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Meet them Half Way

Fact no. 1: The integration of Haredim into the workforce is crucial for the Israeli market. Fact no. 2: The integration of Haredim into academia is the basis for their integration into quality positions in the workforce. Fact no. 3: Most Haredim view separate campuses as fundamental for their integration into academia.

The conclusion is inevitable: Separate campuses are a necessity for the strengthening of Israeli society as well as the Israeli market. Unfortunately, as part of the several universities' efforts against reinstating the five-year-plan for integrating Haredim in academia, they choose to ignore these facts and the conclusions that arise from them.

The opposition carries the flag of excluding women via separate campuses, or as Tomer Persico wrote: "Integrating Haredim, Not at the Cost of Discriminating against Women," "Haaretz." August 6th) – anti-female sterilization. This slogan is joined by additional arguments, including claims of the low academic level in gender-separated campuses, censored materials and the failure of the previous five-year-plan, since, graduates of separate campuses, some claim, find it difficult to integrated into regular places of employment with female employees.

Are we prepared to pay the price of abolishing campuses for Haredim?

As someone who has worked for many years towards integrating Haredi students, men and women, into academia and the workplace, I can state that these claims are wrong and misleading. Regarding the complete lack of women on separate campuses, I invite the university representatives to our men's campus in order to see for themselves that this claim has no basis. Our Haredi pre-academic programs are run by a talented woman, who accompanies the students from their very first day.

As for the low academic level and the censored materials – I invite the readers to examine the results of the latest CPA accreditation exams, which are among the most difficult exams, and in which our students, a third of which are Haredi, were ranked first and second with 100% success rates for our Haredi women's campus. All this while surpassing the achievements of the opposing universities.

Regarding the difficulties in integrating into normal workplaces, a mere visit to leading companies such as Intel, where many of our Haredi graduates are employed, will immediately refute this claim. Studies conducted by the Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research have shown over and over again, that the issue with integrating Haredim into the industry usually stems from what

can be referred to as "culture shock" from the side of secular employers, who will not accept Haredi candidates due to stigmas and unfounded concerns. However, it seems in this case, it is most important to examine the end results. It has been proven more than once that when the Haredi community feels that it is pushed into a corner, it closes itself off. The best example for this is what the Haredim call "The Lapid Decrees." In the two years following the approval of the recruitment law, we witnessed stagnation in the process of the integration of the Haredi community into Israeli society and a significant decrease in the number of enlisting Haredim when compared to previous years.

The echoes of the Haredi feeling, that they are under attack, extended beyond the recruitment degree and also influenced their integration into academia. According to data recently published by the Central Bureau of Statistics, in the year 2014/15, the number of Haredi bachelor's graduates decreased by 5% in comparison to the previous year, this, following years of consistent and significant increase. This decrease is, among others, a result of the laws approved the year prior to 2014/15. From this information, one can only conclude that any attempt to act unilaterally towards the Haredi community will lead to severe damage to the years of efforts placed towards the advancement of this process.

When representatives of the opposition state that they would pay the price of abolishing separate campuses, we as a society must decide if we are willing to pay the price that they are prepared to impose upon us. If we return to the facts and numbers – 71% of Haredi students are currently studying in separate programs, and it is estimated that this is a condition without which 65% of them would not have attended an institution of higher education. Canceling such programs, therefore, would lead to the exclusion of the majority of Haredi men and women from academic institutions.

In addition to the setbacks such exclusion would cause to the very same value of equality that the opposition claims to stand by, it is important to understand the consequences such a move would have on the Israeli market. While the reduction in the number of Haredim enlisting had nearly no effect on IDF operations, excluding Haredim from academia would severely reduce expected tax payments as a result of employment in quality positions, a decline in GDP (gross domestic product), reduction of growth and impede the distribution of the tax burden.

When faced with these heavy costs, which many have claimed that the Israeli market will not withstand, it seems that understanding is required, since we must balance the values we wish to advance alongside consideration of the characteristics and mentality of the Haredi community and acceptance that this is a continuous process, alongside acknowledging and accepting the other, without coercion or arrogance but through inclusion.

The author is the vice president of the Jerusalem College of Technology – Lev Academic Center, where over 2,000 Haredi men and women study towards degrees in in engineering, computers, management and health-sciences.