

A Responsum Regarding Colleges and Universities Which Condone Support for Hamas

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Originally published on Dec. 24, 2023

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The Question

The pivotal question of attending secular college has in the past two months been recast. Previously the question centered (primarily but not exclusively) upon the alarming rate of assimilation. Alongside that life-and-death consideration, a new factor (relevant to many but not all secular colleges) has emerged: the deplorable (in)action and (lack of) speech of university/college presidents in reacting to pro-Hamas demonstrations on their campuses and, more generally, all forms of vile antisemitism. Is it permissible for our children to seek admittance to a college or graduate school whose administration has refused to condemn student groups who justify, and even celebrate, the October 7 atrocities of Hamas? Is it permissible to teach in these institutions?

Background and Context

To be clear, the question arose before the three university presidents testified before Congress, and thus is not limited to those three schools. Their disgraceful, “contextual” response to calls for genocide against Jews was pure evil, but neither new nor revelatory. It

merely magnified their (and other presidents') initial reprehensible reaction. Hamas' avowed goal is genocide; the unspeakable atrocities of October 7 were intended to advance that murderous goal. And thus, supporting Hamas and their actions unambiguously supports genocide. Accordingly, in their refusal to condemn student groups who identified with Hamas and justified and even celebrated their atrocities, the presidents had already condoned calls for genocide. Their brazen congressional testimony merely underscored the evil. Whereas previously they spoke non-verbally ("Not to speak is to speak"), in their testimony they articulated their previous, non-verbal speech.

Invoking the First Amendment protection of free speech as a defense for allowing calls for intifada and genocide is an obvious sham. No campus would tolerate a call to lynch Blacks, or any other racial or ethnic group. And rightly so. Allowing calls for genocide and intifada has nothing to do with free speech and everything to do with monstrous evil and vicious hatred.

The university presidents, in allowing the student calls for intifada on their campuses, were guilty of an even greater evil than the students themselves. An insight provided by our Sages in the context of *lashon hara*, "evil speech", illuminates this point. *Lashon hara* can kill (*Arachin* 15b), and "One who accepts the *lashon hara* bears more responsibility than the one who spoke" (vide Rambam *Hilchos Deios* 7:3 and *Avodas Hamelech* ad loc.). One who speaks *lashon hara*, if ignored, is powerless and harmless. His evil speech would simply reflect badly upon himself. *Lashon hara* becomes toxic when validated by its audience.

Had the university presidents acted morally, and immediately, unequivocally condemned the students' words and actions, they would have helped to disarm these evil, antisemitic forces. The students would have been dismissed as ignorant, immature, impetuous rabble-rousers. Instead, by condoning the student support for genocide, the university presidents legitimized and mainstreamed their murderous words. The magnitude of their evil becomes apparent when we reflect upon one of the most chilling lessons of history: speech, which goes unchallenged, segues to action.

The Relevant Halachic Principle

Having sketched some of the background and context we (re-)turn to our query as to the *halachah* concerning colleges and universities which have condoned celebrations of the October 7 atrocities and calls for genocide.

Attending a (non-sectarian) college does not entail identifying with any ideology. It is akin to shopping in a supermarket which sells kosher and non-kosher items. Patronizing the store does not *eo ipso* endorse everything sold. So too, attending a university does not *eo ipso* endorse everything taught.

There is, however, another consideration. When a Jew denigrates himself in the public square, he is *mechalleh es Hashem*, profanes the name of G-d. The Jewish people are Hashem's chosen (*Shemos* 19:5-6; *Devarim* 7:7-8, etc.), and He identifies Himself with them (*Bereishis* 17:7, *Yerushalmi Ta'anis* 2:6 [*harei ani mishatef Shimi Hagadol bahem veben chaim*]; *Beis Halevi*, *Bereishis* 46:3, et al.). Accordingly, when a Jew publicly denigrates himself, as it were, he

denigrates Hashem.

The Talmud presents this prohibition of self-denigration in the context of accepting charity. One is not allowed to do so in the public square if he has any other recourse. By gratuitously accepting alms before the eyes of the world, he denigrates himself and thereby the Jewish people. This constitutes a *chillul Hashem* (*Sanhedrin* 26b with Rashi s.v. *ochlei davar acher*. See also *Nimukei Yosef* ad loc. and *Shach, Yoreh Deah* 254:1). If, however, he has no other recourse, he is permitted to publicly accept the charity. It is not denigrating to do what is necessary for one's livelihood (This would appear to be the understanding of Rashi, Rambam, *Yad Ramah* and even *Nimukei Yosef*. Meiri dissents, but his opinion is not relevant because *ab initio* he does not follow Rashi's interpretation which is the source of the prohibition.).

Applications and Implications

The prohibition of self-denigration, while presented in the context of accepting charity, is clearly operative in other contexts, such as ours, as well.

Many colleges have condoned demonstrations justifying, and even celebrating (*sic sick!*) the Hamas atrocities of October 7. They have either implicitly or explicitly accommodated support for genocide. Our children's future livelihood or professional opportunities do not in any way depend upon their attending these undergraduate schools. Accordingly, for our children to gratuitously apply for the "privilege" of attending such schools is the height of obsequiousness. It is difficult to imagine a more egregious form of

self-denigration. We are effectively proclaiming, “You can condone and even celebrate the torture, rape, beheading and immolation of our brothers and sisters, and yet we will still seek the “privilege” of attending your school.” Such obsequiousness! Such self-denigration! And, thus, applying to and attending these schools is unquestionably a *chillul Hashem* (*a fortiori* from publicly accepting charity.). Politically motivated back-pedaling, cagey “clarifications” and hollow expressions of regret are worthless. A change of administration and direction are needed. Barring those changes, it will remain a *chillul Hashem* to attend any of these colleges.

Providing for one’s livelihood, however, is not denigrating and thus teaching in these schools is permissible, as per the Talmudic distinction above. Additionally, the professor-university relationship is bilateral, and its bilateralism dispels obsequiousness; such bilateralism, however, does not exist within the student-university relationship.

The propriety of applying to a graduate school under the aegis of these universities is more nuanced. The dispensation of pursuing one’s livelihood may be relevant. If there is no comparable program in terms of training or professional advancement in an unsullied university, it would be permissible to apply. Additionally, in some instances graduate schools have forged an identity uniquely their own, independent of their parent school. In such instances, arguably, the position of the university administration does not reflect upon the school. This angle requires careful consideration and further thought.

Appendix

The *halachic* designation of self-denigration and

obsequiousness as forms of *chillul Hashem* remarkably converges with the *halachos* of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying G-d's name, and *chillul Hashem* as they are expressed in martyrdom. The obligation of *kiddush Hashem* at a time of governmental persecution, according to Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 5:3), includes sacrificing one's life to fulfill a *mitzvas asei*, positive commandment, even though he may be forcibly prevented from doing so. This underscores that the obligation of *kiddush Hashem* is not the fulfillment of the *mitzvah per se* but the heroic resoluteness and steadfastness (not capitulating to persecution).