

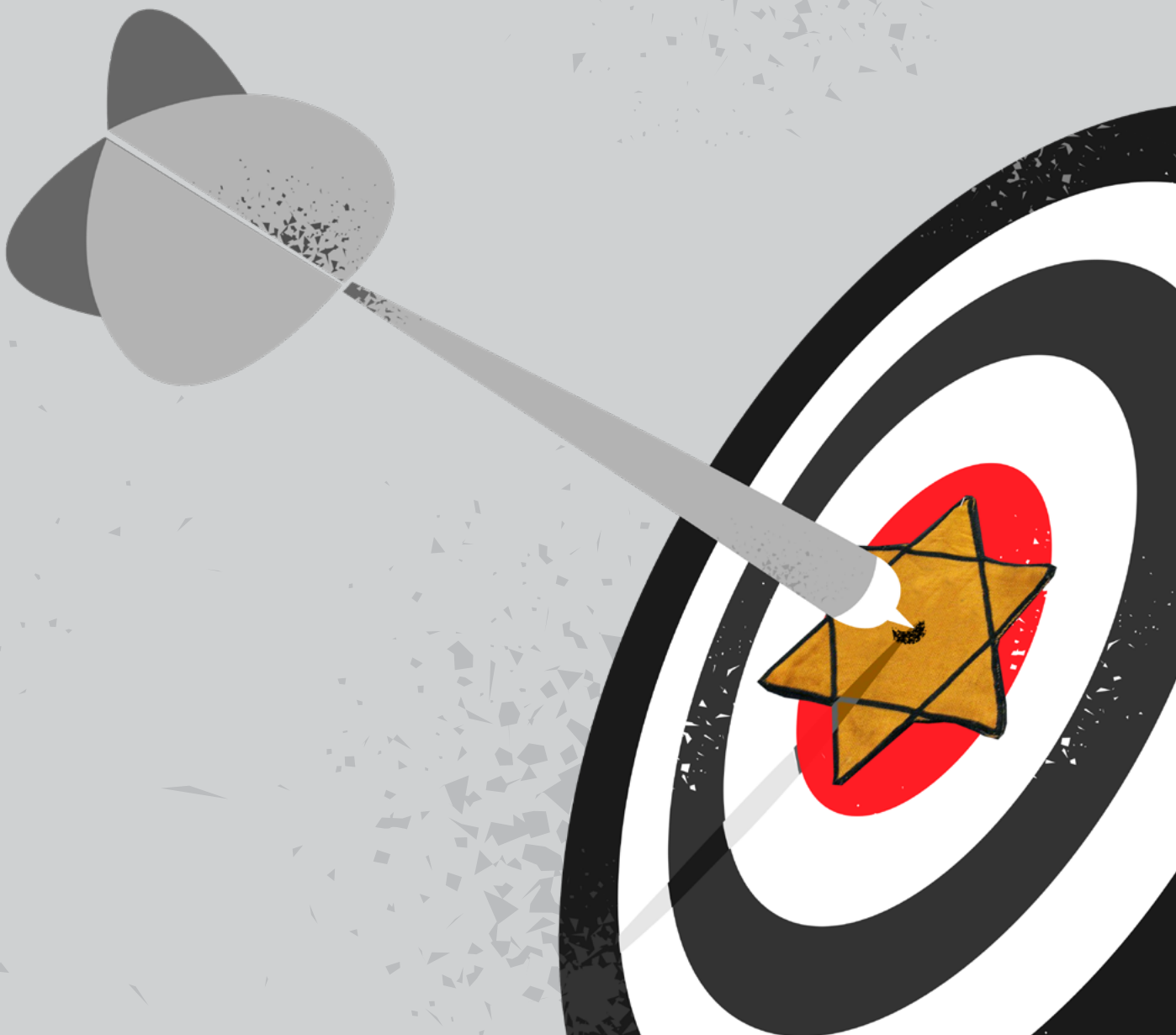


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JEWISH **EDUCATIONAL** LEADERSHIP

Jewish Education Amidst Rising Antisemitism

Volume 20:1 | Fall 2021



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Chana German, Executive Director

Journal Staff

Hyim Brandes | Editor

Zvi Grumet | Editor-in-Chief

Chevi Rubin | Editor

Please send correspondence regarding
journal content to zvi@lookstein.org.

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Editorial Offices and Advertising

The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education

Bar-Ilan University,

Ramat Gan 5290002 Israel

Tel: +972-3-531-8199

US: +1-646-568-9737

www.lookstein.org

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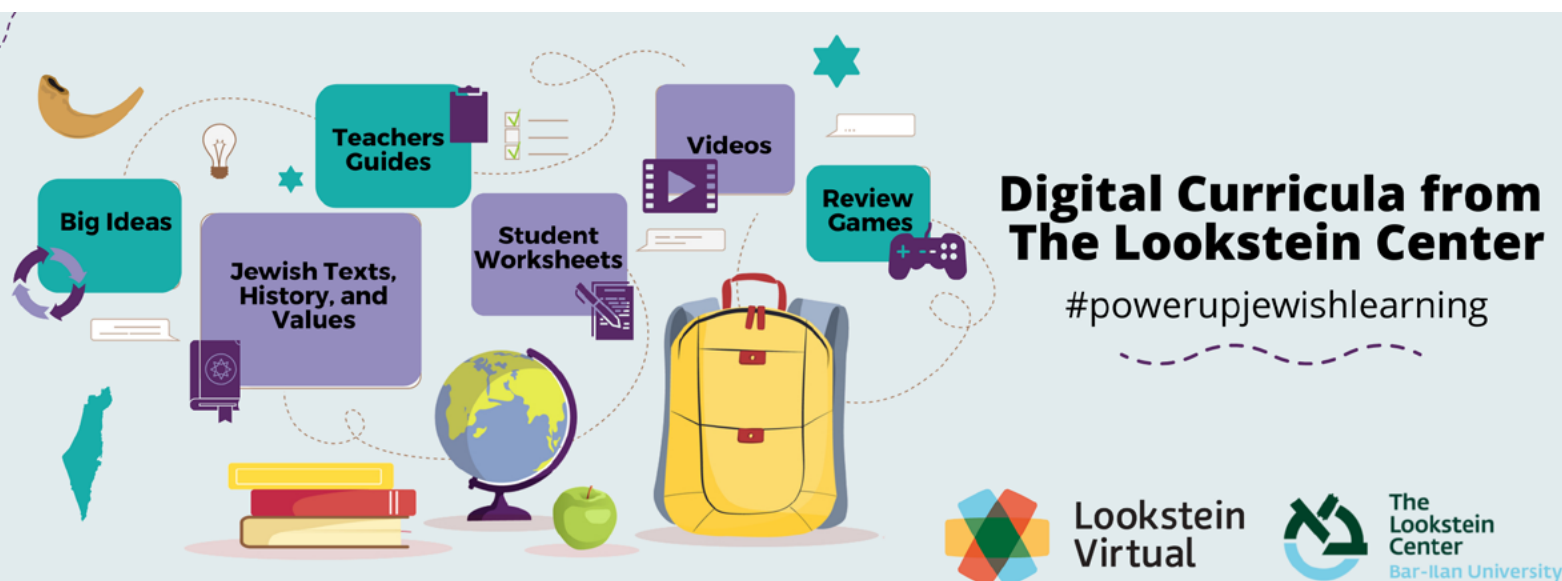
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From the Editor

I grew up with antisemitism. The ugly kind. There were certain nights during the year that my parents didn't allow us out of the house because "bad things" tended to happen on those nights. I was attacked on my bicycle while delivering chickens for a local kosher butcher, beaten on the public bus going to school, punched out on the street coming home. We heatedly debated amongst ourselves whether "it" (the Holocaust) could happen in America. Some of the adults told us not to wear a *kippah* in public. Others encouraged us to be strong and learn to defend ourselves.

People growing up in the same neighborhood ten years later look at me with bemused surprise when I share this, as if I had come from a different part of the planet. Something switched in the 1970s-1980s. Antisemitism seemed to be a thing of the past. For nearly four decades antisemitism—whether the overt kind in the streets or the covert kind of limits on college admissions, exclusions from clubs, professional limitations, and more—seemed to have disappeared into the history books.

Somewhere in the early twenty-first century things began to shift again, subtly at first, and then not so subtly. By 2020 the beast had returned, and this time with a new twist. "Traditional" right-wing antisemitism, resurgent with a wave of school and synagogue shootings, had a new ally on the left. College campuses, bastions of progressive thinking, became hothouses for left-wing antisemitism, and adding fuel to that fire was a growing anti-Israel movement, for much of which the anti-Zionist rhetoric was a thinly veiled form of antisemitism.

That left-driven antisemitism is particularly pernicious as it causes many young Jews not only to be concerned about their physical safety, but to question whether their Jewish identity is something they are proud of or not. For educators, the questions of how and why to understand this resurgence live side-by-side with a myriad of educational challenges. One day-school principal shared with us her distress when a young student commented in a public gathering that if he is attacked for wearing a *kippah* then he is responsible for bringing it upon himself. Do we encourage our students to hide their identity or to protect themselves? What kind of tools can we give students to deal with trauma after an attack on Jewish institutions, the very places designed to provide a sense of security? How do we teach our children to be proud of their Jewish identities when social media floods them with negative images of Jews and Israel? How do we prepare our students for life outside of the Jewish bubbles in which many of them live?

In this issue we bring a wide-ranging collection of voices. From award-winning author Yossi Klein Halevi to Avi Baran Munro, a day school head in Pittsburgh; from social activist Sara Liss to psychologist Michaela Ambrosius and, of course, educators—veterans and newcomers, formal and informal, and from those dealing with students of all ages. As always, we hope that this journal issue brings not only insights and ideas, but questions with which to grapple and content to process in that grappling. Together, we can help our students grow more resilient, more capable of dealing—as Jews—with the uncertain world in which they live.

Bivrakha, Rabbi Zvi Grumet, Ed.D.

Understanding the New Antisemitism

An Interview with Yossi Klein Halevi

Zvi Grumet: When did your concern about antisemitism begin?

Yossi Klein Halevi: [Laughs] When was I not concerned about antisemitism! My father spoke to me about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor when I was really young, three, four years old. That was part of his educational philosophy, that a Jew has to be prepared. And sooner or later, something is coming down the road again. My father's great concern was that he was raising American children who wouldn't have the survival skills, that because of growing up with luxuries, taking comfort for granted, we would be unprepared. My father was a very angry survivor. He was angry at the whole world, but most of all, he was angry at the Jews for not paying attention to the warnings. My father was Hungarian, and the great trauma for him wasn't just the Shoah, but the fact that the Jews of Hungary were so unprepared five years into the Shoah, that it took them by surprise in 1944. This, he felt, was an unforgivable offense of local Jewish leadership, of the *Rebbeim*. His passion, his survivor commitment was to raise Jewish children who would be able to cope with antisemitism. His lesson to me from the very beginning was that they hate us. "You live in a world that hates us and don't have any illusions. You can fall in love with a non-Jewish woman and it's all love, love, and who knows what, until the first fight and then it's 'dirty Jew.'" These are my primal formative memories. We were only 15-20 years after the Shoah, it was virtually contemporary. Whatever antisemitism I experienced on the streets—there were incidents, nothing too traumatic, getting pushed around, getting my *kippah* grabbed off my head, taunts—but when I think back on it, the smallest experiences of antisemitism were unbearable because they brought everything back. Any threat was every threat. Objectively I had a pretty safe childhood, but my inner life was dictated by threat and by the need to protect myself.



Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior fellow at the [Shalom Hartman Institute](#) in Jerusalem. He co-directs the Institute's Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI), which teaches emerging young Muslim American leaders about Judaism, Jewish identity, and Israel. His 2013 book, [Like Dreamers](#), won the Jewish Book Council's Everett Book of the Year Award. His latest book, [Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor](#), is a New York Times bestseller. He has written for leading op-ed pages in North America and is a former contributing editor to the New Republic. He is the recipient of the 2019 "Figure of Reconciliation" Award of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews.

And even more than myself, to protect the Jewish people. That was my father's most important lesson—it was never just about yourself, you have to protect the Jewish people. And so, for me, based on the kind of homeschooling in antisemitism that I received, it was a logical progression not just to join the Zionist movement, but to go right to the hard core. I remember going to a Bnei Akiva meeting and thinking, "This is childish." A friend of mine who was in Betar said, "Come to the *maoz* in Bensonhurst." Betar was serious. I was 12. I went to Camp Betar in the Catskills; we learned to shoot, to crawl on our elbows, we did night maneuvers—we were preparing for the Warsaw Ghetto. And then I discovered the Soviet Jewry movement, which had just begun. I joined the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry in 1965, right around the time of my bar mitzvah. It was my response to my father's education. So to answer your question, there *never* was a time when I was *not* actively thinking, not just about antisemitism but about lethal antisemitism.

I'm about five years younger than you; my parents were not survivors. They were American born. I did not grow up with antisemitism in the home but I experienced it on the street—beaten up a few times, pounded on a public bus. The crazy thing is that when I talk to people who are five years younger than me, they look at me and say, "antisemitism in America? Never! We never experienced it." Even people just five years younger than me had a very different experience, one without active antisemitism. Something changed. So when I think about the American Jewish experience from somewhere in the mid-1970s until the mid-20-teens, there was a golden era of 40 years in the United States.

And I ask myself, now that I hear your story, and your father's voice coming through you: Is what we're experiencing now a blip in the American Jewish experience, or are those 40 years the blip in the historical Jewish experience?

It's a very good question. I'm not convinced that those 40 years were an aberration in the American Jewish context. I've been reading Jonathan Sarna's terrific book, *American Judaism: A History*. It begins with one of America's leading antisemites, Peter Stuyvesant, who tried to keep the Jews out of New Amsterdam, now New York City. My wife is a convert, a direct descendant of Peter Stuyvesant—so Peter Stuyvesant has Jewish Israeli progeny. For me, that's a metaphor for America. You read of Stuyvesant's attempts to keep the first boatload of Jewish refugees out of New Amsterdam, 23 Jews who came from Brazil fleeing the Inquisition. But reading the rest of Sarna's account you realize how accepted Jews were in colonial times. Even before there was an America, Jews were already part of the fabric of colonial society. He describes an extraordinary moment of a celebration in the streets of Philadelphia after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. There's a procession of all the Christian clergy of Philadelphia, together with the rabbis, and they're marching through the streets linking arms. Can you imagine such a thing in 18th century Europe? So built-in to the foundational experience of America is acceptance of its Jews.

The problem is that it was never really an unconditional acceptance. Jews were always expected to change in some way. Yes, we will accept you, but lose the accent; don't speak with your hands; become a little WASPish; give up your radical politics—there

were preconditions. What happened in the last 40 years in America was that America finally accepted the Jews unconditionally. This, I think, is the big breakthrough for the generation that came right after mine. And I saw it beginning to happen before I moved to Israel in 1982; I experienced it.

I'd say that there were two breakthroughs that happened in the last 40 years. One, is the end of conditionality to Jewish acceptance in America. America now effectively told its Jews, "You can be as Jewish as you want, as assimilationist as you want. We have no conditions. You are fully American, and it's your choice to decide whether you're going to light a menorah in a public square, and dress like it's 19th century Europe. That's okay if that's the kind of American Jew you want to be. Or you could be a country club Jew." Total acceptance, that was the first breakthrough.

The second, related breakthrough was the end of the "American Jewish whisper." The American Jewish whisper, which I remember well from childhood, is that when Jews were in a public space, if you would say the word Jew or spoke of any Jewish subject, you would lower your voice. It didn't matter what you were talking about; you didn't speak openly about Jewish issues. When Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald, the American Jewish whisper went into overdrive. I've noticed over the years the gradual disappearance of the American Jewish whisper. Think about it. In recent years we have the trinity of Weinstein, Epstein, and Madoff—three of the greatest villains of this generation, and yet American Jews were not afraid of being turned into symbols of evil. The anxiety of previous generations of American Jews was gone... I remember Bernard Bergman. It wasn't just the *shanda*, it wasn't just a question of a *hillul*

Hashem. It felt a little dangerous for a Jew, a rabbi, to be the villain of the year. Jews lost their anxiety in the last 40 years. This was an extraordinary psychological victory for American Jews.

But that's what they're losing now. And that is primarily because of the rise of anti-Zionism. Anti-Zionism is restoring conditionality to American Jewish life. "We'll accept you in progressive spaces. We'll accept you on campus and media. We have no problem with Jews, provided you're the right kind of Jew, provided that you give up our generation's equivalent of talking with your hands or sounding like Jackie Mason. Give up Zionism, and then we'll accept you." This is the return of conditionality to American Jewish life, and it is a great threat to American Jewish self-confidence and to the community's long-term vitality. Because if you're worried about how you're perceived in a public space as a Jew, it will impact on your cultural and creative vitality.

I want to take you back in history. Your first book, [Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist](#), describes your involvement in your younger years with Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League. As individuals, when we feel threatened, we go into fight or flight mode. I suspect that communities react the same way and I am concerned. How do we prevent an entire generation of young Jews, threatened by antisemitism, going into fight mode, believing that the only appropriate response is down the path of extremism?

That worries me. I look at my generation and the price we paid for centralizing trauma in our Jewish identity. I don't think it was avoidable. The proximity to the Shoah, both in terms of time and of physical intimacy with survivors,

meant that there was no way to avoid centralizing the Shoah. And “Never Again” summed up my Jewish identity growing up. It was the center point. When I began to struggle with religious questions and ask myself, “Am I a religious Jew? Do I believe in this?” one of the crucial factors in shaping my religious identity was the Shoah, and I know that’ll sound counterintuitive. I *gained* my faith because of the Shoah, partly by living in such close proximity to religious survivors. For me, the seminal moment in becoming a Jew of faith was seeing the famous photograph of the Jew who’s putting on *tefillin* while surrounded by laughing SS officers. That photograph was the image of *kiddush Hashem*, so that when I went through a period when I was far from being an observant Jew, I still kept *tefillin* going, in large part because of that photograph. The Shoah was a kind of confirmation for me of something metaphysical at work in Jewish history, and I had a sense of personal challenge to not disappoint the Jews who went to their deaths from a place of faith and the survivors who continued to live with faith. But I think my turn to faith was deeper than that sense of loyalty. The Shoah seemed to me so inexplicable that

it couldn’t be contained in rational categories. Something metaphysical seemed to be at work here. I didn’t understand then and don’t understand now what that was. But I knew I wasn’t secular. The Shoah shaped my politics, my faith. Everything.

Today, I feel that a Holocaust-driven faith isn’t enough, just as a Holocaust-driven politics or Jewish identity aren’t enough. It has to be in the mix—you have to confront the implications of the Shoah, theologically, politically, in terms of our identity—but I don’t want future generations to be shaped as fundamentally as I was by trauma or threat. What I do believe is that we need to be shaped much more deeply by the fact that we are a people that not only went through Auschwitz, but that defeated Auschwitz and, in some sense, reversed Auschwitz by moving from the lowest point in our history to what I regard as the peak point in our history, which is Jewish life today. By any parameter, this, to my mind, is the great moment of Jewish history since Sinai, and we achieved it a few decades after the Shoah. That, for me, is the center point of a contemporary Jewish identity. I do believe that the Shoah needs to be at the center, but not in the way that it was for my generation,

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not as trauma but as triumph. Educationally, we need to be sure that we do not raise a generation of traumatized Jews, but of strong, resilient, self-confident Jews who are aware that threat is a part of Jewish life, but who are also aware that there's no threat that can't be overcome. And that, to me, is, is the real meaning of being a Jew today.

Your last two sentences just took my breath away.

There is a larger project that I'm working on, which is about redefining the Jews as a survivor people. As far as I can recall, we are not commanded to see ourselves as if we were slaves in Egypt; we're only commanded to see ourselves as if we ourselves left Egypt. I think there's a very good psychological reason for that. The trauma belongs to those who experienced it. My father, in a way, tried to turn me into his contemporary, but I wasn't. My father and I became contemporaries after the Shoah, when we became post-Holocaust Jews together. I was part of the first generation after the trauma that was in some sense, the transitional generation to becoming a survivor people. For me, the imperative is not to see yourself as if you were in Auschwitz, but to see yourself as if you came back from Auschwitz, as if we were in the DP camps when they were reconstructing Jewish life.

The society and culture created in the DP camps are one of the greatest Jewish achievements in our history; it's a nearly forgotten story. That's because there are so many dramatic stories from 1945 to 1948. The part of the DP experience that we remember are the boats trying to run the British blockade. But the actual communities that these 20-year-old kids created in the DP camps is an extraordinary story. There were

something like 70 Jewish newspapers in the DP camps. The first Jewish newspaper was published in Buchenwald, a month after the war, and it was a handwritten newspaper called *Tehiyas Hameisim* (the resurrection of the dead). A month after the war, people were still dying—and they're publishing a newspaper. This is the story that we need to own. When we think about antisemitism and threat, the most important educational lesson is how the ultimate victims of antisemitism not only survived it, but reversed it by turning the abyss into an experience of redemption.

Are you concerned about the rise of extremism among young American Jews?

I'm very concerned. My most immediate concern is leftwing extremism, the rise of anti-Zionism among young American Jews. I'm concerned about a parallel outbreak of extremism on the other end of the spectrum, an outbreak of far-right Zionist extremism, the kind of Zionism that I was attracted to when I was young. Each part of the Jewish community has its own unique *yetzer hara* (temptation) that it has to confront, and that *yetzer hara* is rooted in each community's strength. The strength of liberal Judaism is its concern for the Other—*tikkun olam*, an awareness that American Jewish prosperity requires of Jews to be generous toward others, to translate our experience as foreigners and refugees to refugees today. I honor that generosity in the liberal Jewish worldview; it's something that when I was a teenager would have driven me insane. But today, I'm very moved by the fact that the Tenement Museum, for example, is one of the sacred landmarks for liberal American Jews. It's amazing to see how American Jews experience the Tenement Museum, they take their children and grandchildren, to teach them

to appreciate their humble origins. But the *yetzer hara* of *tikkun olam*-ism is to become so universal that you betray the tribe.

The strength of the Orthodox community is its unconditional loyalty to the tribe. And the *yetzer hara* there is to turn unconditional loyalty into xenophobia—and, you know, I have a doctorate in xenophobia, that was my education. I'm particularly aware of that *yetzer hara*, and I'm really worried... Look what we're experiencing in Israel. We haven't had a Kahanist in the Knesset since Kahane himself, and Kahanism is back stronger than ever. And when I think about the Orthodox communities that I know in America, they are as vulnerable to that form of extremism as liberal Jewish communities are to anti-Zionism. Each community needs to develop its own immune system to its particular *yetzer hara*.

This is such a fascinating analysis. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

To give in to the *yetzer hara* of Kahanism, or whatever variant of Kahanism is percolating, is to betray the achievement of the survivors. To raise traumatized Jews is to undo the victory of Zionism, it's to undo the victory of our parents who didn't only see themselves as victims. The older they got, the more they saw themselves as survivors. You know, the term survivor didn't exist when we were growing up. And it's interesting that it didn't exist yet, and I think that, in part, it's because they weren't yet survivors. They used the language *griner* [as in, greenhorn] or simply "from there." My father called himself a refugee. It was only in the 1970s and 80s, that the dignified term "survivor" became part of the Jewish vocabulary. We earned that as a people—and we need to prove, now that we are experiencing some return of threat, that

we have learned something from our parents. That we're not the same people we were 100 years ago. We're a strong people, we're resilient, and we're going to win the battle against the delegitimization of Israel—even if the battle lasts a generation. That's the educational message we need to convey.

And God forbid that we should be teaching our kids what my father taught me, which is that the whole world hates the Jews. Our experience over the last 70 years has been very different. Our experience in America has been very different. I grew up in the Soviet Jewry movement. Why did the Soviet Jewry movement succeed? Because we had extraordinary non-Jewish allies. Congress adopted Soviet Jewry as a major human rights commitment. We're not the same people, and much of the world isn't the same either. Yes, we face serious threats, and those threats are growing. But we need to be very careful not to imagine ourselves as back in the 1930s and not to demonize the non-Jewish world.

Antisemitism and Identity

Michaela Ambrosius

Resurgence of Antisemitism

Many of us may still vividly remember the neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2018, the stabbing in Monsey, New York in 2019 and the recent assaults on Jewish individuals during the Israeli-Arab conflict in May of this year. It seems that in the last few years racially, religiously, and politically based antisemitic attacks in the United States have increased and become more violent—recent statistics made available by the FBI show that antisemitism continues to be a serious issue. In fact, over 60 percent of all U.S. religious hate crimes in 2019 have targeted the Jewish community, despite making up only 2 percent of the U.S. population.

It may not come as a surprise that this trend is also present in educational settings such as college campuses and K-12 schools where antisemitic incidents, especially related to anti-Zionism, nearly doubled in recent years. College campuses have become more and more hostile to Jewish students, who report having been insulted, intimidated, and harassed simply for being Jewish. There have been even a few cases where a Jewish student decided to leave the college because of feeling physically and emotionally threatened.

Coping Skills

At a time where antisemitic incidents continue to rise, it is important that Jewish students are equipped with tools and resources that will allow them to navigate hostile college campuses. It is equally important that they have at their disposition coping skills to deal more effectively with discrimination and emotional distress. It is generally acknowledged that experiences with discrimination have an impact on an individual's self-esteem and overall well-being. Educators and professional counselors can play an important role in supporting Jewish students. They are the first in line and are uniquely positioned to teach students coping skills, such as deep breathing, self-awareness skills, mindfulness, communication skills, and problem-solving skills.



Michaela Ambrosius is a multilingual licensed professional counselor in private practice in Montclair, NJ, and in New York, NY. She received her Ph.D. in counselor education from Montclair State University where she teaches as an adjunct. She specializes in trauma-focused therapy and has a special interest in addressing antisemitism.

For example, educators may start by teaching self-awareness skills, engaging students in journaling activities where students reflect on their experiences with antisemitism and how these experiences have impacted them. As a next step, educators or counselors may introduce mindfulness and practice with students their ability to notice physical sensations or thoughts in the here and now without judgment, assisting them to notice how their physical sensations change when they are exposed to antisemitism. In addition, educators and professional counselors may be able to connect students who struggle with experiences of antisemitism with other students who struggle with similar issues to build a support system.

Jewish Identity

However, based on my doctoral research, there is another aspect that educators and professional counselors may want to consider when working with Jewish students, which is their identity and more specifically their Jewish identity. It is generally acknowledged that Jews are an ethno-religious group even though there is a tendency in the U.S. to erase the ethnic part of the Jewish identity and present it as a religious identity only. A great example here is the hate crimes statistics

presented by the FBI, where hate crimes against Jews are recorded as religious hate crimes even in those incidents where the motivation for the hate crime may not have been of a religious nature (e.g., vandalizing buildings or cemeteries with swastikas or comments such as “Hitler was right”). In both of these examples, the nature of the hate crime is of a racial nature and not necessarily motivated by religious beliefs.

Importance of Jewish Ethnic and Religious Identity

Having a closer look at both aspects (ethnicity and religion) of Jewish identity is important because overall Jews living in the U.S. tend to identify as Jewish based on ethnicity and to a lesser extent on religion. A strong Jewish identity does not need to be based on religious practices. In fact, Simon N. Herman suggests in his 1989 book, [*Jewish Identity: A social psychological perspective*](#), that Jewish identity is constructed on a continuum and that Jews can choose from a range of religious and/or cultural aspects to express their Jewish identity. At one side of the spectrum stands the assimilated Jew who has no relationships with other fellow Jews and does not observe any religious practices and on the other side stands the Orthodox Jew who is a Zionist.

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- HEAD OF JEWISH STUDIES, NYC
SUPERVISOR OF JSITT PARTICIPANT



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The term ethnic identity is a construct and is not easily defined; it tends to be described as a chosen identity (consciously or unconsciously) and is often rooted in common history, traditions, language, behaviors, and values. Jewish identity is a multifaceted and unique identity as it may be experienced as a mix of ethnic components and religious aspects. Jewish ethnic identity can be based on national aspects, such as belonging to a people, cultural practices such as the consumption of specific foods, or language such as using Yiddish expressions. While religious observance such as religious practices (keeping kosher) and beliefs play a significant role in the development of a Jewish religious identity. Thus, Jewish identity is an ethno-religious identity, an identity where ethnic identity and religious identity are intertwined. Whether an individual's Jewish identity is a resource or an exacerbating factor in stressful situations depends on the strengths of an individual's Jewish ethnic and religious identity, as their strengths tend to impact how encounters with antisemitism are experienced and processed. Experiences with antisemitism can be detrimental and have a negative impact on an individual's mental health and overall well-being and can increase symptoms of depression.

In my research, I found that both a strong ethnic identity and a strong religious identity play a crucial part in how often someone faces antisemitism and how stressful the encounter is for the individual. Jews with a strong ethnic identity reported overall having been exposed to antisemitism more often during their life compared to Jews with weaker ethnic identity. In addition, Jews with a strong ethnic identity also perceived the antisemitic incident as more stressful than Jews with a weaker

ethnic identity. In contrast, Orthodox Jews who tend to report a stronger religious identity reported lower levels of stress when exposed to antisemitism compared to individuals with a weaker religious identity. The differences in halachic observance and the strengths of religious beliefs may be an explanation why Orthodox Jews reported lower levels of stress when exposed to antisemitism. It is possible that the lower stress levels may be due to better religious coping skills. For instance, discrimination may be experienced as a trial by Orthodox Jews and therefore may be a stimulus for spiritual growth. Difficulties may be viewed as an opportunity to overcome obstacles and remain unwavering in the face of adversity. In addition, Orthodox Jews, in general, tend to live in tight knit communities and interact primarily with individuals within their community when they need support. However, more research will be necessary to get a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Implications

Based on my findings, educators and professional counselors need to be aware that the Jewish identity is an ethno-religious identity that is composed of two distinct yet intertwined aspects which are religion and ethnicity. Professionals working with Jewish students may want to reflect on their assumptions about what it means to be a Jew and to what extent they believe that a Jewish identity must be based on religious beliefs and practices. This is crucial as the findings of my research indicate that Jews with a strong ethnic identity report experiences with antisemitism more often than individuals with a weaker ethnic identity. In addition, educators may want to assist their Jewish students in

exploring their assumptions about what it means to be a Jew and how they express their identity. Exploring the student's level of ethnic and religious identity will help educators to identify those students that may be at a greater risk to develop mental health issues. Educators may also want to discuss with students the many different forms of antisemitism as it can be based on religious and ethnic bias as well as anti-Israel attitudes. Educators and professional counselors can play an important role in addressing antisemitism and advocating for their Jewish students. Additionally, educators can support their students by teaching how to identify antisemitism, how to address it, and how to advocate for themselves.




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Antisemitism – So Close to Home

Avi Baran Munro

The school I lead sits exactly 1.2 miles from the site of the October 27, 2018 white supremacist terrorist mass shooting that targeted three congregations housed in the Tree of Life synagogue building. My home sits around the corner, 900 feet away. I could hear the police response and shooting battle that morning reverberating through my windows and walls.

It was shocking. So close to home. But as a child of Holocaust survivors and a student of history, I was not surprised. The beating drum of a resurgence of antisemitism had been in the background for some time. Hate group activity had been increasing in western Pennsylvania and throughout the country and the world. Right-wing extremists were winning elections in heretofore progressive nations. Mass shootings were occurring almost daily in America. America felt broken.

In the wake of the synagogue attack, we—as a Pittsburgh Jewish community and as a global people—responded with defiant, full-throated, joyful affirmation of who we are as Jews. We answered hatred by demonstrating how we fortify and nourish ourselves and the world in the fullness, richness, complexity, and simplicity of our Jewish identity.

This affirmation offers a roadmap for how we educate Jews amidst rising antisemitism. I will explain—but first, let me remind you of the story of Squirrel Hill.

In Pittsburgh, our community's work with immigrants led us routinely to celebrate the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, founded 140 years ago to help Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe. Today, the HIAS mission has been expanded to include refugees of all backgrounds, and the organization's work is biblically reinforced every time we chant liturgy connected to "we were strangers in the land of Egypt." A week before the Pittsburgh shooting, Dor Hadash, one of the three congregations in the Tree of Life building, joined with nearly 300 communities to observe HIAS' National Refugee Shabbat.

"HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people," the shooter posted online before the attack. "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

Support for immigrants. This is reportedly what drew the ire of the white supremacist who stormed the synagogue through unlocked doors that were open to the crisp autumn air and to welcome all who



Avi Baran Munro has been the Head of School at Pittsburgh's [Community Day School](#) since 2004. She is a first-generation daughter of two Holocaust survivors and parent of four young adults, all graduates of Community Day School.

would come to worship. His fear of imminent erasure, of the existential threat posed by alleged caravans of terrorists and drug dealers breaching our borders, led to the barrage of bullets that tore through the bodies of the worshippers gathered to pray in their beloved sanctuaries. It led to the murderous attack that tore through our literal and metaphorical Squirrel Hill shtetl and woke us up to the dark underbelly of America.

We would not know the exact death toll, or which neighbors and friends and family members were dead, until the next day. But by that afternoon, word was out that the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh was planning a community vigil for the following night.

And then the teens took over, with Community Day School alumni among the organizers. They had mobilized months earlier to lead a walkout after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting in Parkland, Florida. This time, within hours of the shooting in their own community, they took action to organize a vigil in the heart of Squirrel Hill for that very night.

In an interfaith, multiracial show of solidarity, thousands assembled at the iconic corner of Forbes and Murray, just feet away from our JCC. The teens organized a podium, a sound system, candles, and social media outreach. They led a *Havdalah* service (marking the end of Shabbat and the return to the work week). They led the massive crowd in traditional psalms and prayers. They chanted the *Mi Sheberakh* (prayer for healing). And they spoke:

"I am a different Jew today than I was yesterday," 15-year-old CDS alum Sophia

Levin said. "Antisemitism was something that happened in history, that happened in other places," she continued, her voice breaking. "Tree of Life used to be just a synagogue that my grandparents went to, that my Mom grew up in, that we would go to on High Holidays. And today I feel like it's something different."

After the vigil ended, a reporter asked Sophia if the event was a success. She nodded. "It strengthened our community," she said. "The most important part of Judaism for me is a sense of community."

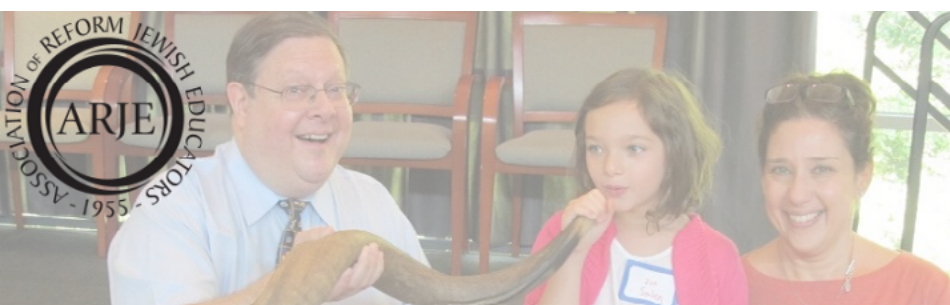
How do we fight antisemitism?

With Jewish day school graduates like Sophia Levin. She knew how to stand up tall and proud as a Jew even hours after a deadly attack on Jews for being Jewish in her neighborhood. She and her friends knew that this was a historic moment. She and her friends also knew how to create a Jewish memorial moment, how to tie it to Shabbat, and how to offer comfort and build community through the rituals and prayers that provide structure and help us know what to say when we are inarticulate with grief.

How do we fight antisemitism?

By meeting antisemites or silenced allies where they are—in one case, the national highways. That is what [JewBelong](#) has launched in a pink billboard campaign to combat antisemitism. There are currently six digital billboards up in various U.S. cities with five slogans and the hashtag #EndJewHate.

My favorite is: "I promise to love being Jewish 10x more than anyone hates me for it."



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How do we fight antisemitism?

With facts. My son, Boaz Munro, a CDS alum and grandson of Holocaust survivors, is a student of the Holocaust and of history in general. He was terror-stricken by the silence of Jewish progressives when confronted with the antisemitic attacks against Jews in America in response to the May 2021 Israel-Gaza conflict. Their silence felt all too deafening, hearkening back to the Weimar Republic in Germany. He understood how Jews as a people were being conflated with the actions of the Israeli government and wrote a [call to action](#) that received nearly 8,000 “likes” and has been viewed almost 300,000 times.

Boaz challenged readers to give any other example of a time when progressives have declined to stand up for other victims of hate due to the actions of a foreign state to which they’re ethnically tied. Aiming to address the lack of historical awareness that leads to this silence, he’s also embarked on an ambitious [20-part Instagram series](#) on “The Jews.” He has completed Chapters 1-10. I don’t know if he realized how ambitious this project was until after he started, but he is determined to take action by calling out inaction and confronting it with truth.

How do we fight antisemitism?

With open discourse. The audience for the crash course in Jewish history that Boaz is creating is not only non-Jews. Many Jews also lack historical perspective, which is why Jewish day schools like mine must find ways to have courageous conversations about the toughest topics. If we allow our students to graduate with a brittle sense of Jewish identity, we fail to instill an enduring Jewish commitment. If they are fragile at the

first poke in high school or college that calls into question what we taught them about Israel or the Holocaust, it is very likely they will question everything they were taught. If they don’t understand our full history, they will accept someone else’s narrative. And while there are tough realities to face about being Jewish and about Israel, some of the narratives circulating are virulent and worse than any truths we could share. Many Jewish day schools, including mine, struggle in having these difficult conversations. I challenge and invite all of us to share what is successful at our schools. We have work to do.

How do we fight antisemitism?

Proudly. After the synagogue shooting, we did what felt simultaneously impossible and imperative—we returned to our campus that very Monday morning with the Israeli flag flying high, and to my memory, with no parents keeping their children home out of fear. Our 8th graders created a prayer service and remembrance ceremony for Tuesday at the site of a [sculpture](#) on our campus.

“You’ve given me some strength to get through today, and for that I thank you,” Tree of Life’s Rabbi Jeffrey Myers told our students.

That Friday, in a testament to the power of community, our entire school and hundreds of parents filled our gymnasium for a raucous, dance-filled Kabbalat Shabbat service as planned.

The message was clear: we are here and we are proud.

We continue to find guidance and comfort and strength in our Jewish teachings, and *ledor vador*, educated Jewish children like Sophia Levin, like Boaz Munro, carry us forward.

How do we fight antisemitism?

By going into our schools tomorrow and doing the work even better than we did the day before.

How do we fight antisemitism?

My father, Moshe Baran, a Holocaust survivor and partisan fighter, two years ago at age 98, said it best.

Be a better Jew.

If that sounds familiar, it is the closing argument of Bari Weiss's [2019 book](#) (OK, she is also a CDS alum).

If you think I should have credited her before I credited my father, here's a short and quintessentially Pittsburgh story.

Before the pandemic, Bari's father Lou Weiss would pick up my Dad for the 7 a.m. minyan at Congregation Beth Shalom in Squirrel Hill, part of an intrepid crew of volunteer drivers of Holocaust survivors.

One early morning ride in 2019, Lou was telling Moshe about his daughter's new book, "How to Fight Anti-Semitism." Upon hearing the title, Moshe said, "Well, the answer is easy. Be a better Jew." And Lou replied, "That is her whole book in four words!"

In her final chapter, Bari asserts that, ultimately, the only response to this moment is to practice a Judaism of affirmation, not a Judaism of defensiveness.

She writes:

We should be telling that epic story, especially to the younger generation. We should not dumb it down. Big ideas changed my life. And nothing has been more powerful in my life than feeling like I'm a part of the Jewish story, a tiny link in our history. In these trying times, our best strategy is to build, without shame, a Judaism and a Jewish people in a Jewish state that are not only safe and resilient but self-aware, meaningful, generative, humane, joyful, and life-affirming. A Judaism capable of lighting a fire in every Jewish soul - and in the souls of everyone who throws in their lot with ours.

There are many forces in our world insisting, again, that all Jews must die. But there is a force far, far greater, and that is the force of who we are. We are a people descended from slaves who brought the world ideas that changed the course of history. One God. Human dignity. The sanctity of life. Freedom itself.

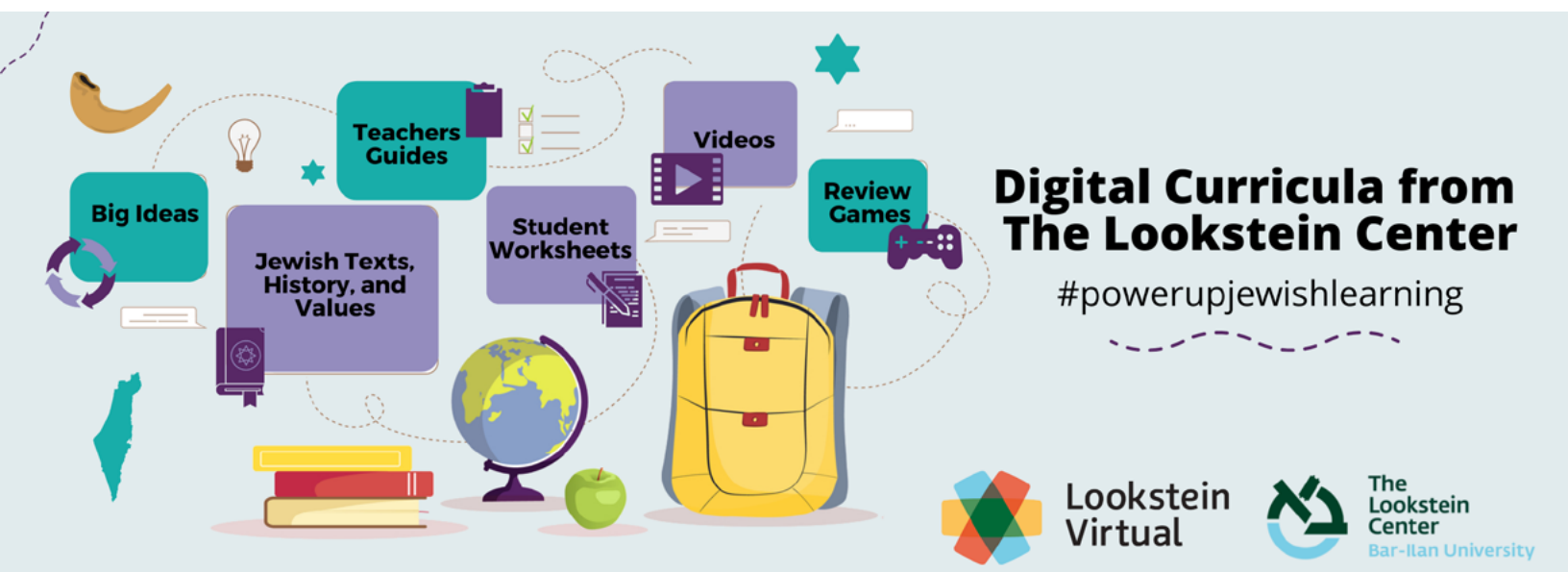
That is our inheritance. That is our legacy. We are the people commanded to bring light into this world.

Do we believe in our own story? Can we make it real again? I believe that we can, and that we must.

Affirming our story doesn't mean you have to be a more traditionally observant Jew or a more activist Jew. It means knowing what it means to be a Jew. To walk proudly (even if quietly) as a Jew. To speak from a place of knowledge, context, and history, knowing that each of those can be defined subjectively and objectively, and knowing how to tell the difference. It means being

committed to checking your moral compass against Jewish teachings and being prepared to find out that sometimes your moral compass—and sometimes Jewish teachings—warrant critical appraisal. Most important, affirming our story means that you are compelled and equipped to seek meaning, to find joy, and to love Judaism, however you live it, for the time-tested, life-affirming, family-affirming, justice-affirming habits of mind and heart it has been cultivating for millennia.

That's how, together, we fight antisemitism.



Confronting the Campus Crisis

Yitzhak Santis

Jewish students at many universities are confronted by a rising tide of antisemitism. A recent [survey](#) of openly Jewish students found that over sixty-five percent of respondents felt unsafe on campus due to antisemitic incidents, while ten percent reported feeling physically unsafe. Half reported needing to hide their Jewish identities. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the backdrop to many of these incidents, as the campus has become a central stage for the most organized, motivated, and effective anti-Israel activist movement in recent memory. This activism is a major component of a “cognitive war to prepare [public opinion] for Israel’s destruction.”* Often this hyper anti-Israelism easily slides from “criticism of Israel” to explicit antisemitism. This presents an enormous challenge for Jewish educators in terms of how to prepare their college-bound students, intellectually and emotionally, for the onslaught they may experience.

Anti-Israel campus activism aims to erode Israel’s solid base of support at the highest levels of Western society. The predominant strategy is the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, whose campus arm is Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). BDS takes aim at Israel’s ability to engage with the world both through boycotts and divestment and the demonization campaign at its core. On campus, pro-BDS activism constitutes an immediate and persistent attack on the freedom of Jewish and pro-Israel students to express their views, assemble peaceably, and to participate freely and fully in student life. “The problem persists because BDS campaigns promote comprehensive hostility toward Israel; that encourages individual students and faculty to take matters into their own hands and carry out actions against others in their community.”*

The campus is targeted by BDS through SJP for two reasons. Firstly, it allows them to focus their propaganda efforts on people who are still developing their views of the world and are particularly susceptible to persuasion. Secondly, when SJP successfully pressures student governments to adopt anti-Israel measures based on anti-Israel propaganda, it taps into the symbolic power of universities to influence public opinion at large.

SJP’s [“Divestment Handbook”](#) reveals it relies heavily on outside



Yitzhak Santis is Senior Analyst and Writer for [StandWithUs](#) and was Chief Programs Officer for NGO Monitor. Before making Aliyah in 2011, he directed the Middle East Project for the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council and was a Regional Director with the ADL. He lives in the Galilee.

political groups, including those actively promoting hate. SJP campus chapters are encouraged to reach out to American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) to trade strategies and get non-students to attend student government meetings about divestment.* AMP chairman Dr. Hatem Bazian, a co-founder of SJP, has repeatedly spread antisemitism on [social media](#), while other AMP leaders and speakers have engaged in [racism](#), [homophobia](#), and [genocide denial](#). Taher Herzallah, AMP's Associate Director of Outreach & Grassroots Organizing, has [said that](#) "Israelis have to be bombed [because] Israel is an illegitimate creation."

BDS leaders and activists do not hide their end game. [Omar Barghouti](#), a BDS co-founder, said, "We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine." Others are equally blunt. Ahmed Moor said, "BDS does mean the end of the Jewish state." [David Letwin](#) stated that "Zionists complain [BDS] demands spell the end of the 'Jewish state.' They are correct." And [Lara Kiswani](#) told a UC Berkeley audience, "Bringing down Israel really will benefit everyone in the world, and everyone in society."

Kiswani's imagining that humanity's salvation requires the destruction of the Jewish state, a not uncommon [anti-Zionist theme](#), should be understood as "redemptive anti-Zionism." It is an update of what renowned Holocaust historian [Saul Friedländer](#) identified as "redemptive antisemitism" in which Nazi ideology fantasized an eternal racial struggle between "Aryan" and "Jew" and concluded Germany's salvation required nothing less than the complete destruction of "the Jews." Similarly, for Kiswani and others, the road to a universal utopia is blocked by the Jewish state, requiring nothing less than its destruction.

Israel is a state, and no state is above criticism. But anti-Zionists frequently combine anti-Jewish tropes with their "criticisms." The result is often antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and violence, such as the surge of random assaults on Jews in North America and Europe during the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Iranian-backed Hamas. *

In the early 20th century, the debate over Zionism was mostly a Jewish one about how to overcome growing antisemitism. Since then, three major historical events forever changed the Jewish people's material conditions: the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, and the flight or expulsion of 99% of Jews from Arab states. Today, with almost [half of world Jewry living in Israel](#), the challenge for anti-Zionists is how not to be antisemitic.

Crucially, for most Jews, Israel and Zionism form an integral part of their [Jewish identity](#). Israel is the birthplace of Jewish civilization, and Jews have maintained a constant presence there for over 3,400 years. Diaspora Jews endured over 1,900 years of oppression and violence and today's world remains plagued by antisemitism. Accordingly, most Jews remain deeply connected to their ancestral homeland, support Zionism as a liberation movement, and see Israel as a "lifeboat" state.

The anti-Zionist demand to "bring down" Israel is a call for Jews to again become a vulnerable minority everywhere. Given the long history of persecution Jews faced across Europe and the Middle East leading up to the Holocaust, this would be a blatantly antisemitic outcome. Yet, this is precisely the cause that SJP promotes when they organize BDS campaigns and make scores of [campuses more hostile](#) for Jewish students.

To shield themselves from criticism for such bigotry, anti-Israel activists often tokenize the extremist Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and others representing a tiny minority of the Jewish community

These are just a few of the innumerable incidents of BDS fueling hate on campuses:

- Graffiti blaming Israel for the [9/11 terror attacks](#).
- Jewish members of student governments being harassed and pressured to [resign](#) or threatened with [impeachment](#).
- Jewish students threatened with academic punishment by a TA who tweeted her intent to [fail “Zionist students.”](#)
- A student senate passing an anti-Israel divestment resolution while refusing to condemn a pro-BDS senator demanding a boycott of Jewish student organizations.
- A student posting on Facebook his “desire for Zionists (sic) to die” after a student government passed a pro-BDS resolution.
- An unsuccessful attempt by SJP to pass a student government resolution redefining antisemitism, without the consent of Jewish students.

These episodes are not the only consequence of BDS campaigns on campus, usually organized by pro-BDS faculty, as academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas have also become a casualty. BDS’s academic boycott guidelines are a prime example of why the movement is so problematic. The guidelines have included calls for boycotts of:

- Study abroad programs in Israel.
- All cooperation projects involving, “Palestinians and/or other Arabs on one side and Israelis on the other” in which the Israeli side fails to fully capitulate to the three core demands of BDS in advance.
- Events co-sponsored not only by Israel and all its academic institutions, but also by organizations that “support” Israel.
- All events that take place in Israel, even if sponsored by international organizations.

This BDS campaign against academic freedom is not without opposition. It has elicited condemnations from the 47,000 member [American Association of University Professors](#), [250-plus university and college presidents](#), seven other academic associations, and at least 38 [Nobel Laureates](#).

The Role of Jewish Educators

Many Jewish high school students experience antisemitism and anti-Israel rhetoric on social media, causing them to feel isolated or targeted at school. In the classroom this may be fostered by peers and even teachers leaving young Jews susceptible to misinformation about Israel, making them feel marginalized, even hiding their Jewish identity.

[David Bryfman](#), CEO of the Jewish Education Project, observes that, “Jewish educators must not merely teach about something called ‘Israel’ by transmitting facts. If they are to encourage students to care about and even love [Israel], educators must tap into learners’ feelings and lived experiences...therefore, the learner must be prioritized—must ‘matter’ even more than the

content....” The idea is to engage both hearts and minds in a way that is personal. Ideally, this should begin at the middle school level or even earlier. In many cases, parents should be brought into this process as well.

The main responsibility of Israel educators is two-fold. First, inspiring Jews to explore how Israel connects to their Jewish identity. All Jews today are part of an amazing story—an ancient people who not only survived 1,900 years of oppression and violence but are miraculously still thriving in their ancestral homeland and finding countless ways to make the world a better place. All of this began in Israel over 3,000 years ago, and much of it continues to play out there today. Any Jewish student can find their own place in this story, as so many have done by traveling to Israel. When this isn’t possible, educators can take advantage of virtual tours and introduce themes that are most relevant to their students, from humanitarian aid around the world to social justice movements within Israel.

Simultaneously, as young Jews grow up it is crucial to develop their critical thinking skills, explore their questions, and cultivate their leadership abilities. This means not only

delving into the difference between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism, but also how to identify antisemitism. It also includes open discussion about Israeli-Palestinian and wider Arab-Israeli issues, including exposure to conflicting narratives. This can be done without compromising the basics. Supporting Israel as a vibrant, secure, Jewish and democratic state is a just cause. Exploring different perspectives does not require accepting misleading or false claims. However, the reality is that if we do not do this work with Jewish students, they may find themselves entirely unprepared when confronted with anti-Israel hatred and propaganda.

A holistic approach is crucial to overcome this challenge: inspiring Jewish youth to be proud of Israel and their identity while building up their confidence, critical thinking skills, and resilience. After all, resilience is at the core of who we are.

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Proud, Progressive, Zionist

An Interview with Sara Liss



Zvi Grumet: Tell me about Zioness.

Sara Liss: Zioness is a movement of Jewish activists and allies who are unabashedly progressive and unapologetically Zionist. Our whole goal is to ensure that there is always a space for Jews and Zionists in the progressive movement and in the progressive world, which is where most American Jews naturally find themselves politically anyway.

Can you speak about how this got started?

Sure. For anyone who's been in the progressive world, and by progressive world, I mean, sort of more the left flank of the Democratic Party in America. Anyone who's been in this space has definitely started feeling some tension, some antagonism, some discomfort with being visibly Zionist or Jewish, and this has all worsened over the last ten or so years. The first time these issues started being noticed and discussed on more mainstream platforms was at the end of the Obama presidency and during the first Trump campaign. In the summer of 2016, the Movement for Black Lives adopted a manifesto calling Israel an apartheid state and accusing it of genocide, which was extremely painful for the millions of American Jews who care deeply about the fight for racial justice. Later that fall, there was a protest in support of the Sioux Tribe against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, during which people were waving Palestinian flags in support of "Indigenous peoples." Of course, I think most people know about the antisemitic, anti-Zionist leadership of the Women's March, who declared repeatedly that "Zionists cannot be feminists." Then in June 2017, the Dyke March in Chicago—a march of left-wing people, mostly LGBTQ people and their allies—actually kicked out three Jewish lesbians who were marching with a rainbow pride flag with a Jewish star in the center, which they felt represented their full selves.

Amanda Berman was watching this all unfolding, as a person who had always been an activist for social justice causes and was also a proud, Jewish Zionist, and was just devastated. She had been feeling something wrong for a while, but she realized that there was no organization in the Jewish

Sara Liss is a Senior Legislative Attorney for New York City Council, where she serves as Counsel to the Committee on Health and the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction. She has also served in a wide range of political offices and campaigns, including in the administration of President Barack Obama. Sara is a devoted public servant, a 4th-generation Bronx resident, and a proud graduate of NYU and Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. Sara currently serves as the President of the Board of Zioness.

communal landscape prepared to address this problem from a place of authenticity, and this series of events pushed her to do something. So when the Chicago SlutWalk announced that it was endorsing the policy of the Dyke March, and banned Jewish stars as “Zionist symbols of racism and oppression,” Zioness was born. They printed up some flyers and posters and they had some folks show up at the SlutWalk with Amanda, not to protest the event but to support it—while refusing to be kicked out for being Jews or Zionists. While it was definitely seen as provocative, it ended up generating a serious dialogue which they felt was really productive.

Over the course of the next few months, they started getting active on social media, got lots of attention in the Jewish press, and just found that there were so many Jews who reached out and said, “Where have you been? I’ve been waiting for this. I have been feeling politically and ideologically homeless for so long.” They felt this sense of relief that they weren’t alone after having felt very uncomfortable in progressive spaces for a long time. Since then, Zioness has morphed into this great national organization that has more than a dozen chapters and thousands of members around the country. We’re still growing, we’re a startup. But there’s a lot of enthusiasm and a ton of work to be done.

You say there had been a growing sense of tension and discomfort in progressive spaces for a while. Can you say more about that?

There is this narrative that the Israel-Palestine conflict is very simple. There’s a powerful militant colonizing oppressor, the Jews, the Israelis, the white and wealthy people, against this oppressed people of color, who are indigenous to the land whose land was

taken from them—and Western forces like Britain and the US are forever insuring their oppression. This narrative has been around for a long time, but I think it’s really caught on like fire and been amplified in the last ten or twenty years. In our view, what could be more progressive than Zionism, the liberation movement for the most historically oppressed people in the world? The reality is that despite our socio-economic status in America, which is overall generally one of financial comfort and enfranchisement—and I’m not ignoring Jewish poverty—there is a grave existential crisis. Our history has taught us that it can all be taken away from us in a second. We understand the suffering of minorities and we understand the importance of uplifting the oppressed, and for many Jews, Zionism is the embodiment of that understanding. That’s why most American Jews identify in some way with Zionism and why the progressive movement is a natural place for Jews. But it feels recently like that progressive space has been closed off to us because of this completely inaccurate narrative lacking nuance. So, we want to ensure that there’s greater understanding and that there’s greater nuance and that people understand who Jews are and what Jews are, which is a question that almost seems like many Americans don’t really know the answer to.

How has this delegitimization of Israel impacted on you personally?

I have so many stories. I would say that I started sensing it when I was in NYU for undergrad. There had been ongoing strikes and protests when I was in college and in my senior year, this would have been 2009, there was a group of students who took over one of the faculty floors with a list of demands.

Every single one of the demands related to the conditions at the school—better prices, increased consciousness of the school's environmental impact, and other things like that. And then one of the demands was BDS against Israel. We saw that and thought, “that doesn't make any sense. It has absolutely nothing to do with the rest of these things that they're demanding.” The protest blew over quickly but that was my first real exposure to the fact that those whose values I would otherwise share, if not maybe their tactics, were kind of glomming on to (editor's note: attaching themselves to) something that I found really concerning. And abhorrent.

Once I got into law school this became way more ironed out. I went to Cardozo, which is a Yeshiva University school, but the student body is very diverse. We had a few incidents where they invited some scholar to come speak about the Israel-Palestine conflict, and it was never an even conversation; they never invited somebody to represent the Zionist-Jewish side of it, it was always just to talk about the Palestinian perspective, in an anti-Israel way. I don't think the Palestinian perspective needs to be inherently anti-Israel but I think that is often the way that it's framed. And then it really, really, really started being obvious for me when I moved to DC after law school, and I was working as a White House intern in the Obama administration. Someone said something to me to the effect of, “Just so you know, you have to be careful about the way you speak about Israel and your Zionism,” essentially telling me that I need to either hide it or be prepared to have a lot of really uncomfortable conversations with people. That kind of put me on high alert and made me feel like I had to check my identity at the door in order to do the work I was really proud

of. We were rolling out the Affordable Care Act and I'm doing this anti-gun work and felt completely connected to all these things, but in order to do that I had to hide my Jewishness or my desire for Jews to be liberated?

I remember having a really, really uncomfortable conversation with somebody in law school, who was essentially accusing me of being racist, just because I was Jewish, and she didn't know me at all, we had never spoken. I think that if I had had that conversation, now, it would have gone very differently because I did not have the tools to have this conversation with her. I had no idea how to address it. And I just felt really ashamed and embarrassed as a Jew. Like it would just make my life easier if I could just hide that part of myself.

That's really powerful. I imagine many others have similar kinds of experiences. When you say that the Zionist perspective, the Jewish perspective, should always have a voice at the table, how do you envision what that looks like? And in what spheres?

What it looks like is that no Jew should ever feel like they have to hide any aspect of their identity in order to participate in progressive activism, frankly, in order to participate in any activism. I had something antisemitic happen to me in New York City about two years ago, and ever since then I've always had some kind of Jewish star or Hebrew lettering, because it is important to me that when I walk into any space, which nine times out of ten is a progressive space, I want them to know that I'm a Jew, and that I'm a proud Jew. And then we can go from there. Whatever conversations that we have, I don't want anyone to feel like they need to take off their *yarmulke*.

On a more global scale it means that Jews

are included in activism and in progressive causes. And what often happens is that when it comes to antisemitism and condemning antisemitism, it feels like people who are otherwise so quick to condemn racism or homophobia are suddenly silent. It feels like when it comes to Jewish lives, the approach is suddenly “all lives matter.” There was an incident in Congress, where Congresswoman Ilhan Omar made that comment, “It’s all about the Benjamins,” with real antisemitic tropes, but they couldn’t even pass a resolution condemning her without also throwing in all other forms of bigotry. Why couldn’t they just call her out on it? We just had a similar thing with the Iron Dome funding where many of the people defending it were saying, “it’s a defense system, it saves Jewish and Palestinian lives.” Why isn’t it enough that it saves Jewish lives? Why are we so embarrassed to say that? And then with all that happened during the latest conflict in Gaza, we heard a lot of people feeling like if they spoke out against antisemitism, they also had to qualify it with the statement that they support Palestinian lives. If somebody is getting punched in the face for being Hasidic in Brooklyn, what does that have to do with Palestinian lives?

Okay, so can you describe, one or two other kinds of activities that Zioness does to promote its agenda?

One thing that we’re very focused on is training our chapters. I’ll make up an example. Let’s say that many activists in the Chicago chapter are working on gun reform issues. What this could look like is that they’ll have a webinar or some kind of training session about how to enter this activism space as a Zionist and as a Jew, and how to make sure that they know there’s what to do if they’re confronted with

anti-Zionism in that space. How they can walk into that room as a proud Jew and a proud Zionist who also is really intent on achieving gun reform in Chicago. More broadly, when there is something like the Women’s March or the keeping-families-together marches and abortion rights marches, we will help people show up in those spaces because we care deeply about those causes. We’ll do it with posters promoting the values as Jews and Zionists. We don’t want to take away from the cause or create a distraction, but we want to make the statement that Zionists support these causes.

Do you think that the anti-Zionism that you’re experiencing slides into or is built on or otherwise connected to antisemitism?

Yes, I think it’s absolutely connected to antisemitism, Amanda [Berman] has said this a lot of times. The only way it could not be antisemitism is if you don’t believe in nationhood at all, for anyone, or you don’t believe that anyone deserves liberation, then it’s not antisemitism because that’s your general viewpoint. But if you believe that people should have a right to a homeland, or that people should have a right to indigeneity or self-determination, but you exclude Jews, then it’s very hard to believe that it’s anything other than antisemitism. Now, of course, that doesn’t mean that you can’t criticize the Israeli government. The Israeli government is absolutely allowed to be criticized and should be criticized in the same way that we openly and regularly criticize the American government. But if you’re criticizing it disproportionately or start leaning on antisemitic tropes in order to do it, then I think you’ve crossed from kind of legitimate criticism into antisemitism. Here’s a good test: if you replace the word Israel

with Jew or Jewish people, and the statement sounds antisemitic, then what you're saying is probably antisemitic. But I don't see any space in practice between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, because almost everyone who claims to be anti-Zionist believes in liberation and self-determination for every other people.

This is a journal about Jewish education. Have you or your friends in Zioness thought about or actually gone into Jewish teen groups or Jewish campus groups and spoken to them?

We will go wherever we're invited. We've been invited to college meetings, and recently Amanda debated Peter Beinart, organized by Yale students. We go into colleges, we go into communities, we speak to parents, we speak to rabbis, we speak to educators, we even had a high school intern program. In an ideal world we would have ten times the budget and ten times the staff, but we are still a startup. It'll be a little bit more time before we can really get out into these spaces. But a big thing that we have done and are continuing to do is create a lot of resources. We have a guide for how to confront anti-Zionism in progressive spaces. I think that creating those kinds of materials could actually be really helpful in the educational context for people to talk about this issue with their students.

I'm going to push you a little. If you were contacted by the principal of a Jewish school, let's say a high school, and they asked you to put together a program because they're afraid of what their students are going to encounter and they're not prepared for this, what would you focus on?

I see two kinds of kids and two different kinds of educational needs. Judaism is an

ethno-religion, and most American Jews are raised with a cultural Jewish identity but not necessarily a religious one. They probably have a stronger sense of being American and probably identify in most ways more with white America, meaning they think of themselves as very protected from any form of bigotry. They feel very safe here and very accepted. They don't know very much [about their Jewish heritage], maybe they celebrate some holidays and have been to Israel once




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on some kind of organized trip. The issue for them is that because they've been raised, most likely, on progressive or democratic values, when they first get to college, they've never really had to think of themselves as being a minority or what it actually means to be a Jew. Then they get to college and they hear the story of the oppressor against the oppressed, and the Israel-Palestine conflict, it's alien to them and they buy into it. Approaching that problem is very different than maybe the one that you're talking about, which is if you've been raised within a strong religious, Jewish, Zionist community and you've gone to Jewish schools for your whole life. You've definitely heard the Zionist story and received a Zionist education but it's very unlikely that you've heard the Palestinian narrative. And if you have heard about Palestinians, you've probably only heard it in a pretty negative, or I'd argue Islamophobic, context. I grew up going to Jewish schools and Jewish camps my whole life. I think I saw the documentary *Jihad for Kids* ten times, in different contexts and at different ages! And despite growing up in a liberal family and a relatively liberal community, and I definitely don't identify with white America—I identify much more with other minority communities, I was never made to feel like I should be too safe to fully let my guard down anywhere as a Jew. But I think that even growing up in a very tolerant home and community, I think my impression of Palestinians was that most of them had bad intentions toward Jews and Israelis, and that this was a fight to the death in some ways. I think that if I was going into a Jewish school now, I would want to really arm the students, who presumably have had this Zionist education, with the Palestinian perspective, and how to talk about that in a

respectful way that shows that it can coexist with the Zionist perspective. I think that is the most powerful tool to give students coming into the American college experience, because what happens now is that the students who should be speaking up—like students who we've sent through twelve years of day school education with a Zionist perspective—don't have any tools or language to talk about it on the other side. This may be their first exposure to the stories of what's happening to a lot of Palestinians, so that not giving them those tools is basically rendering them kind of useless when they get to the college campus.

This was a fascinating conversation. Is there anything you want to add?

I would say that the biggest thing that we could give to American Jews is Jewish pride and an understanding of what that means to be a Jew. So many people don't really have an understanding of what that is, I feel like if you asked an American Jew, what is a Jew? I don't know that you would really get a concise or clear answer from many, many people. I had a little bit of an uncomfortable conversation with a colleague of mine who isn't Jewish. She's a black woman who posted a few things about the Israel-Palestine conflict that had really antisemitic undertones. So I said to her, "I'm not at all trying to silence you or say that you can't talk about or criticize the Israeli government or talk about the Palestinian perspective, but I just want you to know that these are really antisemitic tropes." In the conversations which followed she said, "As a black woman, my existence every day is a form of protest and a form of victory that I exist here in America." I thought, "that's really powerful." I think that what she said is true, but I think that's true for Jews too. She's saying

this to me, as if I'm not the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. My grandfather was literally a slave to the Nazis on the Russian front for two years. It's not a competition; there's no Olympics of oppression. The American experience for black people is very different than the American experience for Jews, and in some ways it's a problem for us because we feel so comfortable here. But I think it's just so important for people to understand what it means to be a Jew. And I think that's something we maybe don't always do a good job with.

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Identifying Jewish for Gen-Z

Samantha Vinokor-Meinrath



As a high school student, I regularly accessorized my outfits with a Jewish star necklace. I could often be found wearing t-shirts with Jewish and Israeli symbols on them, and at one point ironed a decorative Israeli Defense Forces patch onto my backpack. I was proud of my Judaism, and it became increasingly important for me to display it publicly. As with many identity-defining attributes, I wanted my outsides to match my insides. Wearing insignia identifying oneself as Jewish is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that speaks to generational privilege and an ability to claim this identity without fear of retribution, but can also be a source of contention for many. For every impassioned think piece about why we should wear our stars proudly and walk through the world without fear, there's an equally compelling counterpoint that speaks to legitimate concerns about personal safety that are assuaged by taking this one step to blend in and assimilate.

As Jewish educators in 2021, we are educating learners who are coming of age during a disturbing resurgence in antisemitism and anti-Jewish sentiment. The choices that they make about how to present Jewishly in public are at once deeply personal, while also being a matter of collective concern and communal soul searching. After all, we as educators champion having pride in one's Jewish identity. It only makes sense that a generation of individuals who are proud, engaged, and confident in using their voices, would be excited to show their inner selves in their external appearances. At the same time, the uptick in antisemitism that has colored the coming-of-age experiences of Generation Z-ers over the last few years has sometimes resulted in adolescents who are more comfortable keeping their Judaism inside.

Rachel is a high school sophomore from Texas. She has been involved in her synagogue, but generally walks through the halls of her public school knowing that she's one of three Jews in the building. Rachel shared the intentionality behind her decision to wear a particular Jewish symbol. She decided to wear a *chai* necklace, a symbol of Hebrew letters representing the word meaning "life." By opting for this symbol instead of the better-known and more easily recognized Star of

Samantha Vinokor-Meinrath is the Senior Director of Knowledge, Ideas, and Learning at the [Jewish Education Project](#), and regularly teaches and consults on topics relating to Jewish education, Generation Z, and identity development. Dr. Vinokor-Meinrath's forthcoming book, *#antisemitism: Coming of Age During the Resurgence of Hate*, focuses on the impact that antisemitism has had on the Jewish identity of Generation Z-ers.

David, Rachel sought to use her sartorial choices to start conversations. “I got the *chai* because it’s a way to show my faith to others. People who aren’t curious won’t ask. But because it’s not a Star of David and everyone doesn’t know what it is, if they’re curious enough and they do ask, there’s room for us to have a conversation.”

Zachary is a student at a Jewish day school in Maryland. “After the shooting [at Congregation Tree of Life in Pittsburgh] I started wearing my *kippah* more in public. I take the metro to school every day, and I wear my *kippah*. Sometimes I run into other Jewish people, and it’s fun to have a connection. But I understand people who are scared of something happening when you look Jewish in public. For me, I feel like it’s better to show that we’re here, we’re not going anywhere, we’re still Jewish, and we’re going to stay Jewish. There’s not anything anyone’s going to do about it.”

As Jewish educators, we often describe part of our mission as meeting learners where they are. In the case of today’s adolescents, that can mean any number of things, including showing up in person, on Zoom, and on an ever-changing array of social media platforms. Adolescents spend their time in a combination of in-person and virtual spaces, and in each environment there are choices to be made about what it means to present as Jewish. Lia, a high school senior from Ohio, shared that, “I used to include lots of stuff about being Jewish online. I love baking *hallah*, and I’d put it in my Instagram stories, and I had a TikTok go viral about lighting the Hanukkah candles. But then I started getting hate. I’d post something about Shabbat, and people would tell me to go into the ovens with my *hallah*. So, I stopped displaying myself as

specifically Jewish. Now I’m just someone who bakes bread.”

In June of 2021, a meme circulated on social media:



When it comes to presenting Jewishly in public, every choice that each individual makes is deeply personal and legitimate. If someone is frightened for their safety when they claim their Judaism in physical ways, or if they don’t want to be on display as representatives of the Jewish community and opt to fly under the radar, this is not indicative of Jewish shame. Rather than being a commentary on the individual, it’s an indictment of the society that creates the environment in which we feel that being a Jew is something that needs to be somehow private. Likewise, for those who choose to present loudly and proudly, this can be a beautiful thing, particularly when it’s done for the right reasons. To show one’s pride is great—when it’s on your own terms. But for someone’s Judaism to manifest purely as a statement of defiance to detractors is its own potentially fraught reality.

The decisions that adolescents are making about presenting Jewishly in the face of rising antisemitism are informed by instinct, lived experiences, and social norms. Part of the role of the Jewish educator is to be a conduit for this transference of Jewish pride. Our pedagogy can help shape and

influence if and how our learners choose to claim their Judaism in public and virtual forums. In our work, we regularly share the beauty, complexity, and meaning-making that Judaism provides. But are we intentionally connecting the lived experiences of Judaism, however they manifest for our learners, with what it means to carry oneself Jewishly in a world where that means being a minority, visibly or otherwise?

“Judaism should be a joyous experience. Antisemitism isn’t, and shouldn’t be, our major *raison d’être* when it comes to being Jewish. We take it seriously, of course. But if it becomes what defines our Jewish identity, they win.” Lily, a high school senior, summed up her perspective succinctly. Pride is encouraged and championed, always. But a Judaism based on defiance is neither sustainable nor transferable. If the response to antisemitism is focusing all of our efforts on countering hatred and detractors, learners may find real meaning in their activism and self-advocacy, but they run the very real risk of losing sight of the *why* behind the *what*. Any identity that is based on what it runs counter to, rather than the value that it brings lacks sufficient grounding. So when Jewish sartorial choices are made, whether they are for religious observance or cultural adherence, their value to the wearer comes from how

they experience embodied Judaism, not in how others react to their choices.

People have lots of guesses about what the hardest and best parts of our jobs as Jewish educators are. Among the elements that others consider to be top contenders for the hardest, there’s recruiting participants from an over-programmed population, dealing with the sometimes conflicting demands of parents and learners, never having enough time, and limited resources. All true. Likewise, some of the top guesses about the best parts are making an impact on young people, constantly learning new things, participating in immersive experiences, and being able to align my passions, values, and profession. Again, all true. But the at-once hardest and best part of this job is being an authentic Jewish personality, a role model, with flaws and questions and ingrained truths, that our learners can relate to, and be challenged by, and learn from.

For those who are coming of age during the resurgence of hate, and those who care about them, allowing for the gray area between the black and white of right and wrong to be a place of meaning-making will be critical. So too will be finding the authentic truths that guide them in their life journeys. As for where that leaves the status quo with regards to antisemitism, the story will continue to unfold.

Don't Believe Everything You Read

David Hertzberg

The rise of antisemitism challenges educators to respond creatively and provide our students with the tools necessary to prevent them from being influenced or hurt by the distorted narratives often constructed. I would like to suggest that familiarizing our students with the historical method and teaching them how to think historically will help them significantly in this effort.

Historians are trained skeptics. As part of their quest to understand the past they must constantly question evidence. Their default cognitive position when viewing evidence is, “questionable until proven true or false (or at least likely or unlikely).” Collecting the evidence is only the first step. They hold evidence in abeyance contingent upon further investigation. Following collection, the evidence must be confirmed, weighed, and analyzed.

The key tools historians use are primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are produced by live witnesses to the event being studied, such as letters, diary entries, speeches, oral histories, and even photographs. Secondary sources are written by people after the event and present analyses based on the primary sources.

When evaluating sources, historians are guided by a series of questions. What is the source and provenance of the evidence? Is the source both authentic and reliable (meaning is the source legitimate and, if for example, it is a person’s diary entry, is the information accurate)? Is it contemporary to the event it is describing or commenting on, or is it from a different time and place? If it is not contemporary, why was it produced when it was? Can we detect cognitive biases or ideological agendas? Do other sources support or argue with it, and if so, what are their relative strengths and weaknesses? On what points do contradictory sources argue and on what points do they agree? Ultimately, how does this evidence help us understand the event? Only when these questions are answered in a way that assigns value to the evidence, are historians prepared to use it to further our understanding of the historical event being studied.

In fact, this approach is used in many walks of life. For example, national security intelligence agencies adopt this approach when evaluating their sources of information. They evaluate their sources of information based on the reliability and credibility scale. In this matrix, reliability refers



David Hertzberg, Rabbi and Doctor, is Principal of [Yeshivah of Flatbush](#) Middle School (Brooklyn, NY) and Assistant Professor of History at Touro College.

to the “source” and credibility to the level of confidence in the information conveyed. Many intelligence failures have occurred when these questions were not properly asked and information was either believed or disbelieved for reasons such as the influence of cognitive biases like confirmation bias. Examples range from Gedaliah not believing that there was a plot to assassinate him to the United States defense establishment believing that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Even Israel’s vaunted military intelligence community fell victim to this in the days prior to the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Major General Eli Zeira, who commanded Israel’s military intelligence branch, explained away what turned out to be very clear signs of the impending attack because they did not fit into “the Concept” which was guiding Israeli military strategic thinking at the time.

The idea that we should be skeptical can be seen very clearly in rabbinic literature. For example, the fifth chapter of *Sanhedrin* discusses the many questions the *bet din* asked witnesses to ascertain if they were telling the truth. Likewise, even in cases where the witnesses thought they were being honest, the rabbis wanted to ensure that they actually and accurately witnessed what they thought they did. The Sages understood that not only do mistakes happen, but that sometimes, for whatever reasons, people will rationalize outright lying. We can extrapolate from this example that even in non-judicial situations it is wise to question and investigate. As the aphorism declares, “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”

Through the use of case studies and samples of evidence related to these studies we can train students to be skeptical of everything they read. Students can be shown

the famous painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Leutze. While this painting is iconic and captures the courage of Washington and his army that fateful night, it is full of historical errors. Simply asking students to try to identify some of these errors will demonstrate to them that sources need to be judged. On their own they will likely realize that the Delaware River does not look like the river in the painting (it is actually based on the Rhine River) and that given the weather that night,, Washington would not have been able to stand up the way depicted in the painting without falling. It will be essential for them to reveal that Leutze painted this painting nearly seventy-five years after the crossing. The point is that by using this familiar painting students will realize that not everything is as it appears and that they should test their sources.

After studying and evaluating a selection of evidentiary sources like this painting, students will understand the importance of approaching evidence skeptically and familiarize themselves with the questions to ask when evaluating a source. Students can then be taught how to apply these skills to judging social media. When it comes to social media posts (and for that matter print and television news media as well) students can be taught to research the sites and determine if their positions on current events are always the same. They should assess what sources the site relies on and whether these sources are reliable. If you can safely predict what a particular outlet is going to opine on a topic before you read it, it is safe to say it is agenda driven. And while this doesn’t automatically mean it is misrepresenting the truth or does not make valid points, it does indicate the need to question its sources and investigate

further.

A social media checklist could be helpful as it will equip students with a list of basic questions they should ask about everything they read before accepting the conclusion presented. A possible checklist can consist of the following:

- Source Identification: Is it a .edu, .org, .com, etc.
- Author's Background: Is the author's name clearly indicated? Does the author have professional expertise and experience in the field he/she is commenting on? Does the author have a good reputation with respect to fact checking?
- Date Check: Is the publication date clearly indicated? Is it recent enough to be relevant? Has the post been edited, and if so, when and why?
- Content Analysis: Is the article well

written and edited for errors both grammatical and logical? Is the main purpose of the article to inform or to persuade? Does the article present in a respectful and credible manner opposing viewpoints?

- Cross-checking: Is the source original or reposted? Are there similar sources posted and are they each original or repostings as well? Does the article present supporting evidence?

Most, if not all, antisemitic posts will not meet this checklist's criteria. Equipped with this checklist and familiar with the historical method, students will become more critical consumers of social media in general and of antisemitic posts in particular. They will be better prepared to address the challenges they confront and take advantage of the opportunities they encounter as they become adult citizens in our globalized world.

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The Crisis of Identity in an Antisemitic Environment

Sandra Sterling Epstein

Antisemitism, the condition of our world, the identity crisis of too many of our young adults and rising leaders, it can be and often is just too much. How do we respond?

A young man from a Modern Orthodox Jewish home in a Northeastern community with a sizable Jewish population lives in the western part of the United States outside of any such community. He has blond hair and green eyes, slight muscular build, and is in his twenties. People who see him occasionally greet him with the statement, “You look like a great Aryan.” At other times, he confronts antisemitic remarks if anyone thinks he may be Jewish (due in part to his name). He has also been negatively impacted by his experiences in a well-known university with a sizable Jewish privileged population, where he witnessed accepted blatant racism and prejudice towards people of color and various ethnicities, causing him to feel alienated from his own American Jewish peers as he advocated for other groups being maligned. He is frustrated, disillusioned, and reluctant to identify with any specific grouping for any reason. He finds his comfort in a group of equally disillusioned friends and peers who identify with each other more than any nationality, ideology, religious tradition or ethnicity, while representing all of these groupings. He is most certainly not alone.

The rise in antisemitism is not occurring in a vacuum; it is part of a rising tide of prejudicial rhetoric against all affinity groups including those based on race and sexual identity. One particular feature of contemporary bigotry is the complicating factor of intersectionality, the interconnectedness of aspects of identity such as race, class, and gender. In this climate, any distinguishing identity can cause the individual to be disqualified from other group affiliations as well. For example, any level of loyalty to Israel is summarily cast as immoral support for the oppressor, disqualifying the individual from groups working toward social justice. In one recent case, at an international conference for the



**Sandra Sterling
(Sunnie) Epstein**

(shulisrose@aol.com)

directs BeYachad,
a program bringing
Jewish learning and
living together. Dr.

Sterling Epstein is a
lifelong teacher and has
published widely. She is
Educational Consultant
to ESHEL, the LGBT
inclusion consortium for
the Orthodox community.

Sunnie serves on the
presidium of a large
multi-faith council.

LGBTQ+ Jewishly participants were physically and verbally attacked as being “oppressors.” Similar reports have been shared from those attending Black Lives Matter events and other gatherings dedicated to a range of social justice activities. Intersectionality divides people into one of two categories—the oppressed and the oppressors—with no room for nuance or complexity.

The negative experiences of young Jews can generate discomfort with and alienation from their Judaism. As one disenfranchised 20-something put it, “I care about all people and if Judaism cannot show me that this perspective is supported, it has no place in my life.”

What role can we, as educators, play in this unfolding drama?

First, the members of the Jewish community must be taught that by any metric, Judaism *is* about social justice, inclusion, respect for the other, and ensuring the safety and well-being of all. The texts we study, the writings we engage, and the conversations we have can reinforce this core understanding—that their Jewish identity is not inconsistent with the values they hold dear. Back to our young man. He may not be “observing” in the conventional sense of the word, but when he learns about *shemita* (the Sabbatical year) and its teachings about the land, social justice, returning the sense of dignity to individuals by forgiving debts, he gains a greater appreciation of Judaism’s meaningfulness in his life, regardless of whether he shares this with other members of his affinity group or whether they accept his position.

Second, it is valuable to highlight the contemporary efforts of Jews in a multiplicity of social justice areas. These can include Jewish historical involvement in the early

labor movement and Jewish participation in the civil rights movement, but also more recent initiatives. There are initiatives to feed the hungry, both in North America (Mazon) and in underprivileged countries in South America and Africa (AJWS), Jewish environmentalists (Hazon, Arava Institute for Environmental Studies), Jewish sustainability entrepreneurs (Yosef Abramowitz), interfaith dialogue, immigrant assistance (HIAS), and the many efforts that bring young people together across lines of observance, religious belief, ethnicities, race, and every other identity marker. Add to these the organizations and initiatives based in Israel to bring energy to African villages, water to parched lands, aid to disaster struck areas, and so much more.

Third, a sense of Jewish history is essential for young Jews to understand—and to help others understand—that the core experience of Jews for the past two thousand years, including much of the existence of the modern State of Israel, has been one of powerlessness, dependence, and vulnerability in the face of existential threats. That historical knowledge and core message are critical for preserving Jewish identity and pride, and provide the basis for being able to recognize the distinction between legitimate critique of Israel and anti-Zionism as well as the dangerous conflation of anti-Israel sentiments with antisemitism.

Fourth, we can provide our youth and young adults with tools to question, engage in honest discourse with others with whom they will not agree, find and consult accurate resources, learn their history and collective backstory, all as part of reclaiming their identity. One [model](#) for fostering civil conversations is provided by Krista Tippett. Within this process, if we all participate in this reboot of the social justice

aspect of Judaism so central to our traditions, we can hopefully work together to heal the rift that has threatened our well-being. As we program, teach, and share, we simultaneously have the challenge of acknowledging the “world out there and its messages” and responding through choosing the focus of our work to respond to the needs and very important causes which our younger adults hold dear.

By engendering interest in acquiring the tools for learning and using our very available resources in accessing these teachings, those whom we hope will take on the reins of leadership in our Jewish community will be bolstered in their understanding of Judaism for its positive teachings, so related to their interests and causes. Development of strong, clear identity, resulting from a supportive background, shared messaging from different target groups, and understanding where one stands in our complex and complicated world should be the experience of our 20-somethings, 30-somethings, and younger individuals.

A Jewish professional 30-something woman who also comes from a religious Jewish home is asked about her identity. She responds:

I live in a progressive, often queer, often multi-racial, Jewish community where we are dealing with such intense political and social unrest and have become deeply committed to the vision of a progressive, multi-racial democracy in the United States, our home, where we live. In this reality, my read on the tension between progressive Jewish engagement and perspectives on Israel is that a lot of younger progressive Jews feel much more committed to making

our diasporic American context better and more just. This is our home...on top of that many of those people would say that one strategy to fight antisemitism is to be aligned with other fighting for the same multi-racial U.S. democracy that Jews need in order to survive and thrive.

This quote is provided by someone who is successful in their career, doing this type of community Jewish work, and with a good sense of what the challenges are. The answer embedded in her words is to acknowledge the larger context of anti-any group messaging and to join ranks with all who are impacted, thus creating coalitions and hopefully instilling pride in individual identities as well.

While Jewish identity per se may too often not be on the table for those addressing the basic issues of survival, economic inequity, and so much else that plagues our reality today, it is so clear to all of us that it can and should be. What if we were to collectively enter this increasing chasm and follow our Jewish professional's advice articulated here? While recognizing the reality that confronts us all and the conflation of antisemitism with so many other dynamics that threaten us all, we can focus on what we need to internally learn and advocate for so that the external messages do not continue to derail and compromise. Through shared emphasis on this focus, we open ourselves up collectively to recommit ourselves to the very issues that concern young Jews, to learn from them, and to reconfirm for them that this is indeed part of our history and heritage.

Careful Consumption of Social Media

Hannah Greenberg

In an age of social media and social justice activism, when it comes to teaching our students about Israel, it can be challenging to find open and healthy discourse. When Ben & Jerry's pulled selling of ice cream in what they called the "occupied" areas of Israel—my Facebook and Instagram feeds quickly became flooded with competing posts either extolling the company's morals for taking a stand against Zionism or denouncing it for antisemitism. Perhaps we need to begin with some definitions. Antisemitism is defined as hostility to or prejudice against Jewish people; classical anti-Zionism is opposition to the premise that Jews have a right to self-determination or a state of their own. Classical anti-Zionism is mostly antisemitic, but not all criticism of Israel is anti-Zionist. Complicating this picture is that many contemporary young people use the term anti-Zionism to mean being critical of Israel, which may or may not be antisemitic. Like any country, Israel is not perfect, so that criticizing Israel is not inherently antisemitic. Misappropriation of the term anti-Zionism may, in itself, be an attempt to blur the line between legitimate criticism of the State of Israel and the illegitimate denial of the State of Israel's right to exist. How can we distinguish between legitimate criticism and that which has crossed that line?

There are four essential questions that we must teach our students to use as guiding principles when they encounter criticism of Israel in social media. These four questions provide students with the analytical tools they need to succeed in identifying honest critique of Israeli policies from antisemitism; they ask our students to take a step back from the material and put it into perspective. The four questions are:

1. Where is the post from? Does the author or organization have a history of sharing antisemitic views?
2. Does the author/organization hold Israel to a double standard when it comes to critiquing government policies or actions?
 - a. Are they holding other countries accountable for similar actions?



Hannah Greenberg is currently studying at the [Pardes Center for Jewish Educators](#). While earning her M.Ed. with a concentration in autism and severe disabilities from the University of Delaware, she was Hillel Student President and was an Israel advocate. In her free time, she studies daf yomi and posts daily at @dafyomiadventures.

- b. Are they ever critical of questionable Palestinian policies or actions?
- 3. Do they use Jew-baiting or other antisemitic tropes?
- 4. Are they delegitimizing Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state rather than criticizing individual government policies?

Let's explore these a little deeper.

Part of being a media consumer is understanding that most news sources have a political bias, so that they shape the news to promote their agenda rather than simply provide reporting on it. Identifying the source helps us to recognize its potential biases, and hence its trustworthiness and value in shaping our opinions. This is true whether we are talking about media within the Jewish world, where there are left-leaning organizations like J Street and right-leaning organizations like Algemeiner, or in the general media. This is even more important when looking at anonymous postings, where it is more difficult to find the author's predispositions or biases.

This moves us into the second question, the double standard issue, that is, the consideration of what else the author has posted can also help to identify biases. For example, when a friend posts a comment in the name of social justice condemning Israel, is that friend similarly concerned about the rights of Uyghurs in China, LGBTQ+ rights in the Palestinian Authority, or the systematic repression of various civil rights in dozens of other countries? When someone posts about the occupation of the West Bank, does he or she also post about occupation of Tibet or Crimea? If the posts are only about Israel, then perhaps human rights or social justice is not their primary motive. There might be an

anti-Zionist or antisemitic agenda, perhaps even simply a desire to seem "woke" or to gain followers is driving the posting.

What about the language and imagery used—is it meant to inflame or inform? Does it include stereotypes and generalizations to describe Israel? Does it use the language of Jew-baiting, the motif of blood libels, perhaps the tropes of Jews controlling (Congress, the world, etc.) through money, or comparisons to Nazi Germany? All these are red flags for antisemitism and should give the reader cause to question both the intentions and the accuracy of the post.

Investigating these questions will often point a clear direction to answering the fourth question—is the critique one of specific Israeli policies or an attempt to delegitimize the entire Zionist enterprise.

Let's take a look at two examples.

Scrolling through social media, a student sees a number of posts on their Instagram on the recent Sheikh Jarrah protests. The first post is placed by an anonymous account. It looks at the violence that many of the protestors are facing; showing a short clip of some of the sounds of tear gas grenades used by police to try to disrupt and stop the protests. The caption reads: "Liberate Jerusalem! Stand-up to Colonialist Jews! End the Occupation! From the river to the sea, Palestine should be free!"

Using these four questions, the student can pause and break down the post.

1. Where is the post from? Does the author/organization have a history of sharing anti-Jewish views?

This anonymous account does not have affiliates or organizations listed. Scrolling

through this account one can see they only post about the conflict surrounding Sheikh Jarrah. Most posts seem to call for violence against Israelis as well as call for a Free Palestine. A number of posts generalize this violence to all Israelis and view Israel as a colonial power that has caused a *nakba*, calamity or destruction, towards Palestinians. While not inherently antisemitic the posts are clearly anti-Zionist with an agenda to delegitimize and undermine the State of Israel.

2. Does the author/ organization hold Israel to a double standard when it comes to critiquing government policies or actions?

The goal of this account is to highlight and document what is happening in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. As this account only focuses on one specific issue, the extent to which the author holds Israel to a double standard cannot be fully determined. However, when looking at what one's friends share and post, when a friend only focuses on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and seems to turn a blind eye to other countries and their conflicts or focuses on actions by Israelis against Palestinians but not Palestinians against Israelis, a student should be able to recognize the double standards at play.

3. Do they use Jew-baiting or other antisemitic tropes?

Jew-baiting is seen with the use of calling for a stand against colonialist Jews. Statements such as these paint a picture that all Jews are responsible for the challenges many

Palestinians face; it makes no distinction between Jews and Israelis as well as no distinction between Israelis and Israeli government policies. The inability to distinguish between Israelis and Jews or Israel and Israelis, clearly flags this post and the post-er as unreliably antisemitic.

Other forms of Jew-baiting can look like a Nazi insignia on an Israeli flag or claiming that Jews control money, politics, news outlets, etc.

4. Are they delegitimizing Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state rather than criticizing individual government policies?

The call for a "Free Palestine from the river to the sea" and violence against Israelis delegitimizes Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. The reference "from the river (i.e., the Jordan River) to the sea (i.e., the Mediterranean) leaves no room for Israel's existence. Posts focusing on the *nakba* and the dislocations of Palestinian society that resulted from Israel's emergence as a State but which neglect the experience of Jews who were forced to leave the West Bank by Jordan or the exile of Jews from most Arab countries during that same period indicates that the anonymous account is less than transparent about its anti-Zionist agenda.

After examining the post through the lens of these four questions, students can determine that the post is not just critical of Israeli policies, but patently anti-Zionist and antisemitic. The call for violence against Israel and Jews as well as not offering tangible resources to support positive change through legitimate organizations or proper authorities challenges the trustworthiness and reliability

of this account. As mentioned above, the inability to distinguish between Israelis and Jews or Israel and Israelis, clearly flags this post and the post-er as unreliably antisemitic.

By contrast, another post on Sheikh Jarrah showcases the families being evicted and calls for individuals to call on the Israeli government to prevent the eviction of these Arab families from the homes in which they have lived for years. The post highlights pictures of the Arabs who live in Sheikh Jarrah and each post gives a summary of their lives and resources on how one can assist these families. It also highlights the inequality of Jews and Arabs in cases like these—Arab families who fled or abandoned their homes in the War of Independence have no legal recourse to reclaim them but Jewish families who fled or abandoned their homes can regain ownership in court. Again, by going through each of the questions, the student would see that this post, which came from an account just focusing on Sheikh Jarrah, may pose a legitimate criticism of Israel and its policies. When put to the test of the four questions, it is clear that the post is focused on improving the lives of Palestinians, avoids stereotyping, generalizations, incendiary

language, delegitimization, and acknowledges the complexity of the issue of reclaiming property lost during armed conflict long after the end of the conflict. The critique leveled in the post cannot at face value be described as antisemitic or anti-Zionist.

As the face of social justice activism changes and utilizes social media, students must be able to dissect posts and recognize when a post is antisemitic and should be reported or discussed with a friend and/or when it is anti-Zionism and a chance to open dialogue and engage with the other side.

The ability to consume social media critically not only offers students the ability to counter attacks on Israel but enables them to look at all media critically. It will demand that they have a better understanding of the history of Israel and will challenge them to be able to consider positions different from their own and even to be constructively critical of Israel. These skills will help them navigate the complexities of antisemitism in the context of anti-Zionism as they will be able to articulately explain why a comment is or is not antisemitic and begin to conduct healthy and productive conversations.

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Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and Jewish Education

Simon Klarfeld

Anti-Zionism and anti-Israel sentiments are so prevalent that if students have not encountered them as of yet, whether on social media or in person, they are sure to have to grapple with them when they begin their post-high school experience. It would be a great disservice to them if we do not prepare them adequately, and it is the nature of that preparation which will determine our students' abilities to feel confident in the face of antisemitic anti-Zionist attacks. The questions are how and in what context to do that preparation.

Conceptual issues

Even before we begin to explore the above questions, we need to understand just how complicated the issue is. Perhaps we need to begin by identifying two important facts about anti-Zionism.

1. **Not all anti-Israel sentiment is anti-Zionism.** If the arguments are specific to a particular government's policies and not to the undermining of Israel as a Jewish state, then such critical voices are already part of the vibrancy of Israeli democracy today. Of course, there is always the question of whether Jews living outside of Israel should participate in that critique, but suffice it to say that critique from a place of desire to improve is not anti-Zionist.
2. **Not all anti-Zionism is antisemitism.** Since the establishment of political Zionism in the late 1800s, a significant number of Jews and—especially important from an educational perspective—a significant number of Jewish movements and organizations have been anti-Zionist. Ideologues among them have used arguments ranging from *halakha* to anti-nationalism, from messianism to communism, from



Simon Klarfeld is a consultant in the fields of Jewish education and innovation. Simon formerly served as Executive Director of Young Judaea Global. Before then, he was the Hillel Director at Columbia University and Barnard College; Vice President of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies; and Founding Director of the Genesis Program at Brandeis University.

anti-separatism to assimilationism, and none can objectively be identified as antisemitic.

Second, we need to acknowledge the relative paucity of resources we have at our disposal. Jews have been dealing with antisemitism for a long time, and professionally for nearly a century. By contrast, the current anti-Zionism is relatively new and there are limited resources available.

Third, internal philosophical debate within the Jewish community makes it difficult to formulate clear paths to provide the necessary resources. For example, Jews outside of Israel are just as divided as Jews inside Israel regarding the optimal political horizons for the Jewish State. There is no consensus on critical issues such as one state vs two states, carrots vs sticks, pride vs practicality, hope vs fear. According to the 2020 Pew Study of American Jews, only 35% of 18-29 year olds believe that caring about Israel is essential to being Jewish. In many cases, Israel is no longer the source of unity but has become a lightning rod for fierce internal debate.

Practical issues

Perhaps one of the most important things to consider in how to teach about Israel, and how to help our students understand if what they are hearing about Israel is antisemitic, is the language used. Language can be highly contentious and carries subtle, or not so subtle, messages. The language used by everyone involved is loaded—occupied land, liberated land, or disputed land—what does each mean, what do they imply, and what prejudices does each reveal or try to engender? Are the people being criticized in Israel described as Israelis, Israeli Jews, or

Jews, and what difference does it make? When students learn to recognize the subtleties, the coded messages conveyed by language, they can begin to make sense out of what they are reading and hearing.

The context in which anti-Zionism is examined can have a significant impact. If taught as its own unit, it can receive proper attention but will likely be missing context. Presented as an extra-curricular unit can have the benefits of attracting the most interested students, but the disadvantage of the lack of exposure to the broader student body. Taught as part of a class on Israel and Zionism could be valuable as it can provide an important foil to the narrative being explored, but caution should be given to it becoming too much of an interruption to that narrative.

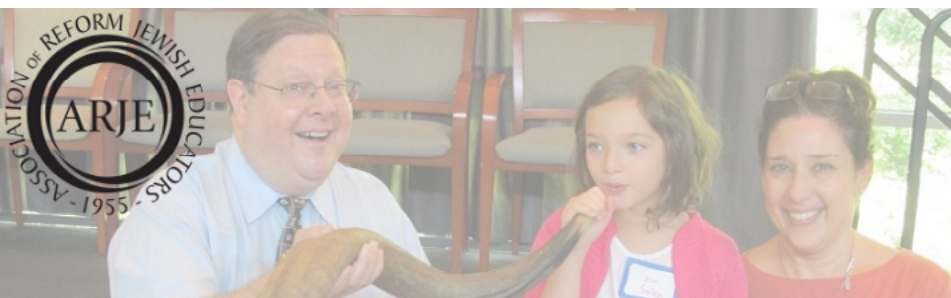
All this leads to the central issue of content, which is integrally connected to the question of why we are teaching about Israel at all. If we are looking to understand why Israel was a necessity, that would involve a historical approach and an examination of the early Zionist philosophies. If we are interested in our students taking pride in Israel, we could explore Israel's success as the little-nation-that-could-despite-all-the-odds, start-up nation, Israeli contributions to medicine, climate, sustainability, irrigation, the arts, literature, resource management, culture, ethical codes of its military, and humanitarian efforts around the world.

If, however, we are interested in teaching about Israel so that our students are prepared to deal meaningfully with anti-Zionism, then we must supplement those other areas with additional exploration. They need to understand how Israel deals with its minorities—primarily Christians, Muslims, Bedouins, and Druze. They need to understand

the language and perspective that the Palestinians take on the events of 1948 and 1967, on the Oslo accords and the Intifada, on terrorists and freedom fighters. They need to hear the voices of those who have no access to citizenship and few rights, whose lives—including freedom of movement and the ability to earn a living—are currently governed and limited by a government imposed on them. Understanding the complexities enables students to hear the other side without feeling threatened, to separate fact from fiction, and to respond meaningfully.

The question of when to begin teaching this complexity is not a simple one. Many have argued that it needs to begin in the teen years, after students have already built an emotional bond with Israel and when they are developmentally capable of dealing with multi-faceted and complicated issues. Perhaps that needs to be rethought. Students cannot afford to wait until their teen years to learn that Israel “is complicated,” and many leave Jewish educational environments before they hit their teens. That would leave students completely unprepared for the realities they will face—even in their teen years—in school, on the playground, and in every public venue in which they interact with the broader world. Their Pollyannaish perspective on the mythical, magical, pristine Israel of the rose-colored glasses will quickly be challenged and shattered, leaving them prone to the antisemitic and anti-Zionist voices surrounding them.

Accomplishing this education requires investment in curriculum, in teacher-training, in school hours, and in professional support. It may be difficult, but it is necessary.



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Ramat Gan 5290002, Israel
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