wall we



Parshat V'Etchanan

Rabbi Yossy Goldman
 Sydenham-Highlands North Shul

should rend our garments like a mourner because we are witnessing the site of the churban, the destruction of our holy temple.

So the reality is that although we have a Jewish State operating in our eternal homeland, the national state of exile is more than just geographical. Exile, galut, is a state of being and not a place on the map.

It does not mean the Diaspora, as if to suggest that only Jews living outside the borders of Israel are in exile. Whether we live in Jerusalem or Johannesburg, we are all in exile. Until the era of redemption arrives and the Temple is rebuilt, the exile isn't over. You might live in an apartment in the Old City of Jerusalem overlooking the Western Wall, but you, too, are in exile because the entire Jewish people is still in a state of exile.

It is not only a question of place; it is a question of time. At this time in our history, the redemption has not yet arrived. We still pray three times a day that the Temple be

rebuilt speedily in our time. And until those prayers are answered, I'm afraid we are all still in galut.

Sure, it would have been wonderful if David Ben-Gurion's announcement in 1948 spelled out not only a "Declaration" of Independence, but also real, practical and total independence. The truth, however, is that we are far from independent.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proudly proclaims that Jews may buy any property they wish in any part of Jerusalem, East or West and thank G-d he did.

But while we proclaim our sovereign rights, President Barack Obama is still on a mission and we are still very dependent on America, on Europe, on public opinion, on the media and even, to a degree, on the United Nations.

We are certainly not yet independent of Hamas, Hizbollah or Ahmadinejad who threaten our very existence as I write these lines.

When Jewish lives are being lost to terrorist armies, when our neighbours still dream of driving us into the sea, when they still deny us our basic legitimacy, when the international media challenges our right to defend our citizens, can we claim that we are really and truly independent?

Thank G-d we have an army, navy and air force. Thank G-d, they are fighting valiantly to

SHABBAT TIMES

July 31 / 10 Av

August 1 / 11 Av

Starts	Ends	
17:23	18:14	Johannesburg
17:48	18:42	Cape Town
17:05	17:57	Durban
17:26	18:17	Bloemfontein
17:19	18:13	Port Elizabeth
17:12	18:05	East London

thwart our mortal enemies' murderous machinations. But true independence means that our national security is no longer threatened and that a genuine and lasting peace has been achieved. No wonder Moshiach is called the Messenger of Peace. Who else can we turn to for that long-awaited dream? Political schemes certainly do not seem very promising.

And so we still observe Tisha B'Av. And unless Moshiach comes before that day we will fast and sit on low chairs in the manner of mourners. We will mourn the destruction of our temple and the state of exile it created. And we will pray for the full return to Jewish sovereignty and total independence. A time when our cities and towns will be free of enemy rockets and our children will feel safe and secure. May that time be now.

Johannesburg law firm reaches out to the poorest

ROBYN SASSEN

IN A world where "corporate responsibility" and "social awareness" are trendy buzzwords that many hide behind, one company which not only walks the walk but also has concrete proof, is law firm Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs, who last week, at a symbolic ceremony in Alexandra township next to Sandton, acknowledged the importance of access to justice for all by opening the first pro bono law office in Alexandra - and the firm's second, the other one being in Mitchells Plain in the Western Cape.

The firm's corporate responsibility strategy, developed a couple of years ago, has resulted in free access to justice for residents of Alexandra. In the new Alexandra-based office, top lawyers will spend hands-on time helping those who would normally not be able to afford this level of expertise. The office in

Mitchells Plain has been operational since July 2005.

The ceremony included invited government representatives, NGOs and Alexandra local dignitaries, as well as Minister of Justice Jeff Radebe, who, with Michael Katz, chairman of Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs, left their footprints on canvas in the office's symbolic inaugural ceremony.

Katz explained: "Alexandra was identified as an area where we felt we could make a substantial difference to the lives of those who previously would have had no chance of having the legal help they needed.

"Another reason for the office, and perhaps one of the most important to the firm internally, was to expose our own people to Alexandra. Instead of creating an in-house department, we decided to take our practitioners into the community.

"Each professional spends 32 hours per year in these offices. The

firm was also determined to contribute towards bridging the historical divide between Alexandra and Sandton, two very different worlds."

Radebe spoke of Alexandra's history of poverty and struggle. He congratulated Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs and commended its dedication to what he believes is imperative.

"Too often, people in communities like these are denied justice because they cannot afford legal help," he said. "The efforts and approach from Government should start before the community members are exposed to the courtroom."

This pro bono office comes at a time when improvement to the access of justice is a government priority. "In addition," he added, "legal education is extremely important; early legal information and details of the rights of members of these communities reduce the chance of court appearances."

Other speakers commented on the day-to-day difference the pro bono office makes. Lankiri Thaba, one of Alexandra's religious leaders, didn't know who to refer members of his church to before Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs established their Alexandra office. Alex FM deejay Trinity Mohlomme concurred that this project gives the community hope.

"We're regularly asked for financial, educational and legal advice; now we're able to refer callers to Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs. Before, no one could help."

Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs practitioners are proactive in self-



Chairman Michael Katz at the inaugural opening of Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs' pro bono office in Alexandra township.



Minister of Justice Jeff Radebe, at the Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs podium, last week. (PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY EDWARD NATHAN SONNENBERG)

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Nina Tassler, right, president of CBS Entertainment, talks to Israeli actress Leor Hashin at a master class on film and television in Tel Aviv on July 23. (PHOTOGRAPH: DINA KRAFT) **SEE PAGE29**

Achmat's boycott call has Limmud seething

MOIRA SCHNEIDER
CAPE TOWN

LIMMUD SA is at the centre of a controversy as a result of a call by human rights activist Zackie Achmat to the organisation to rescind its invitation to Lieutenant-Colonel David Benjamin to speak at its conferences in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg over the next fortnight.

Benjamin, a former South African who graduated in law from the University of Cape Town before going on aliyah in 1989, is a former legal adviser to the Israeli Defence Forces and served as its chief legal adviser for the Gaza Strip from 2001 until Israel's disengagement in 2005. In a Facebook entry, Achmat has labelled him "an architect of the war on Palestinian people" and has also called on "every principled Jewish person who supports democracy, freedom and justice for the people of Palestine" to boycott the conferences should the invitation not be withdrawn.

Describing Limmud's invitation as a "misguided attempt to 'hear' all sides", Achmat says that "to attend or participate in any way with the participation of a man who must be among those who should stand trial for war crime (sic) will be amoral, an injustice to the people of Gaza in Palestine and human rights activism everywhere. I ask all friends especially my friends in Habonim and Limmud ensure that Lieutenant-Colonel Benjamin is not welcome in South Africa or anywhere," the entry reads.

Limmud has invited Israeli human rights lawyer Shlomi Zachary to speak on the same topic as Benjamin.

In response to Achmat's calls, Limmud said in a statement issued by co-chairmen David Bilchitz and Viv Anstey, that it aimed to "reflect the diversity" of the Jewish community, including on matters such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. "Limmud SA believes that only through engaging individuals is it possible to understand and learn about the complexities of the issues."

The organisation wished to "promote constructive dialogue" and would not "utilise tactics of censorship when dealing with controversial or difficult issues. Free speech really matters where we are prepared to defend the rights of those with whom we may even vehe-



Zackie Achmat



David Bilchitz

mently disagree," it stated.

Mr Justice Dennis Davis described Achmat's proposed rescission of Benjamin's invitation as "very bad news. I think we should be encouraging as much engagement as possible provided, as indeed is the case, that there is a person on the other side promoting an alternative view - let those views be heard and let the community decide for themselves."

Davis labelled Achmat's call for individuals to boycott the conferences "absolute madness" as this would have the effect of "handing Limmud to the most reactionary elements" in the community. "If every progressively-minded person withdrew, then instead of diversity, you'd get the usual grinding uniformity," he warned.

In addition, he said he suspected that the facts about Benjamin - a former student of his - were incorrect.

"I'm quite certain that he has argued positions that many people would regard as wrong in international law (but) I find these wild allegations that this is a guy who's responsible for war crimes deeply, deeply disturbing because I can't see any substantiation in fact for any of that - you can't just say these things."

Nevertheless, Davis did not regard Achmat's calls as arrogant, describing himself as a "freedom of speech person. He's got every right to call for it, but then people have got every right to tell him he's wrong," he stressed, adding that this was part of "the exchange of debate".

In a statement supporting Achmat's calls, the Palestine Solidarity Committee refers to Benjamin as a "war criminal" and calls on the state to pursue legal action against such individuals "when they set foot in our country. South Africans should feel outraged to have such a war criminal visiting our country, with the express purpose, according to Limmud, of providing SA audiences with the Israeli army's justification for their war crimes."

"The arrogant refusal by Limmud organisers to respond positively to Achmat's and (cartoonist Jonathan) Shapiro's request perhaps suggests their support of these war crimes," it reads.

SEE COMMENTS ON PAGES 9 AND 10

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