

פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

Be Fruitful and Multiply

**Faith, Family and the
Fate of the World**



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Dear friends

This essay is my vision for a vibrant future for our community, and how each of us can create an everlasting legacy for ourselves.

As you read it, you will discover a story that moves from the latest findings in social science, economics, and history to reveal a Divine formula for overflowing blessing, prosperity, and growth for society.

I explore why this matters for South African Jewry right now, and how it can illuminate and inspire our daily lives with wisdom, meaning, and purpose.

Writing this, I discovered how some of the greatest experts made far-reaching mistakes, and how, after a circuitous path, the world is finding its way back to a formula for blessing that was waiting for us since the dawn of civilisation, kindly left for us by the Creator of the universe.

With blessings for a good and sweet new year.

 CHIEF RABBI *Warren Goldstein*

Faith, Family and the Fate of the World

In 1968, a book was published that shook Western society to its core: *The Population Bomb*. Written by Paul Ehrlich, a Stanford University professor, it warned that the greatest threat to humanity's future was overpopulation.

This was a direct challenge to the very first mitzvah mentioned in the Torah: “*Be fruitful and multiply*,” the commandment to have children. By implication, if Ehrlich was right, the fulfillment of this mitzvah would actually destroy the world. As he put it:

“The birth rate must be brought into balance with the death rate, or mankind will breed itself into oblivion.”

The book's subtitle made clear his apocalyptic prediction:

“While you are reading these words, three children are dying of starvation, and 24 more babies are being born.”

On the title page he delivered his call to action:

“Overpopulation is now the dominant problem ... No one can do rational personal planning, nor can public policy be resolved in any area unless one first takes into account the population bomb.”

Ehrlich backed up these claims with a dire prophecy in the opening lines of his book:

“The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of millions of people will starve to death. At this late stage, nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate.”

He also predicted mass poverty:

“Nothing could be more misleading to our children than our present affluent society. They will inherit a totally different world.”

The Book That Shook The World

At the time, *The Population Bomb* was a sensation. It received rapturous acclaim, sold millions of copies, and raised widespread awareness of the issue. Its

impact was immediate and immense. Ehrlich became a fixture on television, and his warnings filtered into popular culture, fueling a slew of dystopian films.

Policymakers seized on his thesis: President Nixon commissioned a national study on population growth, while in India, Indira Gandhi's government undertook mass sterilisation campaigns in the 1970s, affecting millions, in the name of averting the “population bomb.” Entire university departments sprang up to study “population control,” and in the public imagination, children increasingly came to be seen not as a blessing, but as a threat to the planet's survival.

Over time, the book turned Ehrlich into a celebrity intellectual, becoming one of the most influential works of the latter part of the 20th century. It's no exaggeration to say Ehrlich's ideas contributed to Western society's drift from the values of parenthood and family. Everyone believed he was right – that if birth rates persisted, humanity was headed for disaster. Ehrlich had all the credentials to make these claims – a tenured Ivy League professor boasting in his introduction of having written over 100 scientific papers and more than a dozen books on related subjects.

The core implication of his thesis was that the Book of Genesis with its call to people to “be fruitful and multiply” was dead wrong. Except that in the end, it turns out, in fact, that *he* was dead wrong. None of Ehrlich's predictions came true. The anticipated mass starvation of humanity didn't happen. The dark prophecies of catastrophic global famine and poverty simply never materialised. Humanity did not “breed itself into oblivion.”

In fact, quite the opposite occurred: the global economy has experienced unprecedented growth and prosperity since Ehrlich's time. America's GDP more than quadrupled in real terms, while Europe, Asia, and Africa have all seen extraordinary economic expansions. Far from universal poverty, billions of people are living longer, healthier, and wealthier lives than at any other time in history.

Just how wrong was Ehrlich? Well, in July 2025, a new book appeared making a compelling case for the exact opposite of Ehrlich's thesis.

This new book, *After the Spike: The Risks of Global Depopulation and the Case for People*, is written by Dean Spears and Michael Geruso, economists and demographers at the University of Texas in Austin (one of whom served in the Biden administration, advising on health care and population change). Both are renowned academics, regularly published in *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, and *National Geographic*. Their core claim? That it's not overpopulation that is the greatest threat to humanity, but *depopulation*.

Spears and Geruso marshal extensive research to dismantle Ehrlich's idea that more people inevitably lead to poverty and catastrophe. Instead they argue quite the opposite – by addressing the fundamental question of what drives human progress.

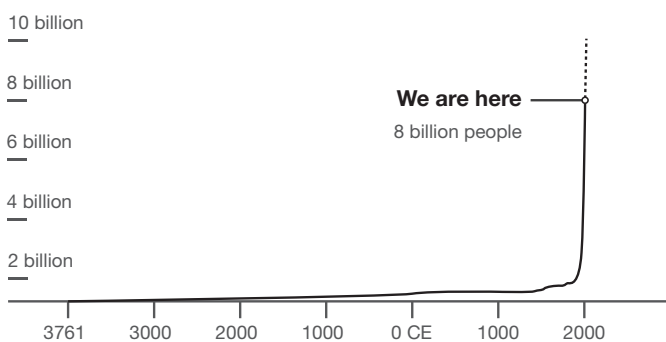
Stop and think for a moment: we live in a world where we assume technology, science, and human innovation are continually advancing. But *why* should this be the case? For much of human history, technological progress remained stagnant.

The Multiplier Effect

Examining the last 5,000 years, Spears and Geruso demonstrate that the vast majority of human innovation and advances in technology, science, medicine, and other forms of development have occurred in the last 200 years. If you look at the graph of human progress, you'll see a sudden spike around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

They then point out a striking correlation: that population growth follows an almost *identical* trajectory. The world's population was essentially flat for thousands of years, and then in the last 200 years saw a dramatic surge – from around 1 billion people in the year 1800 to 8 billion today, and heading toward 10 billion.

World population growth



World population in billions, nearly flat for millennia, then accelerating after 1800 (based on *After the Spike*).

Put simply: the past two centuries account for roughly 80–90% of both global population growth *and* human technological advancement.

Professors Spears and Geruso argue these parallel spikes are no coincidence. They refer to the Nobel Prize-winning work of economist Paul Romer, who explained *why* human innovation is linked to population growth. In his acceptance speech in Stockholm in 2018, Romer crystallised his theory:

“Ideas can be shared. I don’t mean the kind of sharing where we take turns. This is the kind of sharing where everybody can use something, like the Pythagorean theorem, at the same time.”

Economists call this “non-rival innovation” – one person’s use of an idea doesn’t deplete it for others. As Spears and Geruso explain:

“Recipes, designs, and formulas are non-rival. No matter how many cookies are baked or hammers are made, the knowledge remains available, valuable, indestructible. Ideas – whether technologies, process improvements, political theories, inspiring or clarifying works of fiction and art, or anything else – are valuable because they can be used or experienced over and over and over again.”

In other words, ideas can be shared infinitely without being diminished. More people means more minds generating and combining ideas, accelerating human progress.

The Secret of Innovation

History bears this out. All the problems that once seemed insurmountable – from mass hunger, to disease, to energy shortages – have been tackled through human creativity, resourcefulness, and abundance. Famine gave way to agricultural revolutions that feed billions. Diseases that once ravaged humanity are now curable or preventable through vaccines and medicine. Again and again, humanity’s answer to its greatest challenges has not been collapse, but ingenuity.

To illustrate the concept of “non-rival innovation”, Spears and Geruso bring the example of how in the 1960s, doctors in Bangladesh set out to solve child mortality caused by diarrhea. They developed oral rehydration therapy – a simple salt-and-sugar solution mixed with water in the right proportions – in a country with scarce resources. Once the idea spread, it was applied worldwide, saving millions of lives.

And it’s not just that ideas are shared; there is a cumulative impact. Spears and Geruso put it succinctly: “Ideas can multiply each other. Later ideas can interact with ideas that came before.”

They illustrate this with a fascinating and familiar example – the development of lighting. From ancient civilisations burning animal and vegetable fats in stone lamps, to sesame oil, to candles, to coal and gas lighting, to Edison’s incandescent bulb in 1879, and on to today’s LEDs. Each innovation built on the last – lighting ever more efficiently, cheaply, and brightly. Progress compounded as more minds contributed. The surge in global population drove a surge in human creativity.

We now understand that Ehrlich and his contemporaries got it backwards. Far from being a threat to survival, the proliferation of human life has been *the* source of blessing – exactly as the Torah intended when it said, “be fruitful and multiply”. Of course, it had to be so – these words were said by the One who created people, and the world.

Cancer or Creator? Two Views of Humanity

This naturally raises the question: How did Ehrlich and his generation of academics and thought leaders get it so spectacularly wrong? How is it that the phenomenon he and the world around him identified as humanity’s undoing proved instead to be a source of astonishing blessing?

At the heart of this debate is something far more profound than statistics about birth rates or innovation rates. It is about two fundamentally different views of the human being.

The clue lies in this shocking sentence in Ehrlich’s book: “We can no longer afford to treat the symptoms of the cancer of population growth; the cancer itself must be cut out.”

His cancer analogy reflects a dark view of the human being. It is jarring – yet revealing. It is rooted in the value system and worldview shaped by atheistic Darwinism: that the human being is merely an animal – an intelligent animal, yes, but without a soul, and locked in a survival of the fittest; a merciless fight for scarce resources. In such a worldview, each human being is primarily a *consumer* of resources – a burden, a drain – and, in great numbers, a dangerous cancer threatening the planet.

Judaism teaches something radically different. The Book of Genesis (1:26) tells us the human being was created “*in God’s image*”. This means we possess a Godly soul with divine qualities – compassion, care, a drive for meaning and purpose, and of course the crowning glory of humanity: intellect and creativity. Our sages in Pirkei Avot (3:18) put it powerfully: “*Beloved is*

the human being, created in God’s image.” In another passage, the Talmud (Shabbat 10a) describes how human beings can become God’s “*partners in creation*”.

From the Torah’s perspective, the human being is not merely an intelligent animal consuming resources in a bitter fight for survival with other people, animals, and the environment. Rather, the human being is a Godly being, imbued with the characteristics of the Creator of the universe – chief among these, the capacity to create. At the heart of human innovation, development, and advancement is our God-given capacity to create new ideas, new inventions, new ways of solving problems and making the world a better place.

The evidence is all around us. Look at what humanity has achieved – in medicine, architecture, science, engineering, transportation, information technology and every other field of endeavour. By contrast, animals still live as they always have, in the wild; they have not developed or progressed in any meaningful way. They merely exist and procreate. They are *consumers* of resources. Animals are not created in God’s image. They do not have a soul, the capacity for innovation and creativity, the Godly spirit that drives us to improve the world.

And it is not just our *intelligence* that makes us unique among creatures, but also our *moral conscience* – our drive to solve problems out of a concern for others and a commitment to what is right, emanating from the Divine soul within. When those doctors in Bangladesh worked desperately to save children dying from dehydration, they were moved by human suffering. Human progress is powered not only by intellect, but also by compassion, empathy, and the search for meaning.

In this way, human beings are qualitatively different not only from animals, but also from machines. This is an important discussion in the age of artificial intelligence and the race to create super-intelligent machines. What, actually, is the difference between a human being and a machine? If, as in the atheistic-Darwinist view, a human being is merely an animal with heightened intelligence and no soul, then a computer endowed with superintelligence would be no different – indeed, a machine might even be considered superior, since it is not limited by a frail, mortal body.

In God’s Image

Yet the Torah has always taught that we are created in God’s image – that there is something fundamentally different, qualitatively *unique*, about human beings compared to animals, and certainly compared to

machines. What defines us is the fusion of creative intelligence with morality, empathy, and the search for meaning – the very forces that have driven the advancement of humanity for millennia; the Divine soul within us that no animal possesses and no machine can replicate.

Where Ehrlich and company went wrong is that they took as their starting point the atheistic assumptions of Darwinism that the human being is merely an intelligent animal. History has now proven that view *dead wrong*. What we are witnessing today, with the continued explosion of human innovation, is the full unleashing of the image of God within humanity in the most powerful, inspiring, and magnificent manner.

These clashing ideological views on humanity are not merely theoretical – they have dramatic practical implications.

Viewing humanity through a Torah lens, rather than in Darwinian terms, transforms the way we relate to our fellow human beings. We see the image of God radiating from those around us, no matter their colour, creed, or socio-economic background. Viewing humanity as the pinnacle of God's creation, rather than as mere animals locked in a brutal struggle for survival, compels us to treat one another with dignity, respect, and kindness.

The Torah's worldview has been critical to the flourishing of Western civilisation. The founding fathers of the United States were deeply influenced by the Book of Genesis, hence the statement in the constitution:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, amongst them the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

This picture of the human being, possessing inherent Divine value to be protected, gave rise to a society founded on the principles of the Book of Genesis – faith in God, the idea that all human beings are created equal, and that we are not merely highly evolved animals, but possess a Godly soul, a spark of the Divine. This society has enabled unprecedented progress: unparalleled wealth, opportunity, innovation, and technology. In such a worldview, the more people, the better.

From Self-Gratification to Sacred Purpose

These two clashing perspectives of the human being play out in another way. By definition, in the

Darwinian worldview, the purpose of the human being, like all other animals, can amount to nothing more than self-preservation and self-gratification. By contrast, the human being, possessing an immortal Divine soul has a higher calling.

Thus, the opposing philosophies shape our attitude to the commitment required by marriage and the dedication needed to raise children. If life is only about self-gratification then it becomes a cost-benefit calculation. What's in it for me? Marriage closes options and forces commitment. Having children means a huge drain on finances, time, energy – not to mention sleep!

But when life is about a greater purpose – as God revealed to us in the Torah – then family becomes the very arena in which that purpose is lived. Far from trapping us, marriage and parenthood can be the pathway to our deepest fulfillment. Because God created the world with His moral blueprint in mind, the human being actually thrives when we live with His vision.

This emerges from the latest research. In a nationally representative YouGov survey of 3,000 American women ages 25 to 55, conducted in March 2025, the findings directly contradicted the idea that marriage and motherhood breed misery.

The study found that married mothers were actually *happier* than unmarried women and married women without children. Married mothers were also more likely to say that life is enjoyable most or all of the time. These results held even after controlling for age, family income, and education.

Similar patterns have been found in other well-regarded surveys, including the General Social Survey, and further research shows that married or partnered mothers are less likely to experience frequent depression or anxiety than their unmarried peers.

Why is this? The studies point to something deeper than economics or convenience: the profound sense of purpose that comes with raising children. Married mothers were the most likely to say their life “has a clear sense of purpose”, followed closely by unmarried mothers, ahead of women without children.

Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University and the author of *10 Rules for Raising Kids in a High-Tech World*, puts it beautifully:

“I now have three children, and I am somewhat incredulous that in my premotherhood inquiries, no one mentioned the sense of purpose parenthood gives you. Yes, you're going to be tired and overwhelmed, but there's a deep knowledge that you're doing something important with your life: You're nurturing a human

being. These feelings of purpose and meaning are sometimes difficult to put into words—perhaps why they aren't regularly discussed—but they are central to being a parent. I am fortunate to have a career I love and find meaningful; even so, the sense of purpose I have found through motherhood dwarfs every career milestone I have ever achieved."

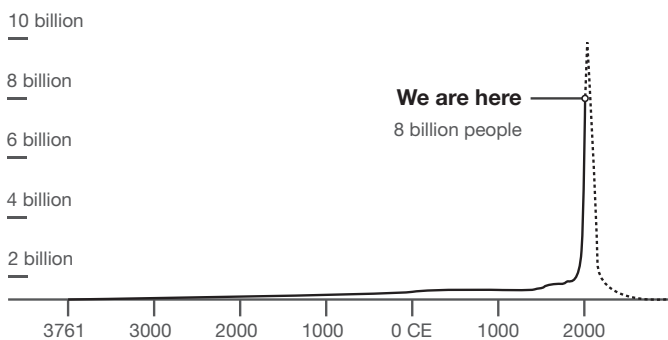
And yet, much of Western society continues to be dominated by the secular Darwinian worldview. In a nationally representative survey, the share of 18-year-old women who expected to have children fell by 11 percentage points between the late 2000s and early 2020s.

At the same time, new technologies are offering alluring substitutes, with AI promising relationships that are endlessly attentive but devoid of real human reciprocity. All of this feeds into a broader cultural pessimism about family, amplified by the echo chambers of social media.

Global Crisis

All of these factors have combined, and the result is a global crisis of falling birth rates. *After the Spike* sounds the alarm: "Humanity is on a path to depopulation" – meaning global birth rates have already fallen below replacement level, and if nothing changes, the world's population will start to fall precipitously, even nearing extinction in the far future.

World population projected decline



World population in billions. The dotted line tracks projected population growth up to a peak of 10 billion, followed by a precipitous decline (based on *After the Spike*).

In most regions of the world today, the average birth rate is below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per couple. The United States is currently at about 1.6. In China, where it has dropped to 1.0, the population has begun to shrink rapidly; whole cities are emptying out after decades of the one-child policy. (China recorded its third consecutive year of population decline in 2024, and a UN report projects that China's 1.4 billion population could plunge to around 633 million by the year 2100.)

In South Korea, the birth rate is just 0.72, the lowest in the world. Japan is also in freefall, with a rapidly aging population that cannot be sustained because there are not enough young people entering the workforce to support the elderly. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned in early 2023 that "Japan is standing on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society".

All across the world, declining populations are creating immense social and economic challenges: shrinking workforces, rising healthcare and pension costs, and the risk of long-term stagnation.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

These societies are learning what we always knew from the Torah – without people, the world becomes desolate. When explaining the importance of the mitzvah of "be fruitful and multiply" our sages (Talmud Yevamot 62a) reference how God "did not create [the world] to be desolate – He formed it to be settled" (Isaiah 45:18). In other words, creation loses its meaning and purpose without human beings.

The world needs to return to the family values of the Torah. With this worldview, expanding populations are not, as Ehrlich claimed, a "cancer" to be excised, nor a threat to scarce resources. Instead, it is to realise that the purpose of life is greater than mere self-gratification, and that bringing a child into the world is our ultimate achievement, our lasting legacy, our greatest blessing.

"Be fruitful and multiply", is not only a call to perpetuate the species, but an invitation to embrace the deep fulfillment of family life. And the more children, the more blessing.

It's no coincidence that the Torah presents humanity as created in God's image, then, in the very next verse, records God's message to the first human beings:

"And He blessed them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.'"

Notice the language: "And He blessed them." God's first blessing to humankind is the call to bring forth life: "Be fruitful and multiply". Population growth – the flourishing of humanity – is itself a source of blessing in the world. It is the source of blessing in any parent's life: the blessing of life and love, a depth of feeling unlike any other.

Becoming a parent is the privilege of becoming a creator like God. The greatest creative act God has entrusted us with is the ability to create another person. As the Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) says, *“there are three partners in the creation of a human being: the father, the mother, and God.”* To become a parent, then, is to partner with God, in bringing another creator, another human soul, into the world.

“Be fruitful and multiply” is God’s blessing to humanity. But for Jews, it is one of our 613 mitzvahs, and, according to our sages, one of the most important we have – for a simple reason: all others depend on it (Sefer Hachinuch no.1). If there are no Jewish children being born today, there will be no more Jews tomorrow. And if there are no Jews, there will be no more mitzvahs done. Our precious Divine legacy and mission will disappear with us, God forbid.

The Future of the Jews

What if there were no Jews left in the world? It’s unthinkable. As a people, we received a clear mandate from God when our ancestors stood at Sinai: a Divine mission to fulfill and hand on to the next generation. But we can only do that if there *is* a next generation. Ultimately, every generation of Jews has to answer this question for themselves – to say “we want the Jewish people to continue.” If there is to be a Jewish future, we need to be decisive and deliberate.

That is why the mitzvah is to have as many children as possible. In a world population of 8.25 billion, there are only around 15 million Jews. Most Jewish communities in the diaspora, excluding the Torah observant ones, are declining in numbers due to high assimilation rates and low birth rates. The future of any Jewish community in the world is reflected by a simple equation of how many Jewish marriages are made and how many Jewish children are born.

This applies no less to us here in South Africa. And securing our future requires a shift in mindset: from seeing ourselves as passive victims of circumstance to becoming active creators of the future we want.

I recall that throughout my childhood, people anxiously debated the future of South African Jewry. For years, I heard people say, “I give the country another five years.” And yet South Africa has endured. With all its problems, the country remains a robust democracy. The system is working; the ruling party is losing support, as it should, given its poor performance, and the democratic institutions are doing their jobs. Across South Africa, citizens are stepping into the gap left by

government failure, taking their destiny into their own hands. Our own community has exemplified this.

The external circumstances, while uncertain, as they are globally, are not what will determine our future. And, what does the future of South African Jewry (or any Jewish community for that matter) depend on? The answer is breathtakingly simple – people. Not the size of our community’s trust funds. Not our best strategic plans. Not what the government does today or tomorrow. Our future comes down to one basic factor: the number of Jewish children born to Jewish parents raised in Jewish homes with Jewish values. If that number is strong, our community will flourish; if it dwindles, so will we. It really is that simple. And the beauty is that what happens is in our hands.

This is not merely a description of reality, it is a call to action: for our community to embrace the Jewish family as the key to our future.

Raising Souls

And that means not only having children but raising them as Jews. To be clear, family is not a biological function of reproduction and caring for offspring, as it is in the animal kingdom. Judaism teaches that to be a parent is to nurture a soul.

We see this in the prayer recited at the birth of a new baby: *“May they (the parents) merit to raise him/her to Torah, chuppah (marriage) and good deeds.”* From the very beginning, we declare that the ultimate goal of parenting is to instill these values. In other words, the mitzvah of having children does not end when they are born. It is just beginning. It is the sacred responsibility of raising our children with Jewish values.

This is critical for two reasons.

Firstly, to bring human beings into the world without providing a moral, ethical, and spiritual education can be very damaging. Earlier, we explored the awesome creative potential and greatness of the human spirit – but human beings are also capable of the most terrible evil. Look at the destruction wrought by the monsters of history: Hitler, Stalin, the Jihadists of today, and so many others who have caused immeasurable suffering. God gave human beings free choice, which can be used to create or to destroy.

Therefore, the responsibility of parenthood is not just to give birth in a physical sense, but also to “give birth” in a moral, ethical, and spiritual sense. A child given life but not values may become a source of pain and trouble rather than blessing.

Secondly, as Jews, raising our children with Jewish values, a Jewish way of life and Jewish beliefs is vital because our identity is not ethnic or racial. There are Jews (and you see this most obviously in Israel) of all colours, races and cultures. To be a Jew is inseparable from the Torah. Our people's future is secured not merely by having children, but by raising sons and daughters who will themselves live a Jewish life according to the Torah and, thereby, continue our Divine mission.

A World First

The Talmud (Kiddushin 29a) teaches that parents must not only equip their children with the tools to earn a living, but also teach them Torah. On the most basic level, this includes teaching them how to do the mitzvahs, how to *daven*, how to read Hebrew and understand Chumash, and the other great books that make up our Divine heritage.

This is why Jewish education has always been at the centre of Jewish life. The Talmud (Bava Batra 21a) describes how the world's first national public education system was set up in Jewish society, by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla about 2000 years ago. Until then, children were entirely home-schooled. But Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla noticed that only those children whose parents had the necessary knowledge and tools could receive a proper Torah education, while other children were left behind. And so he instituted a Torah schooling system.

Based on this, the Rambam (Talmud Torah 2:1) even codifies that it is a basic duty of every Jewish community to establish a Jewish day school to teach Torah – and that a community without one is subject to sanction.

Crucially however, Jewish education is not just about schooling. It starts at home. It is the sacred duty of every Jewish parent to guide, inspire, and train our children in the how and why of the mitzvahs – so that by the time they become bar/bat mitzvah they know how to live as Jews, and are inspired to want to.

And this does not happen in the didactic setting of a classroom alone, but in the warmth of a Jewish home – where you feel and experience Judaism as a lifeforce in action. Whatever a child grows up with at home becomes, for them, normal and natural. If they grow up in a home of Torah values of kindness and sensitivity, of generosity and support, they will themselves grow into giving people. If they grow up in a home where the food is kosher and Shabbos is kept as the sacred

center of the week, they will carry those same values into the future homes *they* build.

If children grow up in a home where they see a loving marriage nurtured with the mitzvahs that sanctify and protect family life – the laws of family purity and *mikvah*, the way husband and wife speak to and treat each other – a home where they learn about honouring parents and being kind to siblings, they will be inspired to emulate these values in their own home one day.

It Takes a Community to Raise a Child

And so, at this time of reflection and renewal, as we contemplate the year ahead and strive for greatness, let this be our call to action – to do everything we can as a community to establish, support, and promote true Jewish homes filled with Jewish children, thereby securing our future.

This is a vision for everyone. It belongs to all, including those who are not married or without children. To paraphrase the well-known African proverb, “It takes a community to raise a child”. Together we must nurture a community that honours and supports families, and treasures children, recognising they are our ultimate legacy. We all have something to contribute to that vision.

The starting point is Jewish marriage: Jews marrying Jews and creating Jewish homes. I recently launched a new initiative – *The Matchmakers Network*, which is setting up and training a network of volunteer matchmakers from across our community, to make introductions and help young Jews in our community find their match. This is something for all of us to get involved in. We all know people. Let's make the introductions so that we can do the ultimate kindness for another person and more marriages can emerge to guarantee our future.

The real threat to the future of the South African Jewish community is not what the ANC will do today or tomorrow – they are a spent force; democracy will take care of them. It is intermarriage. The decisive question that will determine our future is whether the younger generation will choose to marry Jews, have Jewish children, and raise them as Jews.

Formula for Vibrancy

Another vital part of creating a vibrant future for Jewish families is Shabbos. It is a well-established fact that children who grow up in a home where they keep Shabbat will remain Jewish and connected. It's very simple: today, with rising intermarriage and

assimilation reaching 70–80% in many other diaspora communities, if we as parents want our children to marry Jews and raise Jewish families – the best way to achieve that is to raise our children with Shabbos. Our most precious values are handed over at the Shabbos table: when the family gathers together, setting aside the distractions and the pressures of the week to connect... when we declare in the Kiddush that God created the world... when parents bless their children... when children see the light of the Shabbos candles.

The driving vision of the Shabbos Project, since it was established in 2013 is to bring the gift of Shabbos into every Jewish home in our community. The beauty of Shabbos is that it offers us a fortress to nurture and protect families. The renowned social scientist, Jonathan Haidt, documents in his book, *The Anxious Generation*, how constant screens and social media are rewiring the psychology of children, causing deep anxiety and disconnection. Shabbat is one of the great antidotes to this trend. It is sacred time when families can disconnect from devices and truly connect with each other – an immersive day when children sit at the table with their parents, engaging in conversation, song, debate, and laughter, and become part of a real-life community rather than a virtual network.

Jewish day schools are another cornerstone in building strong, connected Jewish families. Again, multiple studies bear this out. The National Jewish Population Survey found that those with 7–12 years at a Jewish day school were nearly twice as likely to marry Jewish and far more likely to see Judaism as central to their lives. Among Orthodox students with 12 or more years of day school, intermarriage dropped to zero – compared to about 70% in the general Jewish population. Enrolling children in a Jewish day school is the most basic duty of Jewish parenthood. And we are blessed in this community to have an array of wonderful schools to give our children a proper Jewish education.

Another vital part of the vision that it takes a community to raise a child are our shuls, where nurturing strong proud Jewish families happens every week. Children who come to shul regularly with their parents, grow up knowing and feeling the warm embrace of community, and feel connected to Hashem and something greater than themselves. South African Jewry is blessed with an amazing network of vibrant shuls that offer so much to young families.

We All Have a Role

Let us all rally around this vision for a vibrant growing community. Marry Jewish. Have as many children as you can. Raise them as proud, knowledgeable Jews. Send them to Jewish day schools. Keep Shabbos. Be part of a shul. If we do all these things – we will have a growing and abundant future.

We all have a role to play in creating this future. It takes a community to raise a child. Young parents should be supported and saluted for their commitment. Parents of married children should help them to the best of their capacity – financially, physically and in every way – to manage the duties of parenthood, and encourage them to have more children.

Those without children can support our Jewish day schools with their *tzedakah* money, and get involved with our shuls to be part of helping make them thriving, child-friendly places of connection. As a community we need to think creatively (and generously) when it comes to easing the financial burdens on young families – from the cost of Jewish day schools to the challenge of securing suitable housing – so they can build vibrant, growing Jewish homes.

Let us find ways of encouraging a community narrative about the blessings of marriage and parenting, talking about how having children makes you happier and more fulfilled. Let us nurture a community culture that respects and acknowledges marriage as sacred, and parenthood as the most noble of aspirations.

History Is Made at Home

If we rally around this vision – we will make history.

Jewish history is written in Jewish homes – not in the headline news. The Torah itself illustrates this in the way it records history. If you were writing an account of the history of a nation, you might expect to focus on kings and wars and “headline” events. And indeed, the Torah, the ultimate book of history as told by God Himself, does recount the most important macro-historical events – the Exodus from Egypt and Revelation at Sinai, the great founding moments of our people. But look at the Book of Genesis, which prepares the way for Jewish history: *it's all about families*.

The whole of humankind stemmed from the family of Adam and Eve. Then, at the time of the flood, it was Noah and his wife and their sons and wives who formed the kernel of the new world that was built after the destruction.

Similarly, the origins of the Jewish people are the families of our founding fathers and mothers. It's the story of Abraham and Sarah, a couple who married and then struggled to have children, until they were blessed with Isaac. It's the story of Isaac finding a wife in Rebecca, and the twin sons they raised, Jacob and Esau – and which of those sons would carry on the legacy. It's the story of Jacob leaving home to get married and build a large family.

Jewish history and destiny is intertwined with the fate of these families. In fact, another name for the Jewish people is *Bnei Yisrael*, the “Children of Israel”, or *Beit Yisrael*, the “House of Israel” – referring to us as the descendants of Jacob's family. The very structure of the Jewish people – the delineation of the twelve tribes – is derived from Jacob and his sons. The Jewish people is essentially one large family made up of many subfamilies. We see this clearly expressed in the way the Torah describes how the people were counted in the desert at certain key moments after the Exodus – *as a collection of families*.

Even on Rosh Hashanah, the day all of humanity is judged, when one might expect the synagogue readings to focus on grand universal themes, what do we read? The Torah reading is the story of Abraham and

Sarah finally having a child, and the Haftarah is the story of Hannah – another holy woman who could not have children – pouring out her heart in prayer and then being blessed with a child (Samuel).

From the way our most sacred texts choose to highlight *family* in these moments we can learn that history is made through families. And so, the history of the South African Jewish community will not be written in Parliament, or in the courts, or in the headlines of newspapers – nor will the history of the Jewish people at large be written at the United Nations or in the halls of the ICJ. The story of our future will be written in our homes and families. The choices we make – whom to marry, whether to build a Jewish home, how to raise our children – those decisions will determine Jewish history.

As we stand at the threshold of a new year, let us strengthen our resolve and rededicate ourselves as a community around the vision and mission of the Jewish family. Let us make it the foundation of our future and the heart of our legacy.

There is no endeavor more important, more holy, or more historic.
