

Morality

Objective: Many students who intend on attending secular universities on American campuses predict that they will not speak up on Israel's behalf. A few defenses for this position include:

- (1) It's easier to just be part of the pro-Israel community and to ignore the criticism.
- (2) I am hesitant to judge another community and to appear judgemental.
- (3) I do not want to be punished by my professors for being part of the pro-Israel community.

This source sheet addresses these positions as students think about how they will act on their future college campus.

I. Easier to Ignore the Criticism

- (1) Rabbi Efreim Goldberg, America is in a state of moral decline - What are you doing about it?

America is in a state of moral decline.

That is not just my feeling, it is the assessment of a majority of Americans. [According to Gallup](#), "Not only are Americans feeling grim about the current state of moral values in the nation, but they are also mostly pessimistic about the future on the subject, as 78% say morals are getting worse and just 18% getting better."

Moral decline can be seen in the deterioration in civility, the increase in litigation, the lack of integrity, out-of-wedlock births and breakup of families, vulgarity, promiscuity, and immodesty. As quickly as we have progressed technologically, medically and scientifically, morally we are rapidly going backwards, confused about basic fundamental values and institutions that much more primitive people understood clearly.

Perhaps this decline can be explained by another recent [Gallup poll](#) that reported that belief in God among U.S. adults has reached a new low. Belief in God provides a moral anchor and a moral compass, rules and regulations from an objective and absolute source of truth and decency. Breakdown of faith breeds relativism, a subjective interpretation of right and wrong. When morality is determined by popular opinion instead of objective truth, by needing to be compatible with comfort and convenience rather than mission and service, by the pursuit of pleasure and happiness, rather than sanctity and holiness, the result is moral decline.

In this morally regressive environment, it is understandably tempting for the Jewish community to turn inward, to focus on protecting ourselves and our families from the increasing dangers of shifting sands around us and we should.

However, we must also rise in this moment to turn outwards. Judaism and Torah were never intended only for the Jews. While we don't believe in proselytizing in the sense of recruiting non-Jews to convert to Judaism, we fervently believe in promoting the Torah's truths, values and ideals to the entire world. That has been our mission since our inception and one shudders to consider what the world would look like if we remain entirely insular.

(2) Pirkei Avot 2:6

הוא הִנֵּה אומר, אין בור ירא חטא, ולא עם הארץ חסיד, ולא הבישן למד, ולא הקפדן מלמד, ולא כל המרבה בסחורה מחכים. ובמקום שאין אנשים, השתדל להיות איש:

He used to say: A brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man

(3) [Unpacked, Crossing the Line 2](#)

Prompt: Do we have an obligation to be part of the pro-Israel community and to defend and spread pro-Israel positions, especially in the face of attacks?

II. Appearing Judgemental

(1) Vayikra 19:18

לֹא־תקום וְלֹא־תטור אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד אֲנִי יְהוָה:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow [Israelite] as yourself: I am God.

(2) Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim, 9:4:2-3

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָה אומר. זֶהוּ כָּלֵל גְּדוּל בַּתּוֹרָה.

Rebbi Aqiba says, that is a great principle in the Torah.

(3) Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future*, p. 14

In teaching our children moral relativism we have placed them in the world without a moral compass, even hinting that there is no such thing. In the name of tolerance we have taught that every alternative lifestyle is legitimate and that moral judgment is taboo, even 'judgmental'. What is right becomes what does not harm others, and in time degenerates to what I feel like doing and can get away with.

Prompt: How do we balance maintaining an open-mind and learning from others, while also staying true to our values? Do you see examples of morality relativism being taught instead of moral objectivity? What are the consequences for the next generation's way of thinking?

III. Punished for Being Part of the Pro-Israel Community

- (1) [Danil Konischev, *The Jerusalem Post*, When teachers harbor anti-Israeli biases, students also suffer](#)

As a [Jewish](#) student at the University of Toronto, with antisemitic sentiment rising across Canada and the US, it has been particularly taxing, as my campus is no stranger to such controversy. I have personally faced instances of discrimination, ranging from individual acts to more organized incidents, such as the recent refusal to endorse kosher food options by the U of T Graduate Students' Union.

Many of the cases involving the harassment of Jewish students (including the example above) on campus involve Israel, due to the rancorous nature in which some student groups target the Jewish state.

It's not just students. Professors who are known to be staunchly anti-Israel also contribute to this culture of toxicity. You might recall a few years ago when a student named Ari Blaff was scornfully referred to as a "Zionist agent" by his U of T professor over his involvement in Hasbara Fellowships Canada, an organization that helps dispel anti-Israel propaganda on campus through the use of public diplomacy. I am a proud fellow myself.

There are other all-too-familiar stories I've heard from my peers who challenge their professors over their bias and omission of key details vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. These students are often told that their narrative is invalid, and that Jews are colonizers in their native land. In some cases, the students are even ostracized.

- (2) Dr. Jordan Peterson, A Discussion at Ryerson University, February 11, 2017

People are so afraid to speak up you just cannot believe it. Tenured professors? Those are the most protected people in the universe, and they're afraid to speak up. And that tells you a lot about what people are like but I should tell you you should be afraid to speak up, but I'll tell you something else; you should be more afraid not to speak up. That's the thing. It's like, you're screwed both ways - pick your poison; you can either suffer the consequences of having a voice, or you can suffer the consequences of not having a voice. And I would highly recommend that you don't pick the suffering that goes along with not having a voice - that's dreadful.

And so, you might say well if I don't speak up I'm safe, and it's like yeah you are for the next fifteen minutes, but you've sacrificed a bit of your soul - you might need that thing to get

through life without getting all bitter and twisted and resentful. So if you've got something to say... you say it. And you don't know what's going to happen, it might be bad, it might be good, but silence has exactly the same consequences.

(3) [The Anti-Israel Movement on U.S. Campuses, 2020-2021](#)

Prompt: How do you decide when to speak up in class, especially if you are nervous that your professor will punish you via grades if you do? Is it smarter to not speak up in class to get a good grade (and then be successful and speak up), or to not allow a missed opportunity to defend Israel?