

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



# IT COULD HAPPEN HERE

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## Discussion Guide

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### About the Book

It's almost impossible to imagine that unbridled hate and systematic violence could come for us or our families. But it has happened in our lifetimes in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. And it could happen here.

In this urgent book, Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the storied ADL (the Anti-Defamation League), sounds an alarm, warning that this age-old trend is gathering momentum in the United States — and that violence on a more catastrophic scale could be just around the corner. But it doesn't have to be this way. Greenblatt offers a bracing primer on how we — as individuals, as organizations, and as a society — can strike back against hate.

### About the Author

Jonathan Greenblatt is CEO of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League), the world's leading anti-hate organization with a distinguished record of fighting antisemitism and advocating for just and fair treatment to all. Jonathan joined ADL in 2015 after serving in the White House as special assistant to President Obama and director of the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation. He joined the government after a distinguished career in business as a successful social entrepreneur and corporate executive: he cofounded Ethos Brands, the company that launched Ethos Water (acquired by Starbucks, 2005), founded All for Good (acquired by Points of Light, 2011), and served as a senior executive at realtor.com (acquired by News Corp, 2014).

### Book Website

For more information, please log on to the book website: [itcouldhappenherebook.org](http://itcouldhappenherebook.org)

## Discussion Group Questions

**Question 1:** The book is titled “It Could Happen Here: Why America is Tipping from Hate to the Unthinkable and How We Can Stop It.”

- What are your thoughts about the meaning of the title?
- Where do you think we are on the ‘tipping point’ of hate and why?
- What do you think is fueling this hate?

**Question 2:** In the first part of the title – ‘It Could Happen Here’ –

- What do you think the ‘It’ is?
- Do you think it could happen here? Please explain and elaborate.
- Could it happen during our lifetime? Please explain and elaborate.
- To what extent do you think the threat is real?

**Question 3:** In Chapter 6, Jonathan refers to the ‘American Berserk.’

- Do you agree with this theory? Why or why not?
- What happens if we allow hate to go unchecked?
- What does that look like?
- Do you think we’re experiencing just another blip of rising hatred, or could this be the moment where the U.S. becomes unraveled? Explain and elaborate.

**Question 4:** If we believe we are on that tipping point, or close to it, how do we avoid the unthinkable in this country?

- What do you see as some strategies and opportunities to get us off this track?
- What can we do as individuals to change the path?
- What can we do as a society to change this path?

**Question 5:** In the book Jonathan quotes Oren Segal (Vice President of ADL Center on Extremism): *“I always remind myself. For every shooting or bombing or insurrection or instance of online harassment, there are many stories of people rejecting it and pushing back against hate.”* (p.37)

- Why do you think Jonathan included this quote early in the book?
- Do you agree with Oren Segal? Explain and elaborate.
- What are examples of this concept in your life or examples you’ve seen in the world?

**Question 6:** Jonathan references a framework that ADL promotes to help individuals find their voices and respond to hate: ‘Speak Up, Share Facts, Show Strength’ (the three S’s).

- What does this framework mean to you?
- Do you like the idea of this framework? Please explain and elaborate.
- What are some ways in which you have spoken up, shared facts and shown strength?
- To what extent do you think this is key to helping us respond to hate?
- Is this something that you could personally commit to? Why or why not?
- Please share personal examples of when you spoke up, shared facts, or showed strength.

**Question 7:** The book discusses the unlikely friendship between Jonathan Greenblatt and Damien Patton, a former white supremacist who then founded and became CEO of Banjo.

- What are your thoughts on how Damien, who is Jewish, became a white supremacist, and the path his life took years later?
- What are your thoughts on the evolution of Jonathan and Damien's relationship?
- What did you learn from reading about that relationship?
- Do you agree with the mindset of 'teshuvah' (repentance)? Why or why not?

**Question 8:** In the book, Jonathan talks about 'Counsel Culture' vs 'Cancel Culture'.

- What is meant by the difference between counsel culture and cancel culture? To what extent do you agree or disagree and why?
- How does this tie into the belief of 'teshuvah'?
- Has cancel culture impacted your life? If so, how?

**Question 9:** The book references ADL's Pyramid of Hate and how hate can escalate from thoughts to words to acts of violence.

- Do you see how hate can grow from 'Biased Attitudes' to 'Acts of Bias' to 'Systemic Discrimination' to 'Bias Motivated Violence'? Share your thoughts.
- To what extent do you think bias is universal and inherent?
- How can we challenge bias in ourselves, others, and society?
- How do we stop biased attitudes from escalating to acts of bias?

**Question 10:** We continue to witness the rise of antisemitic incidents from the white supremacist shootings in Pittsburgh and Poway, to the hostage situation in Colleyville.

- What do you think is fueling the rise in antisemitism?
- Do you think antisemitism is rising or cresting? Share your thoughts.

**Question 11:** Social media is mentioned throughout the book in terms of its impact on the rise of hate. Jonathan refers to the 'hate boosters' – those who promote harassment on platforms ranging from mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to smaller platforms such as 8chan and Gab.

- How much responsibility do you think social media companies bear for the rise in hate?
- What do you think needs to be done about online hate?
- To what extent do you think social media companies are or are not monitoring themselves? Why do you think that is the case?
- Social platforms use the arguments of First Amendment rights and freedom of speech. What are your thoughts about that?
- To what extent do you think we need stricter regulations? What would that look like?

**Question 12:** In the book, Jonathan calls on businesses to step up and use their voice to fight hatred.

- Do you think businesses have a moral (or other) obligation to push back against hate? Explain why.
- What do you think are the most powerful ways businesses can use their influence in the fight against hate?

**Question 13:** In the epilogue, Jonathan references The Book of Exodus when God calls out to Moses and Moses replies "He-ne-ni" ("Here I Am").

- How does this connect back to the calls to action in the book?
- What are your reflections about how "He-ne-ni" relates to your own life and what you can do?

**Question 14:** Jonathan dedicated this book to his grandfather who fled Nazi Germany. He also talks about his wife and her family who fled Iran in the mid-to-late 1980's to escape Ayatollah Khomeini's antisemitic and brutal governing.

- Do you have family members who were forced to flee their home country?
- What did they share with you? Do you know what they experienced?
- How has their experience impacted your thoughts and views about whether 'it could happen here'?
- As you read the book, did you think about their experiences in a new light? Share your thoughts.

**Question 15:** What were your thoughts and feelings at the end of the book?

- Are you more concerned or less? Share your thoughts.
- Do you have a 'Plan B' and if so, what is it?
- Do you feel a stronger call to action? Share your thoughts.
- What steps can you personally take?

## Facilitator's Guide – Notes for Each Question

**Question 1:** The book is titled “It Could Happen Here: Why America is Tipping from Hate to the Unthinkable and How We Can Stop It.”

- What are your thoughts about the meaning of the title?
- Where do you think we are on the ‘tipping point’ of hate and why?
- What do you think is fueling this hate?

### **FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- Hate today isn't just about antisemitism. Jews are the ‘canary in the coal mine’ – hatred often starts with Jews but doesn't end there.
- Hatred of all kinds has exploded in recent years – including racism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim bias, homophobia, anti-immigrant bias, and more.
- Specific examples where hate has manifested into acts of violence:
  - Charlottesville (White Nationalist March)
  - Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting (Pittsburgh)
  - Chabad Synagogue Shooting (Poway, CA)
  - Los Angeles (mob waving pro-Palestinian flags attacked Jewish diners)
  - Atlanta Massage Parlor Attacks (anti-Asian)
  - Charleston AME Church shooting in 2015
  - Pulse Nightclub (Orlando) shooting in 2016
  - Shooting in El Paso in 2019
- Factors fueling this hate:
  - Emboldened white supremacist extremism
  - Dehumanization of immigrants
  - Spread of neo-Nazi conspiracy theories like QAnon
  - Heightened political rhetoric and political divide: Jan 6th insurrection – the physical embodiment of the mainstreaming of hate over the past few years.
  - Economy: Deepening economic inequality; fueled tropes that Jews control the wealth in the US
  - Social Media: Platforms for propaganda; disinformation is now ubiquitous
  - Pandemic: Fueled Anti-Asian attacks (‘China flu’)

**Question 2: In the first part of the title – ‘It Could Happen Here’ –**

- What do you think the ‘It’ is?
- Do you think it could happen here? Please explain and elaborate.
- Could it happen during our lifetime? Please explain and elaborate.
- To what extent do you think the threat is real?

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- In the book, Jonathan talks about how ‘conspiratorial claims about a country or community can prompt hate and violence against any group.’ For example:
  - Attacks on Jewish people following the Israel/Palestine conflict May 2021
  - Attacks on Asian American people after political leaders blamed China for COVID
- Voter suppression laws could lead to two tiers of citizens
- Rise of White Supremacists along with the proliferation of firearms could lead to a time when regions of the U.S. become mini-white-majority ethno-states where Jewish people, Black people, and people of color and other marginalized communities are forced out.

**Question 3: In Chapter 6, Jonathan refers to the ‘American Berserk.’**

- Do you agree with this theory? Why or why not?
- What happens if we allow hate to go unchecked?
- What does that look like?
- Do you think we’re experiencing just another blip of rising hatred, or could this be the moment where the U.S. becomes unraveled? Explain and elaborate.

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- ‘American Berserk’ is based on the late novelist Philip Roth’s notion of ‘indigenous American berserk’.
- Roth suggested that American violence is not only native to Americans but intrinsic to them and that it lurks just beneath the surface and can be set off at any time.
- Roth believed that it partakes of the madness particular to mobs; and that you ignore it at your own peril.

**Question 4: If we believe we are on that tipping point, or close to it, how do we avoid the unthinkable in this country?**

- What do you see as some strategies and opportunities to get us off this track?
- What can we do as individuals to change the path?
- What can we do as a society to change this path?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- Discuss actions that can be taken:
  - Speak up. Share facts. Show strength.
  - Educate self to be able to counter antisemitic comments.
  - Educate friends, family, co-workers, neighbors.
  - Educate college students facing anti-Zionism, BDS and other forms of discrimination and hate
  - Engage in family conversations about current events and bias.
  - Monitor social media
  - Get involved in government at national or local level through advocacy
  - Create interfaith community connections
  - Recognize that there is responsibility at all levels:
    - Societal
    - Corporate
    - Individual

**Question 5: In the book Jonathan quotes Oren Segal (Vice President of ADL Center on Extremism): "I always remind myself. For every shooting or bombing or insurrection or instance of online harassment, there are many stories of people rejecting it and pushing back against hate." (p.37)**

- Why do you think Jonathan included this quote early in the book?
- Do you agree with Oren Segal? Explain and elaborate.
- What are examples of this concept in your life or examples you've seen in the world?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- After Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh, the community gathered for a vigil, Pittsburgh Muslim community raised funds for funeral expenses, and businesses provided free goods and services.
- Entire community came together in pain and outrage to push back against hate.

**Question 6:** Jonathan references a framework that ADL promotes to help individuals find their voices and respond to hate: ‘Speak Up, Share Facts, Show Strength’ (the three S’s).

- What does this framework mean to you?
- Do you like the idea of this framework? Please explain and elaborate.
- What are some ways in which you have spoken up, shared facts and shown strength?
- To what extent do you think this is key to helping us respond to hate?
- Is this something that you could personally commit to? Why or why not?
- Please share personal examples of when you spoke up, shared facts, or showed strength.

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- **Speak Up:** Interrupt bias and hate the moment you see it happen and do it intentionally and publicly. Ask a question or clarification. Explain the impact of the statement. Invoke a broader context and encourage others to see the world more expansively. Connect it to history and point out historical contexts.
- **Share Facts:** Many biases are rooted in a lack of knowledge, experience with and stereotypes about people who are different from us. Learn as much as you can about what is happening in the world around us, people who are different than you are and reflect on how to dispel misinformation and propaganda.
- **Show Strength:** Take positive action to prevent future acts from materializing. Challenge bias, hate and discrimination as allies and advocates for others, whether you know them or not, and whether they’re members of your identity group or not.

**Question 7:** The book discusses the unlikely friendship between Jonathan Greenblatt and Damien Patton, a former white supremacist who then founded and became CEO of Banjo.

- What are your thoughts on how Damien, who is Jewish, became a white supremacist, and the path his life took years later?
- What are your thoughts on the evolution of Jonathan and Damien’s relationship?
- What did you learn from reading about that relationship?
- Do you agree with the mindset of ‘teshuvah’ (repentance)? Why or why not?

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- Jonathan speaks to a belief in ‘teshuvah’ – repentance – where everyone should have the ability to atone for misdeeds and forgiveness.
- We have the duty to help in that endeavor if we can and not write anybody off.

**Question 8:** In the book, Jonathan talks about ‘Counsel Culture’ vs ‘Cancel Culture’.

- What is meant by the difference between counsel culture and cancel culture? To what extent do you agree or disagree and why?
- How does this tie into the belief of ‘teshuvah’?
- Has cancel culture impacted your life? If so, how?

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- Jonathan credits Nick Cannon (entertainer) for the concept of ‘counsel’ vs ‘cancel’ culture which is based on the belief that people who speak or behave in hateful ways can often be redeemed.
- Societal norms often tend toward ‘canceling’ people when they say something hateful, but moral censure should be used only when someone expresses no repentance or desire to learn from their mistakes.
- We should try to educate and work with those who have espoused hatred rather than simply judge them.

**Question 9:** The book references ADL's Pyramid of Hate and how hate can escalate from thoughts to words to acts of violence.

- Do you see how hate can grow from 'Biased Attitudes' to 'Acts of Bias' to 'Systemic Discrimination' to 'Bias Motivated Violence'? Share your thoughts.
- To what extent do you think bias is universal and inherent?
- How can we challenge bias in ourselves, others, and society?
- How do we stop biased attitudes from escalating to acts of bias?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- ADL's Pyramid of Hate illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society. It shows biased behaviors growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels.
- If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or "normal," it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted.
- When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.

**Question 10:** We continue to witness the rise of antisemitic incidents from the white supremacist shootings in Pittsburgh and Poway, to the hostage situation in Colleyville.

- What do you think is fueling the rise in antisemitism?
- Do you think antisemitism is rising or cresting? Share your thoughts.

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- Social Media: Social platforms providing voice for white extremists and other espousers of hate from mainstream platforms (Facebook and Twitter) to smaller sites such as 8chan and Gab (little moderation and no policing on these sites).
- COVID: Pandemic fueled conspiracy theories that Jews are manipulating COVID-19 vaccine to achieve world domination.
- Israel/Palestine Conflict: Fueled rise in anti-Zionist rhetoric and attacks
- Political Divide: Hate is becoming mainstream and accepted

**Question 11:** Social media is mentioned throughout the book in terms of its impact on the rise of hate. Jonathan refers to the ‘hate boosters’ – those who promote harassment on platforms ranging from mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to smaller platforms such as 8chan and Gab.

- How much responsibility do you think social media companies bear for the rise in hate?
- What do you think needs to be done about online hate?
- To what extent do you think social media companies are or are not monitoring themselves? Why do you think that is the case?
- Social platforms use the arguments of First Amendment rights and freedom of speech. What are your thoughts about that?
- To what extent do you think we need stricter regulations? What would that look like?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

In the book, Jonathan puts forth the 3 excuses for why social media companies aren't monitoring themselves:

- #1. They espouse ‘First Amendment’ and freedom of speech.
  - Jonathan counters that social media companies have a moral obligation, in addition to a legal obligation, to monitor hate.
- #2. There is no real economic punishment for hosting hate speech.
  - Social media sites are shielded from lawsuits by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act – “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”
- #3. Hate online makes profits by driving more clicks.
  - Social media companies don't want to do anything that impacts their cash cow – any changes in algorithms impacts advertising revenue.

**Question 12:** In the book, Jonathan calls on businesses to step up and use their voice to fight hatred.

- Do you think businesses have a moral (or other) obligation to push back against hate? Explain why.
- What do you think are the most powerful ways businesses can use their influence in the fight against hate?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:**

- Businesses can and should engage in public advocacy.
- Businesses must build a more respectful and tolerant society and be willing to make the difficult choice on the sacrifice of short-term profits.
- Customers, employees, and shareholders are increasingly rewarding businesses that deliver on social issues.

**Question 13:** In the epilogue, Jonathan references The Book of Exodus when God calls out to Moses and Moses replies “He-ne-ni” (“Here I Am”).

- How does this connect back to the calls to action in the book?
- What are your reflections about how “He-ne-ni” relates to your own life and what you can do?

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- In the Book of Exodus, after reassurances from God, Moses accepts the call to duty.
- It all starts with Moses showing up, and loudly and unequivocally saying, Here I Am.
- While we might think we’re powerless against the forces of hate, we are indeed strong.
- We can take steps as individuals and create our story of courage.
- The freedoms we enjoy today are hard won, delivered through sacrifices of countless other in prior generations who stepped up and said, Here I Am.

**Question 14:** Jonathan dedicated this book to his grandfather who fled Nazi Germany. He also talks about his wife and her family who fled Iran in the mid-to-late 1980’s to escape Ayatollah Khomeini’s antisemitic and brutal governing.

- Do you have family members who were forced to flee their home country?
- What did they share with you? Do you know what they experienced?
- How has their experience impacted your thoughts and views about whether ‘it could happen here’?
- As you read the book, did you think about their experiences in a new light? Share your thoughts.

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- Share stories of grandparents, great-grandparents or other relatives who fled Europe during the Holocaust.
- Share stories of other refugees who fled antisemitic or brutal governing (i.e., Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine).

**Question 15:** What were your thoughts and feelings at the end of the book?

- Are you more concerned or less? Share your thoughts.
- Do you have a ‘Plan B’ and if so, what is it?
- Do you feel a stronger call to action? Share your thoughts.
- What steps can you personally take?

**FACILITATOR’S NOTES:**

- For some, Plan B may entail emigrating to Israel.
- Calls to action can range from family discussions to business decisions to political activism.