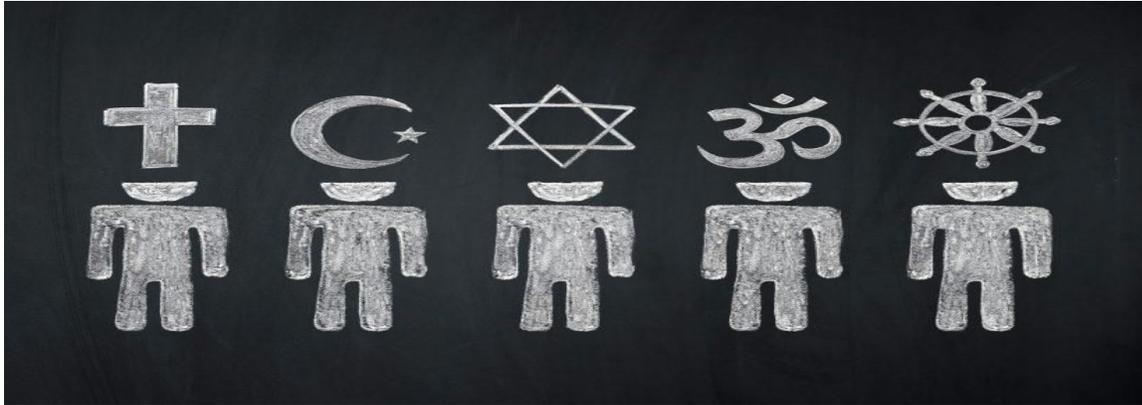


**Religious Expression:
Freedom to Express One's Religious Orientation on College Campuses**

By Jessie Latin



Source: Gaby Dromy, President of Chapman University Chabad

Chapman University deems itself a “church-related school.” While the lack of official religious affiliation is comforting for some, the church emphasis is daunting for others. Gaby Dromy, a junior at Chapman University joined the university freshman year apprehensive about its religious affiliation. Having grown up in a Jewish household and feeling incredibly connected to her Jewish heritage, Dromy feared feeling outcasted and needing to shield her true identity. Dromy’s fears reflect those of several other students who come from non-church practicing backgrounds.

“I was afraid I would be marginalized, ignored by others, or looked at weird because I was of a different religious affiliation than many other Chapman students,” Dromy stated. “I felt conflicted because I had grown up feeling so proud of my Jewish identity, but felt so ashamed of my fear to be myself upon starting at Chapman.”

Many students feel the need to conceal their true selves at the beginning of college, wanting so deeply to fit in. It is often not until students begin to affiliate with campus clubs and organizations that they begin to realize their right, in fact, freedom to express themselves on university campuses.

“I remember the first Shabbat dinner my roommate took me to,” Gaby recounts. “This was the first time I remember feeling like I truly belonged at Chapman – once I realized I had a community of people like me and that I was not alone.”

Gaby went on to become an active member of Chapman University's Chabad, and by the spring of her sophomore year, even became the president. Through an exploration of all that Chapman University has to offer, such as different clubs, Gaby came to recognize the extent to the rights that are provided to her by the university.

"I came to realize that I had the right to be Jewish. I had the right to express my religion freely. I had the right to be myself. I am grateful to university clubs for allowing the expression of religion across all boards," Gaby explained.

Gaby's story is just one of many depicting students feeling they are not allowed to express themselves freely or be who they are. It is easy to become overwhelmed by feeling out-casted and this feeling extends to members of all religions, races, cultures, and so forth. Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that students on college campuses have the right to religious expression and to deny that right is unconstitutional. Once students accept that this is their right, perhaps they will become prouder and more accepting of his or her own identity.

"Joining the team that is Chapman Chabad has truly transformed my experience at Chapman University, enabling me to be a prouder, firmer believer in Judaism and the power of religion for all," Gaby said.