

*Reflections from
Authors and Advocates*

On Being Jewish Now

Edited by Zibby Owens

with the Founding Team of
Artists Against Antisemitism

Book Club Kit

Discussion Questions

1. Which essays surprised you most in their perspective or tone, and why?
2. How do the writers navigate the tension between private identity and public visibility as Jews today?
3. What role does memory—whether of family, community, or history—play across the collection?
4. Several contributors wrestle with generational responsibility. How does the book illustrate what is “passed down” beyond tradition itself?
5. How do the essays illuminate differences between living as Jews in America versus globally?
6. Were there certain moments throughout the collection where you saw hope, resilience, or creativity emerging in the face of antisemitism?
7. Some essays lean into spirituality, while others focus on culture or activism. How do these approaches complement—or even challenge—one another?
8. Which story or perspective prompted you to reconsider your own assumptions about Jewish identity?
9. How do the writers balance grief, anger, and humor in responding to October 7 and its aftermath?
10. What do you think this anthology reveals about the diversity of Jewish voices today?
11. Did any of the essays spark connections to your own experiences of faith, heritage, or belonging?
12. If a sequel to this book were written in five years, what themes or voices would you hope to see included?
13. For non-Jewish readers, which essays helped you better understand Jewish life, culture, or struggle in ways you hadn’t before?
14. How do the contributors’ experiences resonate with, or differ from, challenges faced by other communities you’re familiar with? What can be learned across those connections?

Adrienne's Challah Recipe

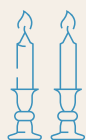
From the essay “I
Do It for Them (But
Mostly for Me)”
by Brenda Janowitz

Ingredients

- 2 packages instant yeast
- 1 tsp. salt
- One stick of butter or 6 Tbsp. canola oil, plus more to grease the bowl
- Honey, to taste
- 5–6 Tbsp. sugar
- 4 eggs
- 4–6 cups flour, plus more for kneading
- Chocolate chips (optional)

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Combine both packages of instant yeast with 1 ¼ cups of warm water (approximately 110 degrees). Sit and let the mixture proof for about 10 minutes. It should become frothy.
3. Add the salt, then the butter, and mix either by hand or with a stand mixer.
4. Add honey and mix (eyeball the honey—I use a lot).
5. Add the sugar and mix. (Adrienne uses 5 Tbsp. I use 6 rounded Tbsp!)
6. Add the eggs, one at a time, and mix.
7. Add the flour, one cup at a time, mixing until incorporated between the additions, at least 4 cups total. But you might need anywhere from 5–6 cups, depending on how sticky it is. Add more flour if needed.
8. Take the dough out of the mixer (or out of the bowl if mixing by hand), and, using more flour on the counter, knead it for 5 to 10 minutes. Then put it into a new greased bowl or pot to rise. Let it rise in a warm spot, covered, for an hour or two. The dough should double in size.
9. Once the dough has risen, I like to “punch” it down. Then take the dough out of the bowl/pot and knead it for another 5 to 10 minutes. Put the dough back into the bowl/pot and let it rise again, covered, for an hour or two. The dough should again double in size.
10. Take the dough out of the bowl/pot and knead it for another 5 to 10 minutes. You will have enough dough for two challahs. Divide into two sections. In each section, divide it further into three equal parts to then braid. I usually make one plain, and one with chocolate chips added in. (Add chocolate chips after all the flour is added but before you take it out of the mixer.)
11. Let the challah rise on a cutting board or platter, covered, for another half-hour.
12. Then make an egg wash (one egg, plus a little water) and brush it on the tops of both loaves. Bake the loaves on baking sheets at 350 degrees for 40 minutes.



What is Shabbat?



Shabbat is a day of rest and observance, celebrated from just before sundown each Friday through the completion of nightfall on Saturday. Shabbat commemorates the completion of creation and is often observed in a synagogue, but it is also a time to pause from a busy week, connect with loved ones, enjoy meaningful conversations, share meals, and feel gratitude. Whether you're religious or not, everyone is welcome at a Shabbat table.

In fact, many secular Jews still celebrate Shabbat in their own way. Join us!



Shabbat Dinner Rituals

- 1. Light the candles:** Two candles mark the start of Shabbat, accompanied by a blessing.
- 2. Wine, challah, and blessings:** Judaism often sanctifies and celebrates joyous occasions with wine, and challah is the special bread for Shabbat. There are traditionally blessings over the wine and the challah before beginning the meal.
- 3. The meal:** Traditional Shabbat foods include matzah ball soup, roast chicken, brisket, kugel, and plenty of desserts—but you can have a Shabbat dinner with any type of food! Most importantly, the meal is an opportunity to appreciate the many blessings and wonderful people that can sometimes be taken for granted during a busy life. Take the time to ask meaningful questions and really listen to the answers, talk about the things in your week you'd like to leave behind and the things you are looking forward to in the week to come.



Host an *On Being Jewish Now* Shabbat Book Club!



Interested in participating? Host a Friday night dinner with some friends with the goal of unplugging from the outside world and connecting with each other. Discuss life, friendship, and, of course, some of your favorite essays from *On Being Jewish Now*! Use our challah recipe to bake your own challah and our discussion guide for a great conversation.

Invite your Jewish and non-Jewish friends, too, because Shabbat is for everyone!

Glossary

*****all words are Hebrew unless noted otherwise**

chaverim: friends or companions

Dayenu: it would have been enough; a popular Passover song

haftorah: to conclude; a short reading that follows the Torah reading

Hatikvah: "The Hope"; the national anthem of Israel

Havdalah: separation; the ceremony that marks the end of Shabbat and brings in the new week

kibbutz: gathering; a community where people voluntarily live and work together

kibitzing: Yiddish; to speak informally or chat

kiddush: a Jewish blessing over wine

kippa/kippah: the skullcap worn in public by Orthodox Jewish men or during prayer by other Jewish men; also called a *yarmulke*

mezuzah: doorpost; refers to a small parchment scroll with words of the Shema that is affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes

minyan: number or count; refers to the quorum of ten Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations in Judaism

mishpacha: family

mohel: a person who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision

motzi/hamotzi: a Jewish blessing over bread

olim: refers to immigrants, particularly Jewish immigrants to Israel

rachamim: compassion or mercy

sabra: refers to individuals born in Israel

schmatta: Yiddish term meaning rag; refers to the clothing or apparel industry, particularly the garment district

Shoah: calamity or catastrophe; the standard Hebrew term for the Holocaust

shul: Yiddish term for a Jewish place of worship; also called a synagogue

Siddur: the prayer book that contains the texts for daily, weekly, and holiday services

simcha: happiness or joy; refers to a Jewish private party or celebration

sukkah: a temporary hut or booth built for the Jewish festival of Sukkot

tallit: a rectangular prayer shawl with fringes on its four corners, worn by Jewish people during morning prayers and other significant religious occasions

Talmud: a central text in Judaism, acting as a comprehensive record of rabbinic teachings and interpretations spanning centuries

tefillah: prayer or "to judge oneself"; signifies self-reflection, a deep spiritual connection, and a conversation with God

teshuvah: return; signifies to a process, often observed during the High Holidays, of returning to a state of moral and spiritual purity by acknowledging wrongdoing, expressing regret, making amends, and resolving to not repeat immoral action

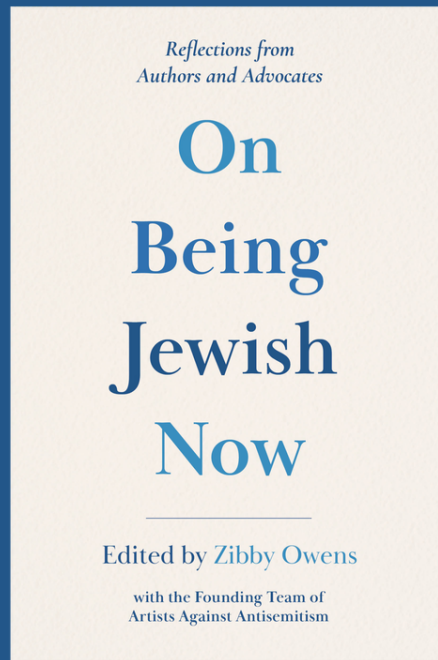
tzedakah: righteousness or justice; refers to the act of charitable giving

tzitzit: the fringes or tassels worn by observant Jews on the corners of their garments as a reminder to observe God's commandments

yeshiva: a Jewish school or college where students study religious texts

Yizkor: "May [God] Remember"; refers to a memorial prayer service in Judaism

Thank you for reading!



If you selected *On Being Jewish Now* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please follow and tag us on social media: [@zibbypublishing](https://twitter.com/zibbypublishing)

To read new weekly essays and find out about community events, follow the *On Being Jewish Now* Substack: onbeingjewishnow.substack.com

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