

“The State of Israel has a special hold on our soul. Israel is the very essence of our being. The Torah that spells out for us a way of life and a religious destiny also binds us to a land, and Jewish life cannot be sustained without Israel as its core...”

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Union for Reform Judaism



“We believe in full and equal inclusion of all Jews regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.”



The South African Union for Progressive Judaism

The South African Union for Progressive Judaism (SAUPJ) represents Progressive Reform Jews and their interests in the Jewish community throughout South Africa. The SAUPJ promotes and supports Progressive Judaism, its traditions and practices, and advocates Jewish values.

The SAUPJ provides moral and financial assistance to existing Progressive Jewish congregations, communities, associations and organisations to ensure their preservation and enhancement. In addition, it helps Progressive Jews who wish to establish any such congregation, community, association or organisation.

The SAUPJ is committed to promoting and strengthening Progressive Jewish youth activities, Jewish education and the principles of non-discrimination in South Africa.

The SAUPJ is affiliated to the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ).

The SAUPJ provides financial assistance to rabbinic students, to Progressive Jews belonging to member congregations and associate bodies who wish to study and/or train in religious educational or administrative leadership or other programmes locally or abroad, and to Progressive Jews to attend seminars locally or abroad.

The SAUPJ promotes and encourages liaison with all other Jewish organisations in South Africa for the advancement and security of the Jewish community.

“The SAUPJ is the national representative of Progressive Reform Jews in South Africa. The organisation protects Progressive Jewish interests in the South African community.”



“The SAUPJ promotes Progressive Judaism in South Africa, supports its traditions and practices and advocates Jewish values.”

Message from the SAUPJ



The SAUPJ is a dynamic, progressive organisation that supports and represents Progressive Jews throughout South Africa.

We are proud of the fact that the SAUPJ is represented on all national bodies in South Africa, where we always get a fair hearing and are able to voice our concerns. As the umbrella body of the Progressive Movement, we play an important role within the wider Jewish community, as well as in the interfaith communities in South Africa.

The SAUPJ plays an active role in making sure that news-breaking events of international and local importance, as well as other newsworthy items are reported in the South African Jewish media. We ensure that Progressive Jews are heard throughout South Africa.

A milestone for us this year is our new website. We are very excited to be live on the web at last, and we hope this will encourage potential members and international visitors, and give us more international exposure. Please visit our website – www.saupj.org.za – to find out about the Progressive Movement in South Africa.

The SAUPJ and our rabbinic organisation, the South African Association for Progressive Rabbis (SAAPR), are involved in the National Religious Leaders Forum and the SA Faith Communities Environment Institute, of which Rabbi Hillel Avidan is the Jewish representative. With global warming and other environmental issues coming to the forefront, this will become more and more important. Our aim is to ‘green’ all our synagogues and, in so doing, lead the way and be an example to all South African religious organisations.

Our movement is now 76 years old and much has happened since its inception. We hope to continue developing and growing so that we can pass a brighter torch onto our children and our children’s children.

Steve Lurie
National Chairperson, SAUPJ

South African Association of Progressive Rabbis

The South African Association of Progressive Rabbis (SAAPR) is a national association which ensures consistent standards of religious practice. The SAAPR embraces all rabbis serving congregations affiliated to the South African Union for Progressive Judaism.

The purpose of the SAAPR is to pool rabbinic expertise, to provide support for its members, and to agree on a common policy regarding *Minhag South Africa*.

Rabbi Hillel Avidan is the current SAAPR chairperson.

Rabbinic leaders

For the first time in many years, most of the rabbis serving the South African Progressive Movement are South African-born. Rabbi Charles Wallach, Rabbi Greg Alexander and Rabbi Malcolm Matitiani are all products of the South African Progressive Movement.

Rabbi Hillel Avidan, although not South African, has decided to make South Africa his home, and has been in the country since 1992. We hope that Rabbi Robert Jacobs, who becomes a member of the SAAPR when he joins Bet David in Johannesburg in August 2007, will also decide to stay in the country for many years.

“These are the duties whose worth cannot be measured:
Honouring father and mother.
Acts of loving kindness.
Diligent pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.
Hospitality to strangers.
Visiting the sick.
Celebrating with a wedding couple.
Consoling the bereaved.
Praying with sincerity.
Making peace where there is strife.
And the study of Torah leads to them all.”

Eilu D'varim



Rabbi Hillel Avidan

Rabbi Hillel Avidan served Bet David in Sandton for 11 years from 1992 to 2003, when he retired. He is Rabbi Emeritus of Bet David. In 2005, he came out of retirement to serve the Durban Progressive Jewish Congregation and intends to stay there for as long as he is needed. Rabbi Avidan is the chairperson of the SAAPR and has been since 2004. He also served in this position between 1995 and 1999, and is currently the national Jewish representative of the South African Faith Communities Environmental Institute (SAFCEI).



Rabbi Charles Wallach

Rabbi Charles Wallach's first synagogue posting after graduation was as one of five rabbis of the then United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg. He later ventured overseas and spent more than 20 years there. In 1999, he joined Bet Menorah in Pretoria as interim rabbi, after which he became full-time. During this period, the position of rabbi became available at Temple Emanuel in Johannesburg. Rabbi Wallach served both congregations until he decided to accept a full-time position at Temple Emanuel.



Rabbi Greg Alexander

Rabbi Greg Alexander was recently welcomed to Cape Town as one of the two rabbis serving Temple Israel's three communities. Rabbi Alexander is no stranger to South African shul-goers. His grandparents on both sides were members of Progressive synagogues in Johannesburg and Durban, and his parents were married at Temple Shalom in Sydenham, Johannesburg, where he celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. Before returning to South Africa, Rabbi Alexander worked as a rabbi for Southgate Reform Synagogue in London, and as a consultant for the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education in Philadelphia.



Rabbi Malcolm Matitiani

Rabbi Malcolm Matitiani was one of three rabbis ordained at the Abraham Geiger College in Potsdam in Germany for the first time since the *Shoah*, ensuring his place in history. His ordination made international headlines. The Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) was closed down by the Gestapo in 1942. When Rabbi Matitiani was ordained in 2006, he was one of the first three rabbis to be ordained in Germany in more than 60 years. Rabbi Matitiani served Temple Israel, Cape Town, as a student rabbi and was recently inducted as a rabbi of the Cape Town congregation where he will serve alongside Rabbi Greg Alexander.



Rabbi Robert Jacobs

Rabbi Robert Jacobs will join Bet David in Morningside, Sandton, in August 2007. Rabbi Jacobs is no stranger to South Africa, having spent two six-week periods with Temple Israel in Cape Town when on Sabbatical in 2005 and 2006. These experiences in South Africa encouraged him to explore other, more long-term, opportunities in the country. Currently, he works at the Temple Adas Shalom-Harford Jewish Centre in Havre de Grace, Maryland, and has been there since 1998. We look forward to welcoming him to the South African community.

Visiting rabbis

Each year, the SAUPJ ensures that all South African congregations have rabbinic support over the High Holy Days. We have had many successful visits from rabbis and student rabbis from around the world. We have welcomed many well-known rabbis, including Rabbi Paul Feinberg, associate dean of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem; Rabbi Fred Reiner, chief rabbi of Temple Sinai in Washington DC; Rabbi Robert Rothman, Rabbi Emeritus of Community Synagogue in Rye, New York; Rabbi Uri Regev, president of the WUPJ; Rabbi Joel Oseran, vice-president, International Development, WUPJ; and Rabbi Avraham Soetendorp, president of the WUPJ European Region, based in The Hague, who came out for the 70th anniversary of Temple Israel, Hillbrow. It is a pleasure to have hosted such esteemed rabbis on our shores.

Tikkun Olam – The South African way!

In his wisdom, Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler, founding rabbi of the South African Progressive Movement, foresaw the important role that women could play in our movement. He encouraged the women who attended his services to form a Sisterhood which would work for the movement and the community at large.

“Sisterhood means service” was the motto adopted by these women. This first Sisterhood was formed on 30 August 1933 and its motto was carried over to all the other Sisterhoods that followed. Today, the South African Union of Temple Sisterhoods (SAUTS) forms the umbrella body of all the Sisterhoods in South Africa.

Sisterhoods all over the country administer feeding schemes in the poorer areas, they assist disadvantaged students, distribute grocery hampers for the various *chaggim* (festivals), provide care to the aged, teach lifeskills, and visit the sick and institutionalised.

Fundraising is undertaken by all the Sisterhoods to finance their projects. These efforts take the form of book sales, jumble sales, whiskey tasting evenings, food collections, the sale of Judaica, concerts and the like. With the exception of the United Sisterhood in Johannesburg, which is a professional fundraising organisation, all Sisterhoods operate on a strictly voluntary basis.

Besides caring for those in our own country who need our help, the Sisterhoods in South Africa also help those beyond our borders. During the past few years, the SAUTS has provided more than 5000 Shabbat dinners for the Jews in Argentina; helped school girls with transport and food for a year (also in Argentina); assisted women in the Ukraine to establish Jewish homes with the provision of Judaica; and provided new clothing for children in Israel who have been affected by the ongoing terror. The United Sisterhood gives assistance to a soup kitchen in Jerusalem and sends food to Zimbabwe.

The SAUTS is a committed member of the Co-ordinating Council of National Jewish Women’s Organisations of South Africa, and is a founder member of the Shalom Bayit project, which provides a place of safety for abused women. The SAUTS is also represented on the board of Women for Reform Judaism, our parent body based in the United States, and has a seat on the governing body of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ).

Monica Solomon is the current president of the SAUTS.



The United Sisterhood, the umbrella organisation for the Johannesburg Sisterhoods, supports various projects, including the MC Weiler School, started by Rabbi MC Weiler in 1945. Other projects include the New Nations School in Vrededorp and Sizwe Hospital.



MaAfrika Tikkun’s Hillbrow Project – a crèche – is based at Temple Israel in Hillbrow. MaAfrika Tikkun provides training for its teachers, supplies equipment for the school, donates blankets, food and clothing to the Hillbrow street children and takes them on various outings during the year.



The Temple Emanuel Sisterhood projects include Our Parents’ Home Dental Project, Siyakhula – our care committee, Our Children’s Feeding Scheme, a home craft centre, food collections, book sales, jumble sales, support of the Hillbrow street children and Netzer camps. On weekends, members of the community collect money and tinned groceries for the various projects.



The United Sisterhood’s new young women’s group known as Hadassah was formed in January 2005. The aim of the group is to create awareness on various themes by arranging talks on a chosen subject. These include HIV/AIDS awareness, general hygiene and pet care. Learners receive packs with products related to the topic. Bet David’s Sisterhood

Inner sanctuaries in South Africa



supports two feeding schemes in Alexandra Township – Zenzeleni Primary School and Leamoetswa (everyone is welcome). Aids orphans and other needy children are given cooked meals daily, some receive tracksuits, socks and shoes for the winter, and some receive food parcels for their families.



The Mitzvah School was opened in January 1986 as a crisis class for one year to assist students from Alexandra Township to pass their final school exams. Although lack of funding threatened closure of the school more than once, the Mitzvah School celebrates its 21st year in 2007. The Mitzvah School, which was started by Molly Smith and Lesley Rosenberg, now receives generous donations from various benefactors. The Sisterhood of Temple Israel Greenpoint in Cape Town held its



annual fundraising Summer Fayre in October 2006 at its new premises. The proceeds from this initiative will be used to support its projects throughout the Western Cape. The Durban Progressive Jewish Congregation's Sisterhood supports the



children at Mavela preschool. In 2006, they were given a Christmas party, and a number of generous donors provided each child at the school, the members of all child-headed households and the caregivers with a Christmas gift.



Bet David, Johannesburg



Bet Menorah, Pretoria



Temple Israel, Cape Town

The future of Progressive Judaism

NETZER SOUTH AFRICA

Netzer South Africa is the Progressive Zionist youth movement committed to interactive, informal Jewish education, youth empowerment and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Established in South Africa in 1979 (then known as Maginim), Netzer is a world-wide movement with *snifim* (branches) across the globe.

In South Africa, we blend our Jewish and Zionist ideas with our signature *ru'ach* (spirit), enthusiasm and fun in programmes. These range from summer *machaneh* (camp) to fun outings, *Shabbatonim*, meaningful social action, prayer services, and our Shnat Netzer post-school year in Israel.

Netzer South Africa operates nationally in a youth-led framework, with centres in Gauteng, Cape Town and Durban (so far). Our close Netzer community ensures that each of our *chaverim* (members) has a strong sense of ownership and belonging. Our members range from six to 22 years old.

2007 marks an exciting year, with our second Israel tour for *madrichim* (youth leaders) and new leadership ready to take the movement from strength to strength!

Nilmad V'Na'aseh! We will learn and we will do!

“We believe in instilling the values of learning, mutual care, purpose, working in co-operation, care for the environment, social justice and equality through Jewish education and Jewish practice as well as the education that comes through lifeskills. We believe in Jewish pluralism and equality, and we are a Zionist youth movement.”

TAMAR SOUTH AFRICA

TaMaR was started as an initiative of Netzer Olami in order to provide a forum for former Netzer participants to remain involved in our movement. Today, TaMaR has become far more than its creators intended. Although TaMaR started as a home for recent ‘graduates’ from Netzer, world-wide it has attracted young adults who were never part of a youth movement wanting to retain their Jewish involvement.

What is of consequence in South Africa is a need to understand what it is to be a Progressive Jew. While we are all aware of our South African *minhag* (custom) and the variety of Jewish expression throughout the world, we seek to interrogate the underlying principles and construct our own practises based on relevance as well as ethical and intellectual integrity.

TaMaR also focuses on the social aspect of bringing the youth together to have fun and spend time with other young Jewish adults.

TaMaR aims to develop and grow the organisation nationally. Our movement’s success relies on continuity planning for our future leaders. We therefore need to target young adults in our community and provide frameworks for TaMaR so that we can encourage them to remain involved.

Our current group consists of approximately 14 to 20 regular attendees. It is the aim of the group to grow its current numbers and welcome people from the Progressive congregations as well as those currently not attending regular services. The group meets fortnightly for a discussion followed by *Havdalah*.

“When good leaders are available, it is the Holy One who proclaims their identity.” *Exodus 31:2*,
Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 55a

Netzer and TaMaR at the winter camp 2006 in Magaliesburg



Netzer in Durban



Netzer Machaneh



Beginnings of Progressive Judaism in South Africa

Professor Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, professor of Jewish music at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, visited his family in Johannesburg in September 1929. While he was here, he gave talks on the nature, principles and procedures of Progressive Judaism.

He urged his brother, Jerry, to establish a group to initiate Progressive Judaism in Johannesburg, which he did. Jerry later joined his brother on a trip through Europe, where he visited Progressive synagogues and met a number of prominent Progressive Jewish leaders and rabbis on the continent and in England, including the Honorable Lily Montagu, who was then president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

On his return, he formed a new committee, which included Oscar Caplan, Dr Louis Freed and Sigmund Haas, among others. He conducted services in private homes during 1930, and later arranged public lectures, gave talks on the radio and wrote articles on Progressive Judaism in the Jewish and daily press.

In June 1931, the South African Jewish Religious Union for Liberal Judaism was established with Jerry as honorary secretary, and a wide media campaign was launched. In 1932, through Abraham Idelsohn and Lily Montagu, he started negotiating with Moses Cyrus Weiler, then a student at Hebrew Union College under the tutelage of Abraham, who was his professor.

“The most important goal is to have complete equality between men and women.”

Once he was ordained, Rabbi Weiler came to Johannesburg. It was August 1933. A Progressive congregation was soon formed and the first service was held at the Freemasons’ Hall.

At the end of that year, a site was purchased to build a synagogue – the first Liberal Jewish synagogue in South Africa. The foundation stone of Temple Israel was laid by the then Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Maurice Freeman, on 22 September 1935, and the official opening of the shul took place on 23 August 1936. The first High Holy Days services that year brought in a large number of new members and other interested people.

A Temple Israel Hebrew School was later established and children’s services were instituted. This was completely revolutionary. The children themselves conducted the Sabbath morning service almost in its entirety, and the first such service was attended by about 20 children.

Rabbi Weiler’s insight and vision were clear from the beginning. As early as 1933, he was able to persuade the committee that certain principles must be adhered to with regard to membership – the most important being complete equality between men and women, and the practice of unassigned seats. “There must never be any vestige of differentiation between a rich man and a poor man,” he said.

This insight followed through to all Rabbi Weiler’s pioneering activities and the committee’s visionary ideals, and as a result, Temple Israel flourished and the Progressive movement grew exponentially.

(Source: Tribute to Temple Israel, 70th anniversary brochure, 2006)

“There must never be any vestige of differentiation between a rich man and a poor man.”

Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler



Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler



Jerry Idelsohn



Temple Israel, Johannesburg

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NEW! SAUPJ website recently launched. Visit www.saupj.org.za

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