

*On many college campuses at this time of the year, anti-Israel activities tend to occur. As our students may be confronted with anti-Israel sentiments, I have written a letter which, beyond sending regards, provides for them two sources to which they can turn for support, information and background. If you have children who are college students or know that someone else's children are in college, I would urge you to forward this material in the hopes that it may be useful for them.*

March 25, 2016 / 15 Adar II 5776

Dear Students,

As the academic year rushes by, I am reaching out to you prior to the end of the year to wish you success in your studies and in the end-of-year exams and papers which, I suspect, are looming! I will also share with you some thoughts about Israel. I know that many of our students are involved in Israel advocacy on campus as it is directed by your university's Hillel and/or by student run organizations. I know, as well, that in the coming weeks, on many campuses, Israel's detractors are planning anti-Israel activities under the heading of "Israel Apartheid Week." I want to make certain that, if confronted by students who are involved in these activities, you have the information and support that you need.

Often, these Israel-related activities, positive or negative, can lead to productive discussions. When people engage in conversations respectfully and in a way that is not threatening, mutual understanding and appreciation can occur. Those who join this conversation may, at times, come to understand things from a different perspective. Sometimes, all one can do is to agree to disagree.

On the other hand, instances of intimidation, anti-Semitism, and other hateful language can be employed in this context to denigrate those whose views may be different. Sometimes the strategies of those who confront Israel's supporters are simply to shout down opposing voices and preclude any messages, other than their own, from being expressed. Should this occur or if at any time you feel frightened or intimidated on campus, I urge you to contact your Hillel, Jewish Students Union or Student Activities Office in order to gain support.

Of course, understanding a different perspective can happen only where rational

conversation takes place. To that end, I have included a couple of resources which may be helpful for you, if you would like to learn a bit about Israel so that you have arguments and facts should you be confronted.

1. An informative and innovative new organization called "Step Up For Israel" has created short films and guides which can provide basic information about Israel, specifically geared toward providing you with facts you might need if you engage in a discussion about Israel. This particular program, called "Step Up On Campus" (SUOC) can be found on the organization's website: [www.StepUpForIsrael.com/SUOC](http://www.StepUpForIsrael.com/SUOC).

2. Another resource which you may not be aware is "Jerusalem U." This program may be of particular interest because it provides several series of online videos about Israel and Jewish ideas. After choosing the series which interests you, you can watch the videos and, upon completion, you will receive \$100! You can find more about this at: [college.JerusalemU.org](http://college.JerusalemU.org).

I hope these resources, which are important whether or not you encounter "Israel Apartheid Week" will be useful and informative. I am interested to know what you think of either or both of these options. Finally, I hope that the early spring will lead to lovely weather, successful studies and enjoyable experiences for the remainder of the year on campus.

Shalom.

Rabbi Neil S. Cooper