



# SO, YOU WANT TO BE AN ALLY

## A (Mostly Friendly) Guide to Fighting Antisemitism

**The 15 Dimensions of Allyship: Building power and confidence for allies outside of the Jewish community**



In the immortal words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:  
**“Few are guilty, but all are responsible.”**

When it comes to antisemitism, most of us aren't the ones spray-painting swastikas or writing up conspiracy blogs in our basements. But still, we're all responsible for the culture we participate in, uphold, and passively absorb. Without our collective accountability for each other's well-being, the threads of the fabric that holds our society together become even more frayed. This guide is here to help you grow in your understanding, build muscles of empathy and accountability, and start showing up in real, non-performative ways for your Jewish neighbors, colleagues, and communities.

# 1. Antisemitism Is Not About Jewish People

**Let's start here: antisemitism is not about Jewish people being bad, good, or literally anything at all about the behavior of Jewish people or communities. It's about societies needing a scapegoat.**

Jewish people didn't create antisemitism any more than women created sexism.

It's an ideology—one that gets recycled, reshaped, and reused throughout history to make the complex motivations of socio-political unrest and the anxiety that follows more manageable. Essentially, it is easier to deal with the minutiae as opposed to the big picture. It's pretending the monster under the bed doesn't exist so that you don't have to reflect on your possible role in putting him there. This is the projection of the big, scary, and often valid feelings churned up during periods of unrest onto external entities.

Antisemitism is political, cultural, conspiratorial, religious, racialized—and often, all at once. It doesn't start with feelings; it starts with false beliefs. And it has historically ended in expulsions, violence, and genocide.



## 2. Ramp Up Your Jewish Literacy (Without Being Weird About It)

**Antisemitism thrives on misinformation and unfamiliarity. So, the first step is to read, listen, and learn: from actual Jewish voices. You don't need a PhD in Jewish Studies. Just pick an entry point that matches your interests.**

- **Into music?** Learn about Leonard Bernstein, Drake, or Yiddish Theater.
- **Into U.S. History?** Emma Lazarus wrote the Statue of Liberty poem as a Jewish refugee advocate.
- **Into food?** Welcome to brisket, babka, bagels, borekas, and check out cookbooks by chefs Michael Twitty, Imani Jackson, Jack Cohen, Einav Gefen, and Michael Solomonov while you're at it.
- **Into comedy?** Welcome to the stage: Billy Crystal, Sarah Silverman, Joan Rivers, Larry David, Tifanny Haddish, Adam Sandler, The Three Stooges, and the Golden Girl Dorothy, played by the indomitable Bea Arthur.

And for the love of all that is holy: **get out of the Holocaust-only mindset.** Jewish history didn't begin or end in 1945. Antisemitism is the book; the Holocaust is a chapter in a long and rich history. Learn about Jewish life in Latin America, the Mediterranean, South Asia, Soviet anti-Zionism campaigns, or the Pale of Settlement pogroms. Understanding the fullness of Jewish life is essential to spotting the distortions of antisemitism.



### 3. Don't Make It Weird: Decenter Yourself Without Disappearing

You don't need to be Jewish to fight antisemitism. In fact, please don't be. That's the point.

- Avoid “I’m not Jewish, so…” (which sounds like an excuse or like inadvertently engaging in ‘othering’). Instead, go with “I’m not Jewish, but…” and then ground it in solidarity:
- “I’m not Jewish, but I attend interfaith Shabbat.”
- “I’m not Jewish, but I know antisemitism is central to understanding white supremacy.”
- “I’m not Jewish, but I believe no one should live in fear of being scapegoated.”
- “I’m not Jewish, but I believe everyone has the right to practice their religion and share their cultural identity.”
- “I’m not Jewish, but I will interject when I encounter anti-Jewish prejudice.

### 4. Learn the Language of Jewish Values

Jewish traditions are rich with social justice and self-improvement values—start with those.

- **Tikkun Olam (repairing the world):** Justice isn't a hobby, it's a commandment.
- **Tzedek (righteousness):** Think “equity,” but with ancient Hebrew flair.
- **Pikuach Nefesh (saving a life):** Human life is the highest value.
- **Lashon Harah (evil speech):** Words have the power to cause pain and suffering. Refrain from speaking ill of someone or engaging in any type of slander. If you don't have something nice to say DON'T.
- **L'dor V'dor (from generation to generation):** Consider values, messages, traditions that are passed down through generations.
- **Mensch (a person of integrity and honor):** Be a mensch! Show up when others are silent, take responsibility when you misstep, and prioritize care, empathy, and community.

You don't need to quote Torah verses at dinner parties, but metabolizing these values in shaping your own growth can lead to a greater capacity to move through the world with a lens of empathy and allyship.

## 5. Whiteness and Race: It's Complicated

### Judaism predates racial categories.

The Jewish community has been categorized as a race (usually unfavorably) for centuries, but many don't identify as white, and certainly not all Jews are white. Don't assume whiteness. There is a wonderful complexity to Jewish peoplehood expressed through a diversity of migration patterns, cultural traditions, and identity.

Also: **antisemitism and racism are branches of the same toxic tree.** The same white supremacist worldview that justifies anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia also scapegoats Jews, often by portraying them as all-powerful puppet-masters.

Antisemitism thrives on monolithic depictions of Jewish identity. Combat this by elevating histories and experiences of Jews of Color (Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Ethiopian Jewish communities in the U.S. and abroad; get familiar with intersectional movements like Jews of Color initiative).



## 6. No, Philosemitism Isn't Cute

### Saying “Jews are so smart!” or “I’ve always wanted to be Jewish!” sounds like a compliment—but it’s not.

It's exoticizing. It's reducing real people to tropes. Philosemitism is a “positive” prejudice, but it still dehumanizes and negates the ability to see the richness and complexity of a people. It is a surface-level passive form of allyship.

Let Jewish people be...people. Not sages. Not victims. Not mystical unicorns.

## 7. Empathize—Don't Pity

**Jewish communities don't need pity. They need partnership.**

Avoid “you poor people” energy. Instead, recognize the agency, resilience, and joy that persist despite centuries of persecution. Remember: Jewish peoplehood and culture didn't survive antisemitism—it thrived *in spite* of it.

## 8. Connect—Don't Compare

**Different forms of oppression aren't in competition.**

Avoid saying things like “it's not as bad as...” or “just like...” when talking about antisemitism. Each system of oppression is unique. But you can draw connections and find solidarity without collapsing the complexity of anyone's experience. A helpful tip to avoid any sort of harmful false equivalency is to not focus on the manifestations of hate and prejudice but rather on the universal themes that have motivated them. It is centering your efforts on the cause of the issue as opposed to just its symptoms.

## 9. Acknowledge Existential Threats

**Antisemitism can be hard to spot because it often shows up differently than other forms of bigotry.**

It may not always look like slurs or hate crimes. Sometimes it looks like conspiracy theories, coded language, microaggressions or the constant fear of gaslighting.

That's existential violence—an anxiety that your people's existence could one day be up for debate. It's real. And it matters.



## 10. Build Coalitions That Actually Mean Something

**Allyship isn't just about what you say when something bad happens—it's about what you do when no one's watching.**

Celebrate, elevate, and listen to diverse Jewish voices. Normalize visibility, honor joy, and integrate Jewish perspectives into broader conversations about justice and community resilience.

- Get your congregation to visit a local synagogue after an antisemitic incident.
- Invite Jewish speakers to your DEI sessions.
- Form an interfaith coalition that includes fighting antisemitism in its mission.
- Check in with your Jewish neighbors and coworkers after an antisemitic incident.
- It's never too early to develop your children's capacity for tolerance and empathy through conversations on ways to be an ally and opportunities to expand the knowledge about other identities.

**The real work is proactive, not reactive.**



## 11. Don't Use Israel as a Litmus Test

**You can be an ally to Jewish folks without needing to pass a foreign policy quiz.**

There are those in the Jewish community who support the state of Israel while also not agreeing with all the policies and actions of the Israeli government. There are also those who have complex feelings. The point is: Jewish safety and antisemitism are not contingent on your personal stance about a foreign government. Don't use it as an excuse to opt out of allyship.

## 12. TL; DR: Antisemitism Is Not Inevitable. It's Learned—and It Can Be Unlearned

**Allyship isn't about being perfect. It's about being present.**

Show up. Learn. Apologize if you get it wrong. Keep going. When antisemitism flourishes, it doesn't just harm Jews—it corrodes democracy, undermines solidarity, and opens the door to other kinds of hate.

## 13. Say “Jewish People,” Not “The Jews” (Words Matter, Friends)

**Language shapes perception.**

When we say, “the Jews,” it can come across as cold, accusatory, or dehumanizing—especially given how that phrasing has been weaponized throughout history by antisemites and extremists.

## 14. You don't have to have all the answers

**While wars and politics are often mired in complexity and the struggle for moral, tactical, and ideological superiority, humanity itself remains simple at its essence.**

People often seek security, comfort, and friendship in times of great unrest. This is to say that to be an ally, you don't have to have all the answers. Just offering someone a sense of security, a comforting gesture, or engaging in the actions that define the strong connective bonds of friendship hold true power. It's the “quiet” moments of heroism and allyship that compound to create real impact.

## 15. Seek dialogue, not resolution

**People often say that Rome was not built in a day.**

The foundation of democracy took time to establish and was shaped through a dogged commitment to respectful and civil discourse. This historical example teaches us a critical lesson: when discussing emotionally charged and highly nuanced issues, our goal shouldn't be quick resolution or gaining the upper hand through moral superiority, but rather a shared commitment to ongoing dialogue. It is unrealistic to expect to resolve a conflict that has endured for decades in one conversation. Real dedication is shown by returning to the discussion repeatedly.