

## The Campus Perspective by Richard M. Joel

I don't know precisely when Harvard University President Lawrence Summers had his "Dreyfus Moment." I'm not talking about his "Richard Dreyfus Moment," the moment when an actor goes from hunting sharks to playing a history professor. I'm talking about the moment when an otherwise uninvolved Jew, such as Theodor Herzl, recognizes that anti-Semitism is still alive, well, and infecting influentials — such as when Herzl witnessed the trial of French Col. Alfred Dreyfus.

Summers' "Dreyfus Moment" could have come when students at San Francisco State University infamously yelled, "Hitler should have finished the job" at Jewish activists. Or when European academics decided to uninvite Israelis, as a class, from their campuses. Or when members of the faculty at Harvard and MIT signed petitions calling on their universities to divest from companies doing business with Israel. Or when a University of California, Berkeley teacher wrote in the course catalog that students who are "conservative thinkers" need not take his course on Palestinian poetry.

Regardless of when Summers had his "Dreyfus" epiphany, his public denunciation of anti-Semitism in academia would have made Herzl proud. Summers raised the issue to the top of the media's hit parade and brought about a wave of critical thinking on the campuses. But was Summers overreacting?

Certainly any level of anti-Semitism is unacceptable. But are the campuses truly aflame? Are Jewish students unwelcome and unloved on campus?

By now we are all familiar with the list of reprehensible acts that have taken place on college campuses in the last year, from the mobbing of Jewish activists at San Francisco State University last spring, to the occupation of a building at Berkeley by anti-Israel activists, to the bombing of Hebrew University in July. These events have grabbed headlines and provoked a forceful response from the Jewish community and its friends.

However, as a recent Anti-Defamation League survey has shown, college campuses suffer less from anti-Semitism than the community at large. Indeed, while anti-Semitic and anti-Israel acts have taken place, they have not prevented Jewish students on those campuses or others from exploring, celebrating, and strengthening their Jewishness. It might even be argued that the increase in pro-active, pro-Israel training and activity on most campuses has strengthened the Jewish leadership core. As one Hillel activist told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in August, "No one asked me if I wanted to be in a leadership position when things were so tough. [It] just so happened I went to college when it was going on. Whether or not that's fair, [or] whether or not I wanted it, it's mine to deal with, and I'm glad to do it."

Promoting Israel and combating anti-Semitism always have been on the agenda of Hillel and Jewish college students. Israel has always been a central element of the life of Hillel and, to be sure, anti-Semitic incidents have occurred on campuses even during times of peace in the Middle East. Israel education and combating Jew hatred have been handled quietly and professionally. Hillel has been fortunate in the last 15 years to be able to concentrate on its Renaissance agenda, providing students with many different opportunities to explore and celebrate their Jewishness: "maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews."

## Villifying Israel

As the conflict in the Middle East has persisted, a campaign has grown, not just to advocate for Palestinian statehood, but also to vilify Israel. Even as a political issue, young Jews are ill-equipped to make Israel's case. They are more distant from Israel; they have no Israel memories. They are also part of a non-confrontational generation that seeks to avoid conflict. And eight out of 10 of them have never seen Israel, except through CNN's eyes.

Added to the political arguments, however, comes an assault not just on Israel's borders, but also on its essence. An ugliness appears on campus in the guise of a divestment campaign, characterizing Israel as the oppressor, the apartheid state, the illegitimate Zionist entity, the racist. All too often, this campaign invites anti-Jewish sentiments, Holocaust denial, and distribution of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This anti-Zionism gives cover for the haters to hate, and leads to intimidation and sometimes violence.

## Training to Become an Activist

Hillel and the broader Jewish community have responded vigorously. Hillel created its Center for Israel Affairs, providing programs, services and grants to campuses to advocate for Israel and to combat anti-Israel activity. Hillel brought 8,000 students to the Israel Solidarity rally in April, sponsored an Advocacy Mission to Israel in May, provided in-depth training to activists at the Jaffee Center in Tel Aviv in June, and launched a Speakers' Bureau with the United Jewish Communities. It has put 40 Grinspoon Israel interns on hot-spot campuses. It has partnered with the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation to create the Israel on Campus Coalition, which helps to coordinate over 25 pro-Israel organizations working on college campuses. At the same time, Hillel has continued to strengthen our entire program, including the areas of social justice and Jewish learning.

Hillel defines its Israel policy broadly: It is committed to the flourishing of Israel as a Jewish state within recognized and secure boundaries. Pro-Israel groups of all political stripes participate in its Israel on Campus Coalition and have trained Hillel student activists. This approach is summed up by Hillel's slogan, "Wherever we stand, we stand with Israel."

What is Hillel's agenda?

- It must work to ensure that both Israel and the Jewish people are portrayed in a true and positive light.
- It must promote and protect on-campus honest debate on the political issues in the Middle East.
- It must train the activists in advocacy and give uninvolved Jewish students the language that will prevent their intimidation. Where Palestinian advocacy morphs into hatred and anti-Semitism, it must be exposed.
- It must proclaim on campus that Israel doesn't cause anti-Semitism; Jews don't cause anti-Semitism; anti-Semites cause anti-Semitism.
- It must educate students about Israel: That it yearns for peace. That it is the only democracy in the Middle East. That it honors free speech. That women, and all minorities, enjoy equal rights. That it is the historic home of the Jewish people.
- It must help birthright israel flourish. Hillel has brought over 10,000 young people to Israel through this program and has seen countless times how it has connected them with their Jewishness, the Jewish

community, and the State of Israel. Alumni of birthright Israel are now members of the Hillel staff. Hillel is offering innovative trips to appeal to the broadest spectrum of individuals, including a joint trip with the New Israel Fund (NIF) called "Israel Behind the Headlines" for young people interested in current issues and a "Peace and Politics" tour sponsored jointly with the ADL.

- It must continue to work with American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the ADL, Hamagshimim, NIF, and other groups as part of the ICC to bring resources to bear on campus.

### Rebuilding the Jewish People

But, we must not allow the haters to divert us from our agenda of Jewish Renaissance, of rebuilding the Jewish People. If young Jews aren't proud to be Jews, they won't feel connected to Israel. We must continue to show Jewish students that their Jewishness can provide community, purpose, meaning and nobility. If they see this as their essence, if they see their Jewish journey as valuable and noble, they'll craft a renaissance, they'll embrace Israel and they'll continue our mission to be a light unto the nations.

It is times like these that challenge Jewish educators to fulfill the highest ideals of their profession with creativity, intelligence, humility, joy, and passion. It is also times like these that can yield some of the greatest rewards. During Hillel's wonderful Israel Advocacy Mission in May, 400 activists were taken to the Kotel at midnight. On the bus afterwards, a young woman, tears streaming down her face, asked to speak to the students. This is what she said, "When you stand at the Wall, you see how smooth the stones are at your height and you realize they've been touched by hands and lips for generations. They've been caressed by us and those who came before us. But when you look higher on the Wall, you see that the stones are coarse. So we have to reach up and caress the Wall to smooth the rough spots. We all have to reach that much higher."

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