

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PUT IN YOUR THOUGHT BUBBLE TO BE ABLE TO STEP UP?

Finding models to help us step up against antisemitism



Have you ever found yourself suddenly placed in a position which demanded of you step up, speak up and exercise leadership in a way that you were not expecting, or prepared for?

Spend some thinking, identify the moment (it can be related to anything) and in the boxes below write five words that describe how that experience made you feel.

Five empty rounded rectangular boxes for writing words.

THE PRESENT MOMENT: WHO ARE OUR MODELS?

With a rise in antisemitism taking place around the world at this moment, many people are finding themselves in positions which demand of them to speak out in ways that they never had to before - in person, online, on campuses, in classrooms, at work, at the gym - to counteract both misinformation and forces of hate.

◆ It raises the question, who do we look to when we need models to guide us?

Sometimes those models are those already in the public sphere. Other times we might find them in more private contexts.



Source: <https://twitter.com/GovKathyHochul/status/1719004345788703148>



IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In late October 2023, in response to threats against Jewish students at Cornell University in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul visited the Cornell campus in Ithaca to condemn the hate speech and present the steps her administration was taking to keep Jewish students on campus safe.

On her visit, she said:

“We will not tolerate threats or hatred or antisemitism...If you’re going to engage in these harmful actions, hate crimes, breaking our laws, you will be caught, and you will be prosecuted.”

And, she made sure the Jewish students knew they were not alone, saying: “I want them to know that they’re not alone, that they have the State of New York backing them. The terrorists, the people who are threatening them, will get no refuge here.”

- ◆ What is your reaction to Governor Hochul’s visit and statement?
- ◆ If you can, name other public figures who have made public statements and declarations against acts of antisemitism and hate.

IN PRIVATE CONTEXTS

- ◆ Think of one person in your close circle who you have observed take an active voice against antisemitism in recent weeks/months – either in public or more private settings.
- ◆ Who is it?
- ◆ What about this person inspires you?
- ◆ What challenges do you think they encountered?



JEWISH ANCHOR

The Biblical book of Esther can serve as a model for how and when we can step up and assume leadership qualities, even in moments when we do not necessarily expect to. (Or want to.) Esther's rise to power in ancient Persia – a Jewish woman in a foreign court – is what ultimately saved her people from Genocide. However, when she first became Queen of Persia, she kept her Jewish identity a secret, and only revealed it to King Ahasuerus when she needed to save her people from the evil decree of Haman. As a person, she was less inclined to take bold and actionable steps, and had to grow into that part of who she was. From what can be inferred about her, she did not seem to enjoy the limelight. And yet, when she felt she had to step up to save her people, she did.



The artist, Sandro Botticelli painted an evocative scene of Esther, Esther at the Palace Gate, in 1475. Spend a moment looking at the image above.

In this image we might imagine Esther contemplating when and how to approach the King to reveal her own Jewish identity and intercede on behalf of the Jewish people in the face of hate.

- ◆ Imagine there is a thought bubble above Esther's head. What do you think she was thinking at this moment?
- ◆ What do you think she said to herself to be able to muster the courage to approach the King, reveal her Jewish identity, and plead for the savior of the Jews?
- ◆ Fill in the thought bubble.



TAKE ACTION: WHAT IS IN YOUR THOUGHT BUBBLE?

Now think of your own moment that demands of you step up in the face of antisemitism, even when hard, and not in your nature.

- ◆ What will you say to yourself the next time you find yourself being challenged to face antisemitism in a way that you may not have been ready or prepared for?
- ◆ Fill in the thought bubble.



Now, look at what you wrote above Esther and what you wrote for yourself.

- ◆ Are they similar in any way?
- ◆ Does having a precedent in the Jewish tradition help you face the antisemitism of this moment?
- ◆ End with making one commitment today that will push you to step out of your comfort zone when it comes to responding to antisemitic rhetoric at this time.
 - ◆ I commit to

