

An Inconvenient Truth and a New Opportunity

Shuki Taylor

CEO, M²: *The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education*

On October 7, 2023, perspectives of Israelis and Jews worldwide underwent a seismic shift, challenging assumptions that were once taken for granted. Faced with Hamas's invasion into Israel and a surge in antisemitic incidents globally, the realization of our vulnerability as a people became evident.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the safety of Jews worldwide has been compromised. We've awakened to a reality ingrained in the Jewish condition for most of its history: *בבבל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו*... the inconvenient truth that in every generation there will be those who seek to destroy the Jewish people. If we thought history had closed the doors on that reality, we learned that we are wrong.

Do we have what it takes to deal with this new reality?

In the past decade, the way we think about the concept of identity has been challenged and evolved: We experiment with identities, trying them on for size, mixing and matching them, and discarding them when they no longer serve a purpose. In this reality, Jewish identity is treated as one possibility for our learners to consider in a marketplace of identities, all interchangeable.



Now more than ever, Jewish education cannot look away from a clear truth: Judaism is not a set of universal ideas, nor is it a range of particularistic ideas that we can adopt and discard at will. It is a people, a place, and a purpose whose existence is, once again, under threat. *A thin and interchangeable Jewish identity does not and will not live up to the task of guiding a people through a war on its very existence.*

What does guide a people through a war is an identity that is strong and salient, unwavering and unapologetic, relying on concepts we haven't used for years: Loyalty, ideology, conviction, and commitment.

Indeed, since October 7, we have found ourselves returning to a language and a set of ideals that Jews over a certain age are rusty on; that may be new to younger Jews; that have been lost in our attempt to be more universal, experimental, complex, and nuanced. These are ideals of peoplehood and solidarity, Zionism and loyalty, ideology and conviction—and, above all, Jewish pride.

Can Jewish education embrace these values? Can it work toward instilling within the students it impacts a Jewish identity grounded in knowledge, ideology, and confidence? An identity so firmly rooted that it cannot be disposed of?

This moment is a moment of awakening. It's sudden, it's unraveling fast, and it is urgent. It's also an opportunity to reset the agenda of Jewish education,

requiring us to reexamine and hopefully reconnect with what Judaism and Zionism stand for.

Jewish education has spent the past decades questioning, innovating, and experimenting. It has widened its tent and set new and critically important priorities and agendas. In our quest to discover what Jewish identity must be for the next generation, *we must build into these priorities the thicker expressions of Jewish identity; identities that are more evolved, more alert, and more firmly rooted.* This now is the task of Jewish education, and all of us supporting Jewish education must rise to this occasion.