

Fighting Anti-Semitism by Getting Straight As

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If you're a Jewish college student these days, chances are you've had to confront an epidemic of hostility against Jews and Israel in the wake of October 7.

How does one fight back without looking weak and reactive?

So far, the Jewish community has rightfully focused on calling out the hate and demanding equal protection for Jewish students. That protection must obviously continue, but it's not enough.

There's an additional way to fight back against the forces of hate: through the chutzpah of success.

That thought occurred to me after spending a few days in Los Angeles with my daughter who goes to NYU. We spent quite a bit of time talking about what Jewish students have faced since Oct. 7, but we also talked about her studies and her life.

After Oct. 7, she decided early on that she would help put up posters for the Israeli hostages and attend pro-Israel events, but

she wouldn't let the anti-Israel fury disrupt her life.

One reason was a lack of respect for the protests themselves. The fact that the anti-Israel animus burst out immediately after 1200 Israelis got massacred by Hamas on Oct.7 exposed them not as seekers of justice but as haters of Jews.

Over the months, as the protests grew more hysterical, they morphed into a joyless bunch of wannabe revolutionaries who think it's cool to hijack graduation ceremonies and block roads to airports.

Why allow such purveyors of nuisance to mess up one's life? Why give them that power?

Indeed, my daughter (and several of her Jewish friends) chose not to give them that power. She kept her eye on her goals, continued to do the things she loves, and, yes, even got a bunch of A's.

I say this not just as a proud father but as a proud Jew. Playing the Victim Olympics has never been a winning move for Jews. Even when our victimhood is completely justified, in the long run we're always better off by building on our accomplishments.

This sense of accomplishment a deep expression of the Jewish ethos. Especially during the college years, Jewish students want to define themselves not by their haters but by their life dreams.

Ever since we landed on these American shores, the freedom to succeed has been the Jewish drug of choice. Jews have been

admired in America not for being weak victims who need protection but for being strong contributors who value opportunity.

None of this means we shouldn't confront antisemitism; it means we should confront it without fear and without losing our Jewish mojo.

The most successful Jewish organization in the world—Chabad—has always done just that.

For the thousands of Chabad emissaries across the world, the best way to combat darkness is to spread light. Every Friday night, across hundreds of college campuses, Chabad and other groups like Hillel fortify Jewish students not with the power of protests but with the power of their tradition.

There are occasionally cases when a Chabad emissary will target a problem directly, as when the Chabad rabbi at Harvard recently confronted a commencement speaker about a remark that he found antisemitic.

But by and large, the Chabad way is to double down on Judaism. The more antisemitism they see, the more pro-semitism they bring. They know that nurturing something positive will create a deeper Jewish identity than simply taking down a negative.

Most of us, however, prefer to take down negatives. We feel more productive when we fight a threat directly. If protesters make Jewish students feel unsafe, we'll focus on the threats, whether through legal means or by compelling authorities to fulfill their duties to protect the students. And that is the correct thing to do:

Physical safety should always come first.

But as crucial as it is, safety is not everything. It's a starting point. The Jewish ideal has always been to aim higher. It may be hard to think that way in the midst of hostility, but it behooves us to seek the path that will help us thrive as strong and proud Jews.

It's tempting to think that because anti-Israel protesters attract so many loud supporters, they must be winning. They're not. Those who measure their self-worth by their worship of victimhood invariably end up alone with their screams of emptiness.

The real winners aren't screaming on their campus squares; they're celebrating life at a warm Shabbat table, reconnecting with their friends, their ancient tradition and their life dreams.

Some of them are even celebrating getting straight A's.