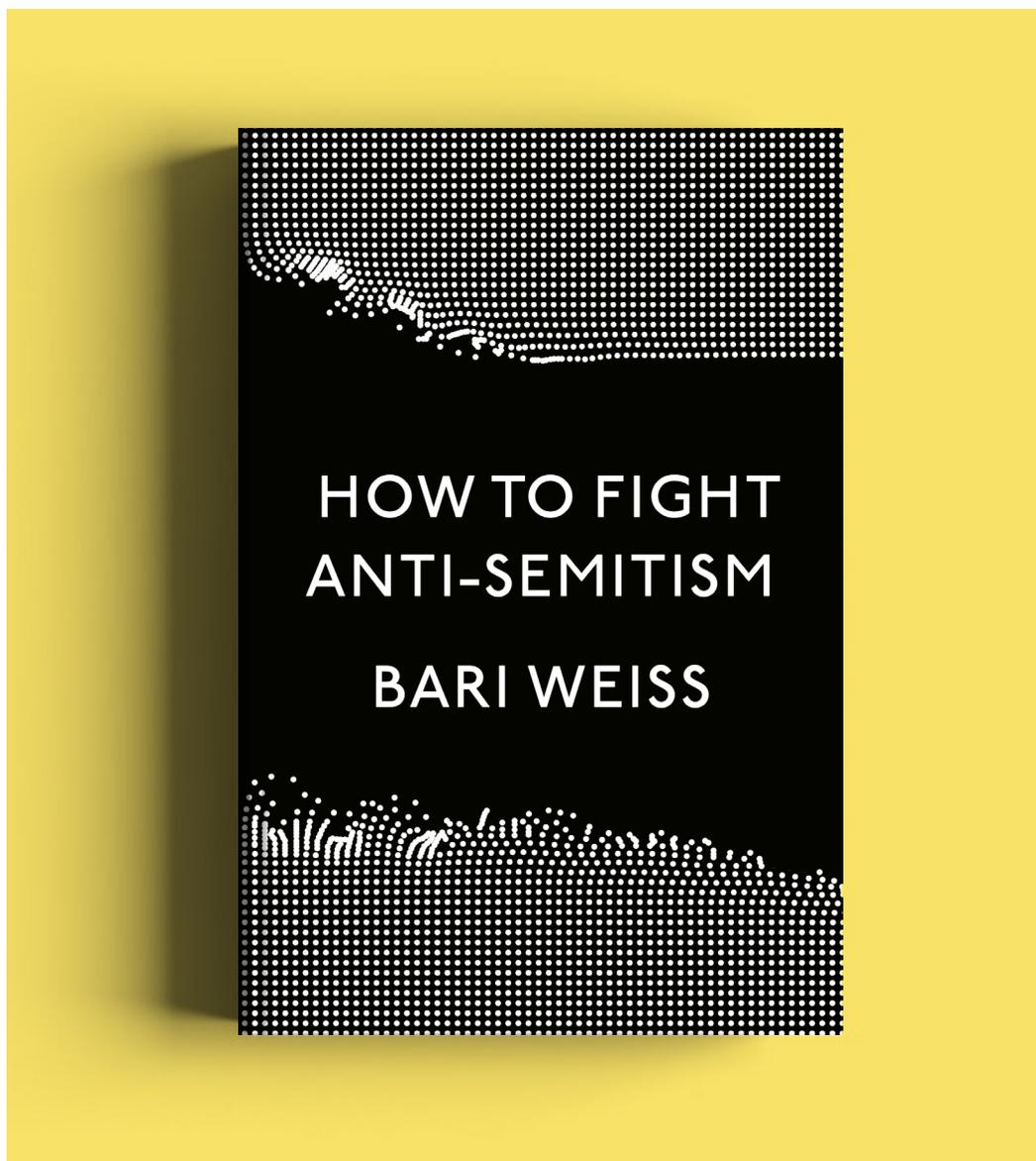


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

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#DontJudgethe BookUntilYou ReadIt

A Guide to Maintaining Engaging, Effective, Dynamic Conversations Around Hot Topics

It's no secret that the current climate—political and cultural — is one that often devolves into heated conversation, with everyone firmly planted in their own opinion on their own “side” of a divide. At this time, politics is almost instantly divisive—and almost everything is politics. Of course, it's natural to staunchly defend an issue that you see as important, and also to come in with certain biases. But these biases and firmly held opinions too often have a negative side effect—that of blinding us to alternative points of view and preventing us from hearing valid ideas that we might otherwise agree with or that could expand our own thinking.

This book, for example, is one that might encounter opposition. As the author herself states, “I know that much of what I write here will not win me fans...So be it” (p. 25). But the reason that people may respond heatedly is that the issues raised are important and personal—and the stakes are high. Whatever your own political stance, there are ideas in this book that bear thinking about and raising in the Jewish community and the much larger community of Americans who believe that hate against anyone is fundamentally in opposition to the country's values and is a danger to our democracy.

So how do you step away from the “sides” and the politics to have an engaging, effective, and dynamic conversation?

Below are some suggestions, tips, and advice for read

ing and discussing this book, and any others that may be controversial but important.

- Decide to read the book. Know going in that others will be coming from different places and that some may agree or disagree more strenuously, but that there is value to reading this particular work.
- Suggest that book group members each read the book with two colors of post-its in hand: one color to flag things that they especially agree with and one to flag areas in which they particularly disagree. This serves the purpose of allowing readers to highlight certain areas to come back to in discussion, to have a means by which to express outrage or agreement in the moment of reading, and to allow the reader and the group to go beyond preconceived notions about the book and delve into the text itself—the ideas and stories that make up the work. Even if a reader begins a book assuming that it will be one with which they would agree/disagree, this method can allow the reader to visually see what they really felt about the book itself.
- Assign a facilitator or leader for the conversation, even if that is not the usual practice of the book group. Choose someone who will be able to help smooth and direct the conversation, making sure that no one person dominates the discussion, and that issues are discussed respectfully. Give the leader guidance about how to manage any disagreements that escalate.

- As a group, agree on a set of ground rules to follow. These “rules to live by” should be printed and either posted or handed out so that everyone can see them throughout the book group meeting.
- Suggestions for rules include obvious ones like no interrupting, no yelling, no insulting another reader, how one indicates when they want to speak—but also rules for if a disagreement becomes more contentious, when and how the discussion leader should step in, if there is a time limit that speakers must adhere to, and whether there are certain topics that are off-limits.
- During the discussion, choose words with care and avoid generalizations. Don’t confuse factual statements with opinions; use “In my opinion...” rather than “This is how it is.”
- Follow Litlovers.com’s advice and “Try to avoid words like ‘awful’ or ‘idiotic’—even ‘like’ and ‘dislike.’ They don’t help move discussions forward and can put others on the defensive. Instead, talk about your experience—how you felt as you read the book.”
- Before the group begins discussing the book, take a few minutes to talk about personal experiences with the topic. This allows for some understanding of how people in the room might be approaching the material, and sets the tone for a respectful and compassionate conversation. Possible ways to start off a personal conversation about *How to Fight Anti-Semitism* include:
 - *Reflect on personal experiences. Start off with “One-sentence memories” where each person fills in one of the following triggers and how they responded: “I was once told/called... and I responded...,” “I heard... and I...,” “I saw...”
 - *Name anti-Semitic tropes or memes, then expand to include language that might be offensive to other minorities. What terms are still widely used—maybe even ones that we’ve unthinkingly used ourselves—that could be disparaging (e.g. “gypped”, “retarded”, “sold down the river”)?
- Remember that everyone’s opinion is valid (even when you think it is wrong).

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Discussion

Questions

1. Think about your own experiences with anti-Semitism in relation to Dara Horn's article referenced on page 46. In which categories do your experiences fall, Hanukkah or Purim? Was there a particular instance of anti-Semitism, in your own life or nationally, that "woke you up" and made you feel that something had changed?
2. Do you believe anti-Semitism to be a form of racism? Do you define Jews as whites or nonwhites? What about Jews of color (who, in the most recent study, make up 12-15% of the American Jewish population)? Is there a way to avoid the double bind of white and nonwhite, oppressed and oppressor that Weiss lays out on page 69?
3. Do you think anti-Semitism is only of concern to Jews? If so, do you believe that to be the case for racism or other forms of prejudice or discrimination? Weiss makes the case that anti-Semitism is both a symptom of an unhealthy society and a destructive force within a society. If you are Jewish, would you recommend this book to non-Jews? Why or why not? If you are not Jewish, why did you choose to read this book?
4. What was something that stayed with you after reading this book? What made you cringe? What made you angriest? Has reading this book altered your perspective in any way?
5. What assumptions did you have about this book before reading it? Did they prove true? Were you surprised by your reaction to the book in any way? If you used the post-it approach suggested in the #DontJudgeTheBookBeforeYouReadIt section above, did you have more "agree" or "disagree" post-its? Was your agree/disagree distribution what you expected?
6. Do you think the book accurately portrays the state of anti-Semitism today? Have American Jews "lost [the] instinct for danger" (p. 24)? This book is intended to "raise the old-new cry" about a "storm threatening" (p. 26). Did you read something that "gave you no other choice but to take up this fight"? How would you respond to people who say Jews are playing the "anti-Semitism card"?
7. Weiss quotes Ben Hecht, "I am much more sensitive to crimes of the intellect than to those of the body. They are more dangerous—because they are more lasting" (p. 93). Do you agree with the statement? Which are you more concerned about currently?
8. The book contextualizes some of the anti-Semitic tropes and notions that we see today by tracing their historical roots. Does understanding the history and source of these ideas change your perception of them?
9. Think about intersectionality and the hierarchy of oppression. How does Judaism fit in? Where do Jews of color fit into the hierarchy? Do you believe that these concepts serve a purpose in understanding how minorities function in a society?
10. Weiss sets out to separate and define anti-Jewish discrimination, anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism. Do you believe these to be distinct categories? Do you agree with her definitions? On page 101, she asks, "Is it fair to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism?" What do you think?

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Discussion

Questions

11. Do you agree that “Jews are transformed into whatever a given society hates most” (p. 127)? How has this happened in other times and places?

12. The book lays out a strategy of how to fight anti-Semitism. Do you agree with the strategy? Is there anything that you would add or take away?

13. In discussing how to respond to anti-Semitism, Weiss writes, “If the response ends in anger, you have missed a tremendous opportunity to examine *why* you wanted to fight back and *what*, exactly, you wanted to fight for” (p. 167). Do you think the larger Jewish community is letting its response end in anger or does it know what it’s fighting for? What about your own community? How would you answer that question personally?

14. Weiss writes about her epiphany while in college about the protests that had often been staged in response to anti-Semitism, and how it led her to develop the strategy she outlines in this book. Do you think the approach of staging a protest is “reactive and defensive” and has a “fundamental weakness” (p. 165)? Is there something to be gained from protesting? What about from working quietly in the background (of an organization, a community, a political sphere)? At the beginning of the book, Weiss refers to “quietists” who join boards and/or create dialogue groups to “move the needle” (p. 25); what do you think of this approach and of her assessment of it?

15. The book ends with an important question: “Do we believe in our own story? Can we make it real once again?” (p. 206). What do those questions mean to

you? What story do you believe in?

A Plan of Action

The last chapter of the book fulfills the promise of the title. Weiss elaborates on her strategy, breaking down each point. But, in order to join the fight, it's necessary to think about what her prescriptions mean for you. Here, wherever possible, the calls to action are grouped into general categories. Go through the recommendations of how to fight; think about how you would respond to each action item.

Tell the truth; Trust your discomfort; Call it out. Especially when it's hard; At the same time, we must fight anti-Semitism on our own side.

What is a truth that you feel needs to be told, either to yourself or to a larger group? Have you been in a situation in which you were made uncomfortable by something someone said? What happened and how did you react? Have you ever called something out? What about a time that you wished you had? In a situation in which you don't want to create conflict (a work environment, dinner party, etc.), what are some ways in which you could address a truth, speak to your own discomfort, and address something that would be polite but effective?

Apply the kippah test.

Have you ever worn or do you currently wear something identifiably Jewish? Why have you chosen to do so? Are there certain places you feel more or less comfortable? Has anyone ever noticed or remarked on what you wear? When you see someone else wearing a kippah, magen david, or any other outward show of Jewish affiliation, do you react to it? What are the positives and negatives of this external presentation? Are there places you think a Jew should specifically not wear something? Do you think it is more important to wear something in an area in which it might draw a negative reaction?

Don't trust people who seek to divide Jews. Even if they are Jews.

What are ways in which Jews are divided? A recent [article about anti-Semitism in Britain that appeared in JTA](#) and the conversation around President Trump's comments about loyalty both highlight the idea of a "good Jew". What makes a "good" Jew or a "bad" Jew in your circles? How do you respond to the charge of what makes a "good" Jew? What are ways to bridge the divide?

Allow for the possibility of change.

Do you know someone whose views have changed drastically? Was there some incident that catalyzed the change? Do you think there is some way of encouraging a change in someone's perspective? How do you know if someone has truly altered their views?

Notice your enemies. But even more, notice your friends; Follow the Pittsburgh principle; Expect solidarity; Praise those who do the right thing.

Do you feel like your larger community (neighborhood, town, etc.) stands in solidarity with its Jewish community? If there has been local anti-Semitism, how has it been addressed? Are there organizations, institutions, or other communities that you would consider friends? Why is it more important to notice friends than enemies? Do you feel you or organizations with which you are affiliated have acted in solidarity with other minority groups? If not, what do

you think should be done to be a more active friend? Regardless of whether you live in Pittsburgh, did you notice the difference in how people responded to this attack? Did the Pittsburgh response affect your reaction to the tragedy? Do you expect solidarity? When you encounter it, does it feel like a favor? Do you feel the need to “repay” the favor? What does solidarity look like to you? What are ways that we could raise the expectation of solidarity within society more generally? Have you seen or heard people who do the right thing praised publicly? How so? What effect has that had? How much does it matter if the person themselves hears the praise? What are ways that we could do more of this? Are there institutional changes that could be made to proliferate more of this kind of praise?

Stop blaming yourself; Choose life; Never ask of yourself what you would not ask of another minority; Resist hierarchical identity politics.

Do you feel like you blame yourself, or other Jews, when you hear about incidents of anti-Semitism? Are Jews harder on themselves or other Jews than on others? Do you believe that Jews have the same rights as other minorities to claim discrimination? Have you been in situations where you felt that you were allowing something that would have been taboo if directed against a different minority? How do you feel about security measures at your local Jewish institutions? What does choosing life mean for you?

Never, ever forget to love your neighbor; Fight, first and foremost, as Americans; Wherever you are, vote for freedom; Maintain your liberalism.

What does it mean to you to fight as an American? What are some ways to vote for freedom, aside from casting a ballot? Why is it so important to love one’s neighbor? How literal should this be? In this case, liberalism is not used in the political sense, but meaning generosity and broad-mindedness. What are ways

that you maintain an open mind and open heart? Do you think Jews have a particular responsibility to prioritize freedom, liberty, and openness?

Support Israel; Maintain the David and Goliath paradox

What does support for Israel look like to you? What would you like to see support for Israel look like more globally? Is there room for criticism within that support? If so, how is it expressed or acted upon? Why do you think support for Israel is included in this list of ways to fight anti-Semitism? Is there a way to not support Israel (either partially or fully) and still fight against anti-Semitism? Where do you fall on the spectrum of the David and Goliath paradox? If you are more of a David person or a Goliath person, why do you feel that way? Do you think there is truth in the other opinion? How do you think either perspective informs the way that people act? Is there a way to encourage maintaining the paradox?

Build community; Do not divide. Multiply; If you find yourself standing alone, know that you are in good company; Knowing when to stand alone depends on knowing exactly what you are fighting for; Lean into Judaism; Nurture your Jewish identity—and that of those around you.

Do you feel like you are part of a community? How do you contribute to building community? Do you ever feel like you are standing alone as a Jew? If so, are there places where you can go to to feel less alone (be it a physical place, a person, a book, an idea). What does involvement in multiple organizations achieve? Are there additional organizations that you would consider joining? What are you fighting for? Is it history, religion, family tradition, culture, freedom, societal values? What does that fight look like to you? Do you feel proud to be Jewish? Why is leaning into Judaism important in the fight against anti-Semitism? What does it look like to lean into Judaism for

you and for your family? How do you nurture your Jewish identity? How do you help nurture the identity of others? Even if you consider yourself to have a very strong Jewish identity, what is something you could commit to doing to strengthen it? If you are looking for ideas of things to do or organizations that can help, below is a very incomplete list.

Ways to lean in:

- Choose an observance of Jewish law or tradition to add to your life (lighting candles and having Shabbat dinner, saying a blessing, attending synagogue, learning a text, keeping kosher)
- Attend a Jewish event
- Read and discuss a Jewish book (find book suggestions, reviews, book club resources, and more at [Jewish Book Council](#))
- Take a class
- Participate in a rally or protest
- Volunteer
- Find Jewish communal discussion groups online (Facebook, local groups, etc.)
- When you travel, connect with Jews abroad
- Donate to a Jewish charity or organization

Organizations, Programs, Publications :

There is a plethora of Jewish organizations that can provide resources and opportunities to nurture a Jewish identity. This is just a small sampling that covers a wide swath of interests and religious denominations and affiliations.

To start, look to your local synagogues, JCCs, Jewish Federations, day schools, Jewish camps, Hebrew schools, and Jewish studies department at nearby universities for programs, classes, events, services, opportunities to volunteer, and more.

[92Y](#) (NYC)
[Aish HaTorah](#)
[Alma](#)
[American Jewish Historical Society](#)
[Amplifier](#)
[A Wider Bridge](#)
[Base](#)
[Bend the Arc](#)
[Birthright Israel](#) (20s)
[Camp Nai Nai Nai](#) (20s and 30s)
[Chabad](#)
[Challah for Hunger](#)
[Chai Mitzvah](#)
[Fuente Latina](#)
[GatherDC](#) (DC)
[Global Day of Jewish Learning](#)
[Hadar](#)
[Hadassah](#)
[Hazon](#)
[Ikar](#) (LA)
[Institute for Jewish Spirituality](#)
[Institute of Southern Jewish Life](#)
[JDC](#)
[Jew Belong](#)
[Jewish Book Council](#)
[Jewish Education Project](#)
[Jewish Food Society](#)
The Jewish Forward
[Jewish Studio Project](#)
[Jews in All Hues](#)
[JIMENA](#)
[JOFA](#)
[The Kitchen](#) (SF)
[Kveller](#)
[Lab/Shul](#) (NYC)
Lilith Magazine
[Limmud](#)
[Mayyim Hayyim](#)
[Me'ah](#)
[Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning](#)
[MJE](#) (NYC)
Moment Magazine
[Momentum](#)
[Moishe House](#) (20s and 30s)

[My Jewish Learning](#)
[National Council for Jewish Women](#)
[Nashuva](#) (LA)
[Nosher](#)
[OneTable](#) (20s and 30s)
[Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies](#)
[PJ Library](#)
[Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)
[Repair the World](#)
[Romemu](#) (NYC)
[Shalom Hartman Institute of North America](#)
[Sixth and I](#) (DC)
[Slingshot Fund list](#) (listing of innovative orgs)
[Tablet](#)
[Tribe 12](#) (Philly, 20s and 30s)
[T'ruah](#)
[Trybal Gatherings](#) (20s and 30s)
[UnOrthodox podcast](#)
[Valley Beit Midrash](#) (AZ)
[Yiddish Book Center](#)

**Know that one person can change history.
Is it you?; Tell your story.**

Do you know someone who has changed history in any way? What do you think it takes to change history, and what separates a crazy idea from a history-changing one? Have you had an idea you would want to act on? What does it mean to “tell your story”? What is your story, and how are you telling it in your life? What do you want to add to your story? Why is telling your story a way to fight anti-Semitism?

Deep Dive

As with any well-researched book, there are many sources quoted within *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*. If you are interested in diving in deeper and reading these sources on your own, they are listed here in order of appearance. The page number on which the reference appears is included in parentheses at the end of the citation, and all of the articles are links that can be clicked on to reach the original source.

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[Tunku Varadarajan, “Paul Berman Interview, The Flight of the Intellectuals.” *The Daily Beast*, July 2017. \(p. 153\)](#)

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JBC Book Clubs, a program of Jewish Book Council, provides resources and support for book clubs interested in reading books of Jewish interest. On the Jewish Book Council website, find thousands of book reviews, discussion questions and discussion guides, thematic reading lists, and more. JBC Book Clubs is a one-stop shop to build and enhance your book club's conversations—let us guide you on your literary journey.

Jewish Book Council, with roots dating back to 1925, is the only nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of Jewish-interest literature. For nearly 70 years, we have supported and celebrated Jewish authors and books, and used literature to bring people together for meaningful discussions around Jewish life, identity, and culture.

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