

NSW shadow minister reconnects with his roots

GARETH NARUNSKY

AS he prepares to take his seat on the NSW opposition's front bench, newly elected Heffron MP Ron Hoenig has opened up to *The AJN* on how he reconnected with Judaism.

Hoenig was announced as the new shadow minister for energy and ports in a shadow cabinet reshuffle last week, which also saw former *AJN* journalist Walt Secord promoted to the shadow ministry.

Earlier this week, Hoenig received an invitation to be called up to the Torah at Maroubra shul and attend a kiddush next month in honour of his election to State Parliament.

Hoenig attends Maroubra Synagogue regularly and keeps a kosher home. But he told *The AJN* this was not always the case. "I was probably like a lot of survivors' children. Judaism didn't play a part other than parents taking you to shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur," he said.

After his bar mitzvah, Hoenig only went to shul on the High Holy Days. "That was about the extent of it, you know when your parents compel you to go and then you reach the age that you no longer have to go."

He would go on to marry a non-Jewish woman with whom he started a



Ron Hoenig (left) and Rabbi Mendel Kastel.

family. It was when his eldest son, now 22, was ready to start school that his journey back to Judaism began.

The Hoenigs consulted with the then principal of Daceyville Public School about education options. "She strongly suggested that we go talk to Harry Taibel at Mount Sinai," Hoenig recalled. "So we actually sent Ben to Mount Sinai for a secular education rather than a religious one."

Over the years, Ben formed a good relationship with Rabbi Chaim Perez and became "quite committed to Judaism at a very young age."

"He wanted to go to shul regularly and he wanted to go on Saturday afternoons, they played indoor soccer in the shul hall then, and so I would take him," Hoenig said.

"After a couple of weeks I picked up the Chumash and was sitting there

reading the translation of the Torah portion and the commentary and in it I discovered the laws on which our current laws are based.

"You know the doctrine of independence, the separation of powers, the doctrine of corroboration, all contained in the Torah. And I started to think that 'how could a human being three-and-a-half thousand years ago have the knowledge to write concepts on which our current laws now are based? How can an individual person do it without divine intervention?"

"I started to get fascinated by it, I started reading some of the translations of some of the psalms and the Amidah in the siddur."

Hoenig went on to kasher his home and nine years ago his sons converted to Judaism. "Since they were four years old they've had a Jewish education, so both of them spoke fluent Hebrew and both of them davven the Shabbos services [and] they were bar mitzvahed, so they've both had a Jewish education," he said.

As well as keeping a kosher home and insisting his sons are home on Friday nights, Hoenig now regularly attends shul. "Even if I'm away interstate, for example in a capital city, if I'm there over Shabbos I'll go to shul there, at least one service on Shabbos."



Danny Hakim training youngsters in the martial arts. Photo: AJN file

The martial art of conflict resolution

ASHLEY SHENKER AND CASSILEE KAHN

THE Budo for Peace (BFP) not-for-profit organisation, which brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth through martial arts, is in final preparation for a special trip to the Shotokan Karate-Do International Federation (SKIF) World Championships in Sydney next month.

Founded by Australian karate champion Danny Hakim and Australian medical practitioner Dr Harvey Belik in 2004, BFP sets out to educate youth about respect, harmony, self-control and self-improvement in order to combat the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

"By actively teaching the moral values inherent in traditional martial arts, we can make a difference," Hakim told *The AJN*.

"I hope to show the world of martial arts that they have a powerful educational tool to bring peace in the world."

"If BFP is doing it between Israelis and Palestinians, then it is possible to do more to stop violence and hatred, and bring communities from different ethnic backgrounds to coexist and live in harmony."

BFP will launch itself on the world stage during the Sydney SKIF World Championships in the hope of raising awareness among the

competing nations about the positive effect martial arts can have in bringing communities together.

"After eight years of building the organisation in Israel, we were ready to go international," Hakim said. "[And] being Australian, I regard the Budo for Peace initiative as an Australian peace initiative, and I thought it is appropriate to have the launch in Australia."

The group of eight will arrive Down Under in mid-November and will be taking part in a special performance at the opening ceremony.

Hakim, who represented Australia for many years and was named Maccabi Sportsman of the Year in 1988, will lead the BFP team. He said he is very excited about bringing the team to his home country to compete at the world event.

"Nearly all the team members, including myself, will be competing in different categories at the competition," Hakim said.

"Returning with a mixed Israeli/Palestinian team to show Australian Jews and Muslims to chill out and share what you have in common, rather than the opposite, is something special."

The SKIF World Championships will take place from November 22 at the Sydney Olympic Park Sports Centre. Enquiries: info@budoforpeace.org; www.budoforpeace.org.

Australia's UN victory welcomed

GARETH NARUNSKY

AUSTRALIA'S elevation to the United Nations Security Council for the next two years has received a resounding welcome from Jewish community leaders and politicians.

Last Thursday New York time, Australia was elected with 140 votes in the first round of voting in a three-way contest for two temporary seats with Finland and Luxembourg, the latter also successful in its bid.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry president Dr Danny Lamm and executive director Peter Wertheim said they were delighted with Australia's win and congratulated the government on the "wonderful achievement".

"As a middle-ranking power that punches above its weight in the wide range of regional and international obligations it

assumes, Australia fully deserves to have a seat on the UN Security Council," they said.

"The magnitude of the vote in Australia's favour has refuted decisively the opinions of those commentators who had said that the bid for a Security Council seat was compromised by the strength of Australia's support for the US alliance and for Israel."

Kooyong MP Josh Frydenberg, who had been critical of the government's foreign policy and aid distribution prior to the vote, also welcomed the election.

"Australia, with its global interests and proud record in diplomacy, will have a positive influence during its two-year term," he said. "However, during this time we should always stay true to our values and act in a manner consistent with our national interest. One also hopes that Australia's support for Israel does not waver nor Australia's willingness to speak

out against state sponsors of terrorism."

A spokesperson for the Foreign Minister said the government was very grateful to receive support for the bid from all over the world. "But Israel was a very early and very consistent supporter of our bid ... and that should be appropriately acknowledged," the spokesperson said.

Israel's support came despite Australia changing its vote on three annual UN resolutions relating to the Jewish State last November, a move criticised by shadow foreign minister Julie Bishop. "[Then foreign minister] Mr Rudd should admit the extent to which the campaign for a temporary seat on the UN Security Council is influencing the votes," she said at the time.

Critics also labelled the government's decision to send two high-level diplomats to the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Tehran in September as a vote-buying exercise.

Jewish International

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