

Shame on the Conservative Movement

Shame Shame Shame



YAMIN LEVY, RABBI

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Shame on all the Conservative rabbis and lay leaders who have not yet publicly apologized to **The Honorable Isaac Herzog**, President of the State of Israel, for the reckless and deeply irresponsible behavior surrounding his invitation to speak at the commencement ceremony of Jewish Theological Seminary.

At a moment when the Jewish people are living through one of the most painful and dangerous periods in modern history, President Herzog — the democratically elected president of the State of Israel — should have been embraced with dignity, gratitude and respect. Instead, a group of students chose to publicly protest his appearance, effectively signaling that even the symbolic head of the Jewish State is unwelcome within one of America's most historic Jewish institutions.

What makes this especially disturbing is not merely the protest itself. Universities are places where disagreement exists. Young people sometimes say foolish things. The deeper failure is the silence that followed.

Where are the senior rabbinic voices?

Where are the lay leaders?

Where are the moral adults in the room willing to say clearly:

"This does not represent us."

"This is beneath the dignity of a rabbinical institution."

"We reject the demonization and delegitimization of Israel's leadership."

President Herzog is not a fringe political figure. He is widely regarded across the Jewish world as one of the most moderate, thoughtful, and conciliatory voices in Israeli public life. He has spent years speaking about Jewish unity, democracy, coexistence, and the shared destiny of the Jewish people. If even Herzog cannot address a Jewish commencement without protest and hostility, then something profoundly unhealthy has entered parts of American Jewish religious culture.

There is also something tragically ironic here. The Conservative movement once prided itself on its commitment to Zionism, Jewish peoplehood, and historical responsibility. For decades, its rabbis spoke passionately about the centrality of Israel to Jewish identity. Yet now, when Israel is wounded, isolated, and under relentless international assault following the horrors of October 7th, too many leaders appear paralyzed — fearful of students, activists, social pressure, or ideological trends.

Silence in moments like this is not neutrality.

It is surrender.

One may criticize Israeli policy. Israelis themselves do so passionately every single day. That is part of democratic life. But there is a vast moral difference between criticism born out of love and responsibility, and a culture that increasingly treats Israeli leaders as moral pariahs while minimizing the existential threats Israel faces.

A rabbinical seminary should cultivate moral seriousness, historical memory, and intellectual honesty. It should teach future rabbis that Jewish leadership carries obligations not only to abstract ideals, but to the actual Jewish people — living, vulnerable, struggling human beings.

At a minimum, the leadership of JTS and prominent Conservative rabbis should publicly distance themselves from the protesting students' conduct, apologize to President Herzog for the embarrassment inflicted upon him, and express appreciation for his lifelong commitment to the state of Israel.

If Jewish institutions cannot honor the President of the Jewish State during a time of war and rising antisemitism, then we must ask difficult questions not only about politics, but about Jewish identity itself.

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