

# Did universities just commit suicide?

The world was stunned recently not only by the skyrocketing of antisemitism and pro-Hamas support at university campuses in the US but also by the stance of elite universities that allowed this to happen. The UC Berkeley Department of Ethnic Studies, for example, offered extra credit for students who attended a pro-Hamas rally.

Such encouragement at universities to support murder, rape, beheading, and burning of Jews is masked as “pro-Palestinian” – in itself, an Islamophobic suggestion that all Palestinians support terrorism.

Within two weeks in October, there was a de facto rebranding of Harvard, Berkeley, and Cornell. These names – once associated with education, career-building, and academia – are now mentioned in the news, social media, and casual conversations almost exclusively in the context of antisemitism, hate, and conflict.

This led various donors to immediately stop their funding and cut their ties to universities. But perhaps equally dangerous to universities is that their behavior suddenly awakened a question that has been brewing under the surface for several years now.

## Are universities needed?

A number of unrelated global processes govern this conversation, such as the democratization of knowledge that occurred over the last decades. Education, knowledge, and training can now be acquired in more effective ways online, such as in virtual courses and digital libraries and through artificial intelligence platforms. The concept of education acquisition at a physical location – i.e., a college campus – had become antiquated. Then came COVID, which turned the theory into a practice. A proof-of-concept was developed, showing how physical campuses may no longer be needed.

Universities, however, provide much more than education; they also provide uniformity of thinking. Indeed, that was needed in previous centuries to advance society. It was important for leaders to think through similar frameworks. But now there is broad acceptance that such uniformity has a liability component that might outweigh the benefit. The Israeli shock over Hamas’ attack on October 7 is already attributed in part to such uniformity of thinking within the military-political establishment.

Ivy League and other topnotch universities pride themselves on having a high percentage of lecturers with PhDs – in some universities, close to 100%. But with the changing world environment, this in itself could be viewed as a liability, robbing students of teachers with real-life experience. A complete reversal in coming years is possible. Would the capping of lecturers with PhDs to, say, 50%, at elite universities be deemed as a mark of excellence in education?

There is a global trend to shift power away from old elites associated with the university system’s uniformity of thinking – in the US, to flyover countries and minority populations; in Israel, to the religious/traditional majority.

In addition, there has been a growing trend of de-conglomeration. Once it was the bank that provided all of one’s financial needs. Today, most people get their financial services – mortgages, credit cards, asset



PALESTINIAN SUPPORTERS gather in Harvard Yard; ‘Veritas’ on the sign refers to Harvard University’s motto, ‘truth’ in Latin. (Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images)

management, checking accounts, retirement savings – from different providers.

In a similar manner, one can argue that a law school need not be associated with science-research facilities – neither organizationally nor physically.

As for social and life-preparation benefits, it has now been put to question whether university years are value-adding or value-destroying for young adults. Rituals such as initiation to a fraternity or sorority have been replaced by initiation to indoctrinated Israel-bashing ideology.

Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, who studied this phenomenon, explained in a recent Judaism 3.0 symposium about anti-Zionism that universities present true dangers to Jewish continuity: “We are losing our kids. They are led to believe that they can either be pro-human rights or pro Israel.”

This, while there are alternative life-preparedness models, such as the military and National Service in Israel or the Mission in Mormon society.

Add to that the humongous cost of attending universities, which in itself creates social strata, lifelong stress, and even birth-suppression, and the question becomes inevitable: Are universities needed?

Such a grand question was set to be deliberated over the next decades at a slow and nuanced pace.

But then came October 7...

## The October suicide of universities?

Universities’ behavior in the aftermath of Hamas’ massacre shocked Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike.

Jewish students at Cornell were on lockdown in the kosher dining hall; Harvard Jewish students were in danger after the university allowed 33 student organizations to put out a letter blaming Israel for Hamas’ atrocities. (Harvard used to limit the admission of Jews; now it admits Jews but apparently places their lives in danger.)

Through their actions, universities both awoke the dormant debate of whether they are needed and placed themselves in potential financial peril. The donors who have already pulled their funding may just be the

preamble to bigger problems.

Universities depend on governments – for tax-exempt stature, for funding, for permits, for partnership. Universities cannot survive without the support of the government. Their refusal to stand against Holocaust 2.0 puts them on a collision path with the US, its citizens, and its values.

In addition, millions of outraged alumni, many still in debt, might now demand to get their tuition reimbursed. They purchased something different when they dedicated their life savings, not an association with an institution that houses hate, bigotry, and antisemitism.

This is not the first time that universities find themselves at the forefront of Jew-hatred. In the late 19th century, universities in Europe served as the breeding ground for antisemitic ideology – the expression of Jew-hatred of that time. That is what pushed a young student, Theodor Herzl, toward the idea of Zionism – a transformation of Judaism that saved the Jewish nation.

Today, universities in the US serve as the breeding ground for anti-Zionist ideology – the contemporary expression of Jew-hatred.

Will universities reverse course and save themselves? Or is it too late?

*The writer is author of Judaism 3.0: Judaism’s Transformation to Zionism (Judaism-Zionism.com), and chairman of the Judaism 3.0 think tank. To read his geopolitical articles, go to: EuropeAndJerusalem.com*

## Those who curse and those who bless

During the same week when a dual assault on the Jewish nation unraveled – a physical assault through Hamas and an ideological assault through Israel-bashers and anti-Zionists – Jews around the world read in the weekly Torah portion about God’s promise to Abraham: “And I shall bless those blessing you, and those cursing you I shall curse, and in you and in your seed all the generations of the Earth shall be blessed.”

It was hard not to notice how this became a reality in October 2023. There were those who cursed: Universities’ anti-Israel stance triggered a conversation about their *raison d’être*; foundations nurturing Israel-bashing ideology are scaling down and cutting their staff by nearly half; and Hamas itself is facing the obliteration of its military and governance capabilities.

At the same time, those who choose to bless Israel, such as large parts of the Arab world, are reaping the economic and security benefits of the Abraham Accords.

Indeed, more and more people around the world are recognizing that – just as Theodor Herzl had predicted – humanity is advancing through innovations coming out of Israel.

As discussed in this column, Zionism has turned into the anchor of Judaism. Therefore, it is the vehicle through which Judaism is being attacked, and it is the vehicle through which generations of the earth are being blessed.

– G.K.