

# Ramaz and Rashid Khalidi

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The Ramaz School was wrong to [refuse to allow Rashid Khalidi](#), the Palestinian apologist, to speak to its senior students. The purpose of any good school is to educate its pupils to think for themselves.

Thinking students need to hear other opinions, other arguments and other convictions. Knowing what the other side's arguments and emotions are, they can better make up their own minds about the issues of the day. One of the primary tasks of a good education is to present different ideas. Certainly where a school prides itself on the intellectual quality of its staff, its pupils, and its curriculum, there is all the greater responsibility to present conflicting points of view and intellectual challenges, even if they sometimes might be painful. Presenting different points of view is indeed the very difference between education and indoctrination.

This does not mean that a good school cannot propagate its own particular favored position and ideology. It should and it must. But if you do not expose your charges to an opposing point of view, they will be totally unequipped to deal with the challenges they will face on the outside in situations when there may be no one there to consult or to give them another point of view.

In my years in education, both high school and adult, I was always ready to invite controversial speakers to present another point of view, even if I hated the opinion and the person who propagated it. Whether it was the Austrian neo-Nazi Jorg Haider or South African Bishop Desmond Tutu, or an extreme left-wing Israeli opinion, which was often much worse. I have always thought it important to actually listen to them in a context in which they can be challenged, both for their own good (though it rarely achieves that, hatred rarely tolerates a riposte) and in order to learn how to respond. Even, I might say, to listen with humility if there are strong arguments that are painful.

The process of dialectic, of classical philosophical debate, is an invaluable tool for young people to learn not only how to think for themselves but how to try to persuade others. Similarly, when it comes to religious issues I have welcomed atheists, such as Anthony Grayling. I think it essential that young Jews learn how to defend themselves. After all, even Pirkei Avot commands us to "know how to answer the Apikorous."

All this presupposes that in the audience and afterwards there will be well-informed teachers who will be able to defend the other side. Sometimes this is not the case. But if it does happen, the school has every opportunity to make sure that this is rectified further down the line with better-equipped experts brought in to ensure that other arguments are given and the nuances appreciated. Anyway there are levels of commitment that go beyond logic; priorities of family, people and nation even if one has reservations or sees

another point of view.

One of the sad features of political debate nowadays in general and the Israel-Palestinian issue in particular is that in one side, invariably the Palestinian, in my experience, usually tries to shout down the other. In Europe Israel rarely gets an opportunity to present itself, and when it is given a platform the other side and its amen-choruses try their best to disrupt. This is happening on American campuses too. Fashion in academia is as insidious as in Vogue. More so given the stakes. The illogicality of boycotting Israel over say China or Russia simply defies logic or justice. Balanced and reasoned debate is increasingly rare. But this doesn't mean a well-organized school genuinely interested in education should be frightened of presenting both sides, even if universities do not.

Rashid Khalidi is a historian at Columbia, an apologist for the Palestinian cause, and a supporter of armed resistance. He is intelligent and articulate. I think it would have been very useful for the Ramaz students to hear his arguments. Besides, now that he has been denied a platform there, I have no doubt that many pupils will try to find out for themselves what his arguments are, outside the school. So what have you achieved?

I do feel sorry for Ramaz. When, as a rabbi or headmaster, I did invite controversial speakers, the skies fell down around me, and all sorts of pressure was tried to get me to change my mind. Everyone who thought, or whom other people persuaded, that they could influence me, either because they were donors or communal bigwigs, weighed in on the matter and tried everything from threats to withdrawing financial aid. That's Jewish life for you. Fortunately I was always in a position to ignore them, sometimes politely. Not everyone is. So I sympathize.

It a grave mistake to believe one can completely protect one's children intellectually, and even if you could it would certainly not help if one wanted them to grow up to take their places in a competitive society. Ironically, I am more in favor of refusing to give our enemies a platform as adults within the established community than I am in schools, precisely because there the minds are more open and malleable.

Once again it is the season for anti-Israel campus events. The very terminology, such as Apartheid, is proof of the intellectual ignorance and dishonesty of the campaigns. Yet left-wing academics rush into the fray all over the country. Not enough is being done to arm young Jewish students to fight back. Sadly, it too often has to be against other Jews who are as fanatically opposed to Israel as the blindest of Jihadis. But their arguments and lies must be exposed, not avoided.

There are enough reasons to criticize Israel without lies and distortions, and equally there enough good arguments to show that Palestinians themselves are the authors of their own sorry state of affairs. I wish it could be resolved amicably, or even not amicably. But the last thing we want to do is to descend to their level of dishonest debate, falsified history, and a culture of physical and mental dependency. Unless our youngsters actually hear the lies and how to answer them, they will not be prepared for

university life or the moral challenges that face them.