

# Bagel Brunch: Jewish Texts on Being an Ally GSA Ally Week 2015 (5775!)

Teach a text: what does it say about the importance of being an ally or how to be an ally?

#1

לֹא תֵעָמַד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה

Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:16

*This can be understood to apply to ANY kind of harm—even embarrassing someone and causing the person to blush was seen as spilling blood*

*How might religion/spirituality relate to being an ally?*

#2

There is an evil which most of us condone and are even guilty of: indifference to evil. We remain neutral, impartial, and not easily moved by the wrongs done unto other people. Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself; it is more universal, more contagious, more dangerous. A silent justification, it makes possible an evil erupting as an exception becoming the rule and being in turn accepted.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel  
from "Religion and Race," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p. 110

*Why is indifference to evil more universal, contagious, and dangerous than evil?*

*Can you think of an example related to gender and sexuality?*

*How does being an ally change things?*

#3

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא  
עֲכָשְׁיוֹ, אֵימָתִי

(Hillel) would say: If I am not for me, who will be for me?

When I am for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

Pirkei Avot 1:14

*The first rhetorical question can be understood to mean that each person is responsible for elevating hir soul. What must a person do in order to become an ally?*

*How are standing up for yourself and standing up for others related?*

*A commentary on the third question says, "If I wait until I'm older I may not have the opportunity." What's the significance of the third question for being an ally?*

#4

Hillel also said: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary, go and learn it."

Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a

*How does self-awareness relate to being an ally?*

*In order to be an ally, what do you need to learn?*

## 7 Values of Inclusive Community (From Hillel International and Keshet)

### Kavod: Respect

Judaism teaches us to treat ourselves and others with respect; even the stranger is to be treated with respect. Kavod is a feeling of regard for the rights, dignity, feelings, wishes, and abilities of others. Teasing and name-calling disrespect and hurt everyone, so learn to respect people's differences

### Shalom Bayit: Peace in the Home

Our community centers, synagogues, youth groups, and camps are often our second homes. Everyone needs to feel comfortable, safe, welcome, and respected at home. Don't ostracize those who seem different. Strive to settle disagreements in peaceful and respectful ways that allow all community members to maintain their dignity.

### B'Tzelem Elohim: In God's Image

The Torah tells us that we are all created "b'Tzelem Elohim" (Bereshit 1:26), in the image of God. This is a simple and profound idea that should guide our interactions with all people. If we see each person as created in the image of God, we can see humanity and dignity in all people. True inclusion is built upon this foundation.

### Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh: Communal Responsibility

The Jewish principle that "All Israel is responsible for one another" (Shavuot 39a) means each of us must take action and inspire others to create a community in which we can all take pride.

### Sh'mirat Halashon: Guarding One's Use of Language

The Talmud warns us that we must take care in how we use language. Talking about others behind their backs, even if what we are saying is true, is prohibited. The guidelines for "sh'mirat halashon" remind us that what we say about others affects them in ways we can never predict. Words can hurt or heal depending on how we use them.

### V'ahavta L'Reiacha Kamocho: "Love your neighbor as yourself"

Commenting on Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself," Rabbi Hillel once stated that this was the foundational value of the Torah. It begins with loving ourselves. We must love and accept our whole selves, and in doing so create the capacity for extending that love and acceptance to others.

### Al Tifrosh Min Hatsibur: Solidarity

"Don't separate yourself from the community" (Pirke Avot 2:5). When you feel different from others in your community, don't isolate yourself. Find allies and supporters who you can talk to. If you know someone who is feeling isolated, reach out; be an ally and a friend.