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A Hindu-Jewish Partnership

*Jews and Hindus are experiencing increased—
and more diverse forms of—prejudice.
It's time we forge a partnership to fight it*



GREAT DEAL has been discussed about the failure of Israel's intelligence apparatus and political leadership to anticipate and prevent the horrific events of October 7, even in the face of clear evidence. I'd like to discuss, however, a more pervasive intellectual failure—the failure to recognize the threat that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs pose to Jews—and the opportunity this presents for American Jewish and Hindu allyship.

In the early days of DEI, many Jews and Hindus were instinctually supportive of its goals. How could there be anything wrong with supporting other minority groups in the service of a richer society? But both groups were largely blind to the theoretical underpinnings

of the movement, and further to its potential weaponization in the aftermath of October 7. Hedge-fund manager and major Democratic and Harvard donor Bill Ackman admitted as much in an extended January 3 post on X (formerly Twitter), including a trenchant and compelling critique.

I have always believed that diversity is an important feature of a successful organization, but by diversity I mean diversity in its broadest form: diversity of viewpoints, politics, ethnicity, race, age, religion, experience, socioeconomic background, sexual identity, gender, one's upbringing, and more.

What I learned, however, was that DEI was not about diversity in its purest form, but rather DEI was a political advocacy movement on behalf of certain groups that are deemed oppressed under DEI's own methodology.

Under DEI, one's degree of oppression is determined based upon where one resides on a so-called intersectional pyramid of oppression where whites, Jews, and Asians are deemed oppressors, and a subset of people of color, LGBTQ people, and/or women are deemed to be oppressed.

And Ackman is one to know; his undergraduate thesis at Harvard was entitled "Scaling the Ivy Wall: The Jewish and Asian American Experience in Harvard Admissions." It is specifically these groups—often described as "model minorities" who have made much of the American dream—who have ended up on the oppressive side of the DEI ledger, specifically on account of their success.

But the very term "Asian American" elides a great diversity of nationality and religious affiliation. A 2012 Pew Research study entitled "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths" found Asian-American Hindus to be the most financially successful ethno-religious group in

the United States. Forty-eight percent have a household income above \$100,000, whereas the second-most successful religious group by this metric—Jews—are at 40 percent. In the realm of education, Hindus and Jews outstrip other minorities by an even greater margin. “Eighty-five percent of Hindu-Americans are college graduates, and 57 percent have some postgraduate education, which is nearly five times the national average.” Pew numbers from 2016 show an undergraduate-degree rate of 59 percent for Jewish Americans.

These statistics underscore why Jewish and Hindu Americans are not only left unprotected by DEI but are in fact considered to be part of the problem by virtue of their overrepresentation. But in an age of DEI, isn't it curious that, despite their ubiquity on college campuses, “only 5 percent of colleges had groups for Hindu students” according to a 2022 study?

What this amounts to is an emerging shared reality for Jews and Hindus, one in which they are subject to the hateful consequences of achievement—a paradoxical form of prejudice characterized by accusations of disproportionate wealth on the one hand and, on the other, inferiority. In August 2022, as reported by *The Washington Post*, the Coalition of Hindus of North America hosted a briefing, highlighting “memes and online social cyber signals referring to perceived ‘dirty’ and ‘scamming’ qualities of Hindus,” according to lead researcher Joel Finkelstein. “Many of the memes were manufactured out of commonly used tropes against Jewish people, using tilaks, swastikas and bindis to signify Hindu culture.”



In academia, antisemitism and Hinduphobia both draw from Marxist models that take aim at the Jewish and Hindu national projects, particularly vis-à-vis their relationship to the Muslim populations in

their respective homelands. It is an ironic offense given that both traditions predated Islam by generations, only to be supplanted and persecuted by the imperial forces of Islam. In the case of Hindus, this persecution was especially present within their own homeland. The Islamic invasions of the Indian subcontinent started in the seventh century in what is now Afghanistan and then Sindh, moving toward the Indian heartland steadily over several centuries. To this day Muslims persist in claiming property rights over key sites that were long sacred to Hindus before Muslims arrived. Somehow, progressive on-campus indignation about imperialism focuses only on its Western version.

This alliance between Islamism and progressive intellectualism is fragile and shortsighted because of fundamental incompatibilities in their core tenets. Bound only by their shared antipathies, they are strange tactical bedfellows in their quest for power, seeking to dismantle the prevailing social order and replace it with alternatives that are mutually irreconcilable. Their views on a host of issues — personal autonomy, religious freedom, feminism, political legitimacy, to name but a few — could not be further apart, yet together they offer a momentary mix of righteous indignation and sophisticated pedigree, religious rage and liberal credibility. But the commonalities between Hinduphobia and antisemitism reveal a deeper connection between Jewish and Hindu heritage in contradistinction to the violent Christian–Muslim drama that animated the Eastern Hemisphere for much of the past 1,400 years. Unlike Christianity or Islam, Judaism and Hinduism have been mostly internally focused rather than driven by external aggression, ambitions of foreign conquests, or proselytization. They have generally been on the receiving end of expansionist belief systems, conversion campaigns, and religiously motivated crusades. They have a posture of mutual respect toward other faith traditions, free from any mandate from God to build a

global community. Fittingly, we find ourselves today in a moment of flourishing Jewish-Hindu interfaith activities, including summits in New Delhi and Jerusalem and books by leading Jewish scholars such as Alan Brill and Alon Goshen-Gottstein.



The natural question arises: How should Jews and Hindus work together to face the current predicament? There are several actions to take that can collectively be referred to as an Intellectual Iron Dome—a set of measures and initiatives designed to anticipate and intercept these attacks on the culture of meritocracy.

Most immediately, Jews and Hindus should learn more about one another. Given the number of institutions of higher learning that host large Hindu and Jewish populations, it is rather astounding how little the communities interact. Introductions should be formalized by communal organizations both on and off campus.

Hindu and Jewish parents must stop sending their children to institutions that practice unmeritocratic admissions policies, and by extension donors must end their funding and affiliations. The two communities have contributed immeasurably to the intellectual heft of these institutions. Originally, we needed them to succeed. Now, we should create new educational institutions that champion meritocracy and genuine free speech.

A think tank devoted to Jewish and Hindu partnership should be established. In addition to finding opportunities for mutual thriving, it should analyze intellectual threats to each community.

It is also time to harness the powers of AI as a force multiplier in the arsenal against Hinduphobia and antisemitism. An AI-based system can be designed to monitor and examine trends in antisemitism and Hinduphobia online and predict problems before they manifest.

Such a system could be equipped to disseminate counter-messaging for threats to meritocracy, free speech, and the dignity and safety of Jews and Hindus.

A complementary system could create and disseminate indices that rate bias by individuals and institutions, to help the public make informed decisions in choosing vendors and organizational partners.

Just as the Iron Dome is necessary for protecting the citizens of Israel, the Intellectual Iron Dome is crucial for securing the reputations and identities of the next generation of Jews and Hindus as the custodians of their respective civilizations. Jews and Hindus owe it to their heritages to invest in such an initiative not just for their own traditions but also to safeguard the world from the regressive movement against merit. *