

Source Sheet: Jewish Perspectives on Allyship

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1. Examples of allyship in Tanach

Source 1a: Parashat Sh'mot, Sh'mot 2:11-12

- 11 Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and he witnessed their labours. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.
12 He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and he hid him in the sand.

יֵא וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיַּגְדֵּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא
אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי
מַכֶּה אִישׁ־עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו
יב וַיִּפֹּן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת־
הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַּחֹל

Source 1b: Parashat Sh'mot, Sh'mot 2:15-17

- 15 Moses fled from Pharaoh's presence and settled in Midian. He sat down near a well.
16 Now the ruler of Midian had seven daughters. They came to this well, drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flocks,
17 but shepherds came and drove them away. Moses rose to their defence, and then watered their flocks.

טו וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפָּנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיָּנֹשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־
מִדְיָן וַיָּנֹשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר
טז וּלְכַתֵּן מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת וַתָּבֹאנָה
וַתִּדְּלָנָה וַתִּמְלֹאנָה אֶת־הַרְהָטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת
צֹאן אֲבִיהֶן
יז וַיִּבְּאוּ הָרָעִים וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה
וַיִּשְׁעֶן וַיִּשְׁק אֶת־צֹאנָם

Source 2a: Parashat Korach, Bamidbar 16:20-24

- 20 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,
21 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in an instant.'
22 They fell on their faces and said, "God, the God who knows the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins should You be angry with the whole congregation?"
23 God spoke to Moses, saying,
24 "Speak to the congregation saying, 'Withdraw from the dwelling of Korach, Dathan, and Aviram.'"

כ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר
כא הִבְדְּלוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶכְלָה
אֹתָם בְּרֹגַע
כב וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי
הָרוּחֹת לְכָל־בָּשָׂר הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחָטָא וְעַל־
כָּל־הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף
כג וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר
כד דַּבֵּר אֶל־הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר הִעֲלוּ מִסִּבִּיב
לְמִשְׁכַּן־קֹרַח דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם

Source 2b: Parashat Korach, Bamidbar 17:9-13

- 9 God spoke to Moses, saying,
10 "Remove yourselves from this community, and I will consume them in an instant." They fell on their faces.
11 Moses said to Aaron, "Take the fire-pan, put fire from the top of the Altar in it, place incense in it, and take it quickly to the community and atone for them, for wrath has gone forth from God, and the plague has begun."
12 Aaron took it, just as Moses had said, and he ran into the midst of the community, and indeed, the plague had begun among the people. He placed the incense on it and atoned for the people.
13 He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague ceased.

ט וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר
י הֲרֵמוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶכְלָה אֹתָם
בְּרֹגַע וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם
יא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת־הַמִּחָתָה
וְתִרְעֲלֶיהָ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׁים קֶטֶרֶת
וְהוֹלֹךְ מִהֵרָה אֶל־הָעֵדָה וְכִפֹּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי־יָצָא
הַקָּצֵף מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה הַחַל הַנֶּגֶף
יב וַיִּקַּח אֶהָרֹן בָּאֵשֶׁר | דָּבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל־
תּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וְהִנֵּה הַחַל הַנֶּגֶף בָּעָם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־
הַקֶּטֶרֶת וַיִּכְפֹּר עַל־הָעָם
יג וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין־הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין־הַחַיִּים וַתֵּעָצֹר
הַמִּגֶּפֶה

Source 3: Ruth 5-9

5 Then Boaz said to his servant, who stood over the reapers, "To whom does this maiden belong?"

6 And the servant in charge of the reapers answered and said, "She is a Moabite maiden who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab. [..]"

8 And Boaz said to Ruth, "Have you not heard, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, neither shall you go away from here, and here you shall stay with my maidens, [..]"

9 And (if) you are thirsty, you may go to the vessels and drink from that which the youths draw."

ה וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֹז לְנַעֲרוֹ הַנָּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים לְמִי הַנִּעְרָה הַזֹּאת

ו וַיַּעַן הַנָּעַר הַנָּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר נִעְרָה מוֹאֲבִיָּה הִיא הַשָּׁבָה עִם־נָעֲמִי מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב

ח וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֹז אֶל־רוּת הֲלֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בְּתִי אֶל־תִּלְכִּי לִלְקֹט בְּשָׂדֶה אֲחֵר וְגַם לֹא תִעְבְּרִי מִזֶּה וְכֹה תִדְבְּקִין עִם־בְּעֵרְתִּי

ט וַצִּמַּת וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל־הַכֵּלִים וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲנָשׁ וַיִּשָּׂאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים

2. What do our texts say about hurtful language?

Source 4a: Mishnah Bava Metzia, 4:10

Just as (there is a prohibition against) mistreatment in buying and selling, so is there (also) against mistreatment in words.

Source 4b: CR Ephraim Mirvis, 'The Wellbeing of LGBT+ Pupils: A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Schools' (2018)

"It is clear from here [ie source 4a], that if one knows that a particular subject or form of words is likely to cause pain to another but chooses to go ahead and use those words nonetheless, one is guilty of *ona'at devarim* (wrongdoing with words). [..] It is also forbidden to inadvertently cause people pain, even where the intention was to be constructive."

Source 5: BT, Bava Metzia 58b

One who 'whitens another's face' (ie shames or embarrasses them) in public, it is as if that person shed blood.

Source 6: Maimonides/Rambam, Mishneh Torah 'Sales' 14

Verbally abusing a person is more severe than taking unfair advantage of him financially. For the latter can be repaid, while the former can never be repaid.

3. Why should we be an ally?

Source 7: Vayikrah 18:5

5 And you will keep the statutes and commandments, which you the people shall do, and **live** by them.

ה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּם הָאֱדֹם וְחִי בָהֶם

Source 8: Vayikrah 19:16

16 Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour: I am God.

טז לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה

Source 9: Devarim 16:20

20 Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live

כ צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּדְרֹךְ לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה

4. When, and how, should we be an ally?

Source 10: Ezra, 10:14

14 Whoever is in our cities [...] shall come at appointed times, and with them the elders of each and every city and its judges, until we avert the burning anger of our God from us until this matter (is concluded).

יְיָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר בְּעָרֵינוּ הִשְׁיִיב נָשִׁים
נִכְרִיּוֹת יָבֹא לַעֲתִים מְזֻמָּיִם וְעִמָּהֶם זִקְנֵי-
עִיר וְעִיר וְשֹׁפְטֵיהֶם עַד לְהִשְׁיֵב חֲרוֹן אַף-
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד לְדַבֵּר הַזֶּה

Source 11: Sh'mot, 22:21

21 You must not cause pain to any widow or orphan.

כֹּא כָל-אֶלְמָנָה וַיִּתּוֹם לֹא תַעֲבֹן

Source 12: Pirkei Avot, 2:16

16 It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

טוֹ לא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמּוֹר, וְלֹא אֲתָה
בֶּן חוֹרִין לְהִבָּטֵל מִמֶּנָּה

5. Is it enough not to use hurtful language?

Source 13: BT Shabbat 54b

Anyone who can protest the wrongful actions of their household and does not, is held responsible for the actions of their household.

כָּל מִי שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר לְמַחוֹת לְאִנְשֵׁי
בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא מִיָּחָה – נִתְפָּס עַל
אִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ.

Anyone who can protest the wrongful actions of their town and does not, is held responsible for the actions of their town.

בְּאִנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ – נִתְפָּס עַל אִנְשֵׁי
עִירוֹ.

Anyone who can protest the wrongful actions of the whole world and does not, is held responsible for the actions of the whole world.

בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם כּוּלּוֹ – נִתְפָּס עַל
כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוּלּוֹ.

Source 14: R Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence' (1955)

"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."

Source 15: R Joachim Prinz, speech at the March on Washington (1963)

"When I was the rabbi [...] in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence. A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers."

...but, when speaking up, always consider the who and the where and the when

Source 16: Beverly Daniel Tatum, 'Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race' (2021)

"We all have a sphere of influence. Each of us needs to find our own sources of courage so that we can begin to speak. There are many problems to address, and we cannot avoid them indefinitely. We cannot continue to be silent. We must begin to speak, knowing that words alone are insufficient but [...] that meaningful dialogue can lead to effective action."

6. How should we speak up?

See **sources 5 and 6** in section 2 above.

Source 17: BT, Eruvin 13b

A Divine Voice proclaimed: "Both these (the school of Shammai) and those (the school of Hillel) are the words of the living God. However, God's will is in accordance with the opinion of the School of Hillel." Why? The reason is that they were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, and would teach both their own statements and the statements of the school of Shammai. Moreover, they prioritized the statements of the school of Shammai to their own, in deference to their adversaries.

יֵצְאָה בֵּית קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: אֵלֶּי וְאֵלֶּי
דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים הֵם, וְהִלְכָּה
בְּבֵית הִלֵּל [] מִפְּנֵי מָה? []
מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנִּזְכָּרִין וְעֹלֵבִין הָיוּ, וְשׁוֹכֵן
דְּבָרֵיהֶן וְדְבָרֵי בֵּית שְׁמַאי, וְלֹא
עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁמִּקְדִּימִין דְּבָרֵי בֵּית
שְׁמַאי לְדְבָרֵיהֶן.

Source 18: R Yisroel Meir Kagan, 'Sefer Chofetz Chayim' (1873)

In the section of this book called *Hilchot Lashon Hara* (the laws of bad speech), seven preconditions are named before a person can repeat hurtful language *l'to'elet* (ie for constructive/positive purposes). These are summarised below. Sources: <https://cchf.global/the-seven-rules-of-toeles/> and also <https://torah.org/learning/halashon-chapter10/>.

1. The speaker must be sure the information is accurate – either through witnessing the incident themselves or through careful investigation if heard second-hand
2. The speaker should reflect thoroughly, rather than acting in haste
3. The speaker should first approach the transgressor privately, using gentle language
4. The description of the action should not be exaggerated
5. The speaker must have good intentions, ie only to help the victim and/or to stop the transgressor
6. If the purpose of speaking out (eg repentance, protecting others) cannot be achieved another way
7. The transgressor should not be caused more damage than would be allowed in *halachah*

Source 19: Shakirah Bourne and Dana Alison Levy (Eds), 'Being An Ally' (2023)

"Being a good ally often means not speaking up when there are folks who can speak for themselves."

7. To conclude

Source 20: R Lord Jonathan Sacks, 'To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility' (2005)

"The commandment to love your neighbour as yourself is a call to build a society in which difference is not just tolerated but celebrated. A sacred community is one in which the diversity of its members is acknowledged as the source of its strength and vitality."

Source 21: Helen Keller (c 1920)

"We live by each other and for each other. Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."