



# A Chanukah Message: When Intellect Lacks Character

*From the archives: This article, published on December 7, 2023, was written a few days after Rabbi Hauer testified to congress on the state of antisemitism on college campuses. Here he demonstrates the root of higher education's failure in the story of Chanukah.*

On August 31, 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave an epic address at Harvard University in which he said, “character is higher than intellect.” Those five words should guide the presidents of Harvard, Penn, and MIT and their colleagues as they attempt to dig themselves out from their shameless and disastrous testimony to Congress and find the path forward

for American “higher” education.

Decades before the current tsunami of university antisemitism, Harvard professor Dr. Robert Coles used Emerson’s phrase to diagnose the problem he was already observing in universities. “Institutions originally founded to teach their students how to become good and decent, as well as broadly and deeply literate, may abandon the first mission to concentrate on a driven, narrow book learning—a course of study in no way intent on making a connection between ideas and theories on one hand and, on the other, our lives as we actually live them.”

Knowledge must never be divorced from values. The United States is an international leader in science, technology, and medicine, yet we consider our primary contribution to the world the American values of human dignity, justice, and freedom. When we worry about China or Russia winning the race to Mars or to energy independence, it is not only our national pride that is at stake. We are fearful of seeing that powerful knowledge in the wrong hands.

We have that same fear today as we observe the hateful rhetoric and chants filling the classrooms and quads of America’s leading universities. We are horrified by the character and values of those claiming the



**OU Israel sends our sincere wishes of nechama to our esteemed Senior Faculty Member Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler and family on the passing of his beloved mother**

**Mrs. Sonja Adler a’h**

**May the entire mishpacha find comfort among all those who mourn for Zion and Yerushalayim**

knowledge and pedigree provided by these institutions and we are fearful of what their future as civic, scientific, and political leaders portends for this country.

American Jews have been on the vanguard of fighting for liberal values. Jews will be the last to shut down academic debate or to exclude anyone's perspective from the classroom. Jewish tradition celebrates vigorous intellectual argument as essential to the pursuit of truth, but it insists that knowledge must never be divorced from values. The Talmud (Kiddushin 31b) synthesized these ideals elegantly and practically when it noted that father and son, teacher and student, may argue like enemies in their determined pursuit of truth but will not leave the study hall until their love for each other is made clear. That vision of academic debate bears not the slightest resemblance to the poisonous rhetoric of teachers and students that have made these university environments hostile to Jews. As the prophet Zacharia urged, we must find room in our hearts and minds to love both truth and peace.

This emphasis on the fusion of intellect and character lies at the heart of the story of Chanuka, when the Jewish people encountered the Greeks, a nation similarly preoccupied with the quest for knowledge. Yet the Greek

intellectual pursuits came along with blatantly immoral interests and practices that ultimately led the Jewish people to rebel against them. In one such ugly display, Greek rulers demanded *Prima Nocta*, where every new bride would lie first with the governor. While many Jews of the time were initially taken in by the Greeks' parallel pursuit of knowledge, we were jolted back to reality by their bifurcation of that knowledge from basic morality and values.

The Chanukah candles provide a stark reminder that knowledge alone casts a dark and menacing shadow but when fused with values provides much light. That light can chase away the darkness and confusion currently enveloping our university campuses and their leadership and move them away from their spineless and valueless equivocation to instead guide their institutions to provide a genuinely higher education, staffed and led by men and women who are not just good teachers but good examples, educating their students to be good and decent, and building a future that reflects the prioritization of character over intellect. ■

In loving memory of  
our dear daughter and sister

**DAPHNA MINTZ** ז"ל

on her 27<sup>th</sup> yahrzeit

She died at the tender age of 15

” כסלו תשמ”ד - כ”ו כסלו תשנ”ט

*Yaacov and Dina  
Avi, Shlomit and families*

**Lenny Davidman**

**Professional  
Planning & Production**

**English Speaking  
Pesach Program  
at the Dead Sea**

**Events, Congresses &  
Tours in Israel**

**pesach.LDEvents.com**

**www.LDEvents.com**

**054-557-3101**

**Lenny@LDEvents.com**