

## **SA Jewry gives 'philandering' rabbi the boot**

by Julian Rademeyer

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'Incriminating SMS put cheated husband in a rage'

Secrecy surrounds the sacking of a prominent South African rabbi who was allegedly caught having an affair with a married woman.

Amid a growing scandal, Rabbi Lewis Furman of Johannesburg, who was also a family counsellor and international speaker, is believed to have left South Africa for Israel where he is undergoing "rehabilitation".

Furman — who is alleged by congregants to have been a "serial philanderer" — was forced to resign his position in South Africa and will not practise as a rabbi in this country again.

South African Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein said: "These events have caused much pain and anguish, which has been exacerbated by much unfounded speculation.

"Allegations of improper conduct concerning Rabbi Furman were recently, and for the first time, brought to the attention of the office of the chief rabbi.

"The matter received swift and urgent attention, and after due hearing, and in consultation with senior members of the ... Rabbinate, including his employers, he was requested to immediately resign from his congregational position, which he did.

"It was also agreed that he will not hold any further position in the South African Rabbinate."

A source close to the chief rabbi said Furman's behaviour was "not criminal" and the Rabbinate's comments were constrained by the Jewish prohibition on gossip, *loshan hara*. Literally translated, it means "evil tongue".

But outraged members of the Jewish community, speaking on condition of anonymity, have accused the Rabbinate of "sweeping the matter under the carpet" and failing to be "transparent" about it.

They say Furman had a reputation as a "serial philanderer" who was caught out when he mistakenly sent an incriminating SMS to the wrong person.

Furman was apparently then confronted and assaulted by a cuckolded husband.

Furman, who served as a chaplain in the then South African Defence Force, has held rabbinical positions in large Jewish congregations in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Fourteen years ago, in Johannesburg, he established a "very successful" branch of *Ohr Somayach*, an influential teaching academy and international outreach organisation with campuses in Israel, the US, Canada, the UK and Australia.

Furman lectured extensively in all five countries and was a frequent guest on radio and television.

Tapes of his lectures are still on sale on the Ohr Somayach website.

A brief biography published on a website during one of his speaking tours in Melbourne, Australia, states that Furman's "profound insights into how Jewish law and thoughts affect our day-to-day lives, as well as his warmth and sense of humour, means that he is a popular lecturer and scholar in residence".

Rabbi Larry Shain of Ohr Somayach declined to comment on the scandal this week, referring all queries to the chief rabbi, as did the Jewish Board of Deputies.

Attempts to obtain comment from Furman proved fruitless.

TELL US: Is the chief rabbi being sufficiently transparent about the case or should he make public the allegations against Furman?

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