

Allyship as a Practice

Elective

AUTHOR(S):	Sarra Alpert
SUMMARY:	The idea of allyship can have lots of complications but in many ways comes down to: how do we show up for each other? Allyship is a powerful offering that we can make to each other, and it is essential to learn how to do so with deep listening, individualized care and authenticity. In this session, we'll explore that learning, drawing on our own and others' experiences as well as the ways that experts and activists have developed excellent tools for us to practice. We'll be working towards better tools for supporting each other's' particular needs and experiences, and helping our campers learn to do so as well.
TOPIC(S):	Identity, Community Building, Relationship Building, Social Justice
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will deepen their understandings of how to practice healthy allyship and will develop new tools for how to best be in strong supportive ally relationships.
AUDIENCE:	Staff or older campers
TIMING:	90 min
APPENDICES:	Handouts in process
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Handouts, notecards, pens.
SET-UP DETAILS:	Any space will be fine as long as it has accessible walls to post notecards on during one of the writing/sharing activities.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Intro/framing:

This session will be based around some key principles and ideas of allyship:

- Allyship as an offering rather than an assumption;
- Allyship as an ongoing practice;
- Allyship as a way of looking at the world and your role in it.

Definitions:

- We'll start by working from some group definitions (see handout #1) of some key terms.
 - Have everyone take time to read through most of them on their own (all except for the "allyship" ones).
 - Have everyone get into pairs and share with each other about 1-2 new learnings from the definitions.
 - Come back together. Take a few minutes to take questions.
 - Read the "ally" definitions together. Ask a few people to share what's resonating for them in those definitions and/or what they have questions about.

Personal Reflections:

- Give everyone time to write or draw out their responses to the following:
 - When have you felt like you didn't fit into some aspect of the majority identity or experience?
 - What kind of support did you need?
 - Who was able to offer it to you? How did they figure out what you needed?
 - Who are other folks in your life who you know have sometimes been one of a minority identity or experience in a group space that you shared with them?
 - Were you able to support them through the challenges of that? If so, what did you do and how did you figure out whether/how to do it? If not, what got in the way?
- Storytelling: Get into pairs or trios to tell a story about one of the particular personal examples that showed up in your maps/writing. If their story involves sharing about someone else's identities or experiences, they should make sure not to protect that person's anonymity.

Learning:

- Split into small groups to read a set of additional texts (some groups should read the Yavilah Mccoy piece, while other groups should read both the Mia McKenzie and the Kolot Chayeinu pieces) that each help to further explain a particular aspect of allyship. Discuss:
 - How do the ideas that the author is expressing help to support, challenge, or expand the definitions we started with?
 - What can you draw out from the article as a few principles or practices of allyship?
- Come back together and share back each group's learning so that we can develop a shared list of best practices.

Camp:

- Give everyone a few notecards or small pieces of paper. They should anonymously write down their responses to the following:
 - When do you feel most at home in your camp community?
 - When do you feel like an outsider in your camp community?
 - What's one way that you wish your camp community was better at meeting a more diverse range of needs or experiences?
- As people finish writing their notecards, they should come up to paste them on the wall, grouped by question. Everyone should take some time to read over the responses. As they read them over, they should feel free to note down:
 - Anything that someone else celebrates as part of their camp environment that you wish could be said about your camp environment.
 - If you see anything that another camp seems to not be doing especially well and where you've seen strong relevant tools used at your camp.
 - Any particular themes or commonalities that you notice.
- Gather back together and open up for discussion and Q&A to each other:
 - If you saw something that someone else wrote as a positive aspect of their camp environment and you think your camp could learn from that, this is a chance to ask someone from that camp (it doesn't necessarily have to be the person who wrote it down) to share more about how they accomplish that element of their camp culture.
 - If you know of things that your camp is doing especially around diversity/inclusion/allyship culture and which would address some of the concerns that folks identified at other camps, this is a great chance to share about those things and take questions from other folks.
 - Another interesting approach here could be to have a fishbowl-style conversation where a smaller group talks in more depth about some of the commonalities they saw in how these issues show up at our camps and what they think can be done about that.

Closing

- Read together the "Nirtzah - When We Imagine Ourselves Allies" piece. Take a few minutes to discuss and add any final principles that you draw from this to add to your list of allyship practices.
- In pairs or trios, come up with a physical way to show one idea for what it looks like (either literally or metaphorically) to show up for others as a strong, available, supportive ally (maybe as one of the specific relationships that came up in the Nirtzah piece - i.e. Moses with Israelites). Share your representation with the rest of the group.

Definitions

Identity: Our identity consists of the various characteristics we use to categorize and define ourselves and the various characteristics that are constructed by those around us.

Sometimes people only think of identity as those visible characteristics of a person, but sometimes our identity characteristics are invisible. (Teaching Tolerance)

Marginalization: The social process of becoming or being made unimportant and without worth, especially as a group within a larger society. (www.memidex.com/)

Targeted group: Social groups that are: explicitly negatively valued; treated as inferior, abnormal, or dependent; targeted for violence (both direct and indirect) by government and/or other social groups; and given limited access to resources and social power. (adapted from National Conference for Community and Justice)

Privilege: Unearned benefits conferred upon members of mainstream or dominant groups (in the US, these include male, white, heterosexual, affluent, young, able-bodied, and/or Christian) at the expenses of others. “Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do.” (Peggy McIntosh). Privilege can manifest through visible advantages such as access to wealth, professional opportunities, and social status, as well as more subtly through, for example, freedom of behavior and setting the standard of normality against which others are judged. Dominant group members may be unaware of their privilege or take it for granted. (Open Source Leadership Strategies Inc.)

Intersectionality

1. An analysis developed by Professor Kimberle Crenshaw, positing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. (adapted from White Privilege Conference Handbook)
2. Building from the above theory, the idea that exposing [one's] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life. (adapted from Intergroup Resources)

Solidarity: Unity or agreement based on shared interests and objectives; long-term mutual support within and between groups. (Department of Inclusion & Multicultural Engagement, Lewis & Clark College)

Liberation: A state of being grounded in one's evolving identity, free movement, free from bias, imposed expectations, control, and violence towards one's place in the world, including the policing of it. Liberation is an ongoing process and practice of self-governance, accountability, responsibility, and transparency with oneself and within one's community. It requires ongoing acknowledgement of oppression in all its forms and on all levels of society, reparations, meaningful reconciliation directed by those targeted by oppression, and transformational changes on personal, positional, institutional and systemic levels of society. (The Anti-Oppression Network)

Allyship begins when a person of privilege seeks to support a marginalized individual or group. It is a practice of unlearning and relearning, and is a life-long process of building relationships based on trust, consistency and accountability with marginalized individuals or groups. Allyship is not an identity, nor is it self-defined. (PeerNet BC)

Always center the impacted

Listen & learn from those who live in the oppression

Leverage your privilege

Yield the floor

(Kayla Reed: organizer, activist)

Excerpts from a Rosh Hashanah sermon by Rabbi Ellen Lippmann and Ernst Mohamed, rabbi and congregant of Kolot Chayeinu in Brooklyn, 2012:

Ellen: The hard truths I have learned are: that even as a Jew I am a white person, like it or not; that Kolot is not as all-warm-welcoming as I thought or hoped; that people of color may have a different experience of Kolot than do white people; that we white people inevitably act from the place of privilege that we have inherited. We are not bigots here at Kolot, but we have been living unexamined lives. Our race task force is designed to help us all examine. Its members also hope to help Kolot become an anti-racist congregation, which might start by looking at how we do what we do, or as someone phrased it, who gets invited to the meeting before the meeting? Who is on the board? Whose priorities are put forward?

For me, it has been a wonder to sit and plan with the Race Task Force. As one member says, "As we are facing this, we are doing it together and slowly, looking at each other, finding it not as scary as we feared to say hard things. We are in it together, not leaving anyone behind, making space to disagree, but not with rancor."

Ernst: It is easy to get defensive and many here may want to say, "I am not a racist!!! There are real racists out there!" There are. But we have to start here. It is so easy to blame others. It is much harder to look within, to bend our knees and dig for truth, as we encounter all 70 human faces and more.

From “How to Tell the Difference Between Real Solidarity and 'Ally Theater”

Mia McKenzie, <http://www.blackgirldangerous.com>

Listen. Solidarity is action. That’s it. What we DO in solidarity is all that counts. How people with privilege listen to what marginalized groups ask of them and do that is all that counts.

Claiming “ally” as an identity and then using it to shield oneself from the criticism of those one says they’re an “ally” to is the opposite of solidarity.

Someone putting “ally” in their bio is a really easy way to let me know that they are, in fact, a cookie-seeker and, #sorynotsorry, but I don’t bake....

If you’re a white and/or straight and/or cis and/or abled, etc. person trying to be in solidarity with oppressed people: before you jump up to perform “allyship” ask yourself, “is what I’m about to say or do in any way beneficial to the person I’m about to say or do it to? If so, how?”

If you can’t come up with a good answer, it’s likely just ally theater. Please back away from the stage.

Purim 2015: As Esther Fades to Black

Yavilah McCoy

As an African-American Jewish woman, I review the Purim story and am immediately drawn to the actions of Esther, an innocent victim turned heroine, and her ability to utilize the privilege and position of power granted to her to save the Jewish people from annihilation. From the perspective of my African-American-Jewish history, there are many lessons and similarities. As I read the megillah (Purim scroll), I recall 1853 and celebrate the actions of Sojourner Truth who spoke out against an unwilling White male Congress and compared them to King Achashverosh and herself to Esther, a Jewish woman passing for a gentile, who was able to not only out herself as a Jew, but also summon up the courage to stand before the king as a messenger of truth and a representative of an oppressed people. As I read the megillah, I think of our majority White, Male and Republican Congress in 2015, and wonder who Sojourner Truth would name as the King Achashverosh and Queen Esthers of our time.

As a Black Jewish woman, I am reminded of the words of Mordechai to Esther at the hour of despair, “Ki Im Hacharash, Tacharishi... Umi Yodeah Im Laet Hazot Higaat Lamalchut?” “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place and you and your house will perish, and who knows but that you have come to your position for such a time as this?” When I hear these words I think of the killing of unarmed Black Men, and the national work to make “Black Lives Matter” and the many Jewish voices that are still silent at this hour. I think of the struggle in Black communities to endure poverty, gain employment, secure fair wages, resist prison and avoid death on the street, and I consider my position as a Black woman living in an affluent and predominantly Jewish white suburb, who has achieved gainful employment, but still worries about my White neighbors’ responses to my son and husband walking the streets of our neighborhood after dark. I think of the persistent racial inequities in education, voting rights, and immigration, and the need in each of these areas for champions who will answer the

question posed by Mordechai to Esther and utilize what privilege, power, access and relationships we have to stand for the oppressed and compel our country toward change.

As an African-American Jewish woman, I endeavor to see the hand of God in all things. How else do I and my people, both of them, come to be standing here, still whole, after all that has been done to erase and diminish our existence on this earth? How else do I, a Black-Jewish woman who herself has been targeted and racially profiled by my local police, still pray to the God of Israel for a better day? The Purim story is descriptive of a time when we are told that the face of God was hidden. The Jewish-French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas believed that seeing the face of another was always a transformational experience, because once we've looked into the eyes of another, we tend to find ourselves ethically (and infinitely) obligated to them because the face, more than anything, conveys both the uniqueness and the universality of what it means to be human. As I consider the current state of unrest that our country is facing regarding the deaths of so many young black men at the hands of police and the continuing struggle for deep and abiding racial equity and justice, I look to the Purim concept of "Hester Panim," the concealed face of God, for inspiration. The concept of hester panim, teaches me, like Levinas, to endeavor to see the "face" of all those that have been slain and remember them. It also reminds me that the Purim story is filled with actions that appear to be random, but none of them are coincidence. Each and every action, is eventually pivotal toward the eventual liberation of the Jewish people. As I consider the current #BlackLivesMatter statistic that every 28 hours a black man, woman, or child is murdered by police or vigilante law enforcement, I have to believe that these deaths are not meant to be in vain and that through our continued protest and closer scrutiny of what has been and must be done, in each case, we will reach "v'nehefochu," the ability to overturn a decree of death, for others. As we close our megillot this year, greet each other with joy, and say the phrase in unison "Layehudim Hayta Ora V'simcha," "To the Jews there was light and celebration!" May this light and celebration be the result of our continued commitment and combined action with others to bring Black liberation, human liberation, and lasting equity and justice closer to a reality for all of us.

Nirtzah - When We Imagine Ourselves Allies, written by Sarah Barasch and Graie Hagans, from the Jews for Racial & Economic Justice Mixed Multitudes Haggadah Supplement

In most discussions of racial justice, interracial families are often made completely invisible. This is ironic, as these families constantly deal in a microcosm with the larger issues of white supremacy and thus have much to teach us. This piece began as a way of addressing the complexities of oppression within interracial families and pushing against how abstract and disconnected most conceptions of “allyship” can feel for white members of interracial families. The language of fighting for family may make more sense for everyone to acknowledge the experiences of an interracial family unit and of a larger multiracial human family. The Exodus story is filled with allies and oppressors, with many of the characters inhabited both roles at different points. The Exodus story, and particularly the story of wandering afterwards, is populated by family members wrestling with what it means to be allied with each other. Since our current struggles can feel like we too are in a desert, let us pause in the desert this Passover to listen for justice, just as the Midrash tells us that entire Jewish family did at Sinai. If everywhere is a desert then the sand we stand is always shifting, and so is our relationship to each other. Let us take a moment to imagine ourselves thus...

Sometimes we are Pharaoh’s daughter... choosing “compassion” without hesitation, pulling the baby out of the river and giving him a home. But when we pull him from the river, he is taken from his people and forced to pretend to be someone else in order to survive. And we know that he is family and we love him as our son, but we ask impossible things of him. We ask him to pass for Egyptian, we cut him off from his heritage in the hopes of keeping him safe. We do not recognize the futility, that safety is always an illusion. We do not use our proximity to power to try to change the situation for other babies like him. We can sleep at night because we tell ourselves we are good people living in a cruel system, but we do not admit that we could change things if only we would convince our synagogue to support the protests, or to at least stop hiring police officers to protect High Holiday services without questioning whether they make all of our community feel safe.

Sometimes we are Moses... conditionally white with Cossack eyes and a quick sunburn, passing but keeping a suitcase by the door just in case. Feeling mostly safe in the palace walls, guilty but not knowing why, until one day everything changes. Until one day we see the Egyptian striking the Israelite and know he is hurting our family—and this time we do not run away. We know that Moses killed the taskmaster, but we do not do not strike anyone, knowing that violence will not lead to greater justice for our families because violence by those of us who ‘pass’ would be met with greater violence and retaliation against those who cannot hide behind conditional whiteness. So sometimes we are standing next to our Black husband at the protest, and we are both chanting peacefully but the policeman strikes him and all we can do is choose not to run away, to stand firmly with our hands raised so that we both get hit. Because family means if you hit him then you hit me.

Sometimes we are Miriam... hoping our brother Moses survives the river, knowing danger and feeling unsafe in our Jewish skin, knowing what it means to be hated because of who we are. And then we are Miriam who, given time, a few chapters later mocks Moses’ Black wife Tziporah. She confounds us because she is us, Ashkenazim with conditional whiteness and generations distanced from legal discrimination, not seeing the contradictions in our own character. We are white-skinned Jews celebrating Fifty Years of Freedom Summer and putting on commemorative panels but escorting out anyone who yells #BlackLivesMatter. Or, acknowledging Tziporah but refusing to defend her interracial, interfaith family when Jewish talking heads warn that families like hers are the end of Judaism. We are descendants of slaves who do not yell back that Moses had a Black wife and Black children and that #BlackLivesMatter to our people whether or not we acknowledge it.

Sometimes we are Tziporah... fully capable of defending ourselves but in need of a few more allies. Ready to be an ally when it means leaving our family, circumcising our children, and wandering in the desert for decades. And some of us are still Tziporah. Marveling at how quickly you forget this when our children are killed by the police. Wondering if you will claim us as family when the news paints our children as deserving of

their deaths. We wonder why we stand in community to say Kaddish for those we've lost and stand on street corners shouting for justice for those who have been stolen from us. We wonder why our many parts cannot become whole and why our children cannot be a blessing. Picking up a sign because we have no choice, hoping to see you at the protests even though you do.

Sometimes something miraculous happens... an event out of time, an act of God who comes with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and leads us out of Egypt. And in the desert we become a people, shedding the divisions and mentality of slavery so that we become whole—none of us palace people, all of us desert people. Wandering together towards wholeness. So that Miriam, a prophet who is human, can choose to change. When she is struck with illness as punishment for her slander of Tzipporah, she can heal and choose new words. And her healing prayer spoken by her brother Moses—El Na Refa Na La—becomes liturgy that can inspire us to overcome the disease of our own racism. We can choose to challenge the narrative, write an editorial or interrupt a General Assembly, tell the pundits that we have always been an Erev Rav, a mixed multitude, and if you do not embrace all of our family, then you cannot love any of us. We can choose to pick up our sign and join them in the street, to face the tear gas and the rubber bullets because they are killing our family.

Sometimes, we are all in the street, and the street becomes Sinai... but only if everyone shows up, Moses and Miriam and Bat Pharaoh and Tzipporah and all the rest, wrestling with the commandments and trying to hear God. Maybe we are Tzipporah and Bat Pharaoh meeting at a Mother's March. And maybe we talk about being there because we are both mothers and Mike Brown could have been our son. Or maybe we talk about having ensured the survival of the Jewish people, yet isn't it ironic that now our community will not march for anyone that looks like us? Or maybe we have nothing to talk about, but a look passes between us and God is there.

And maybe our imagining their conversation is a holy act that we desperately need. Because sometimes, if we imagine the rally as Sinai then we listen for God, and when we do we get one step further through the desert and one step closer to redemption.