OH CANADA, OH ISRAEL
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Prime Minister Harper's historic mission to Israel this past month provides a wonderful opportunity to share with you some of my own thoughts about Israel. First I urge you to read Prime Minster Harper's remarks to the Knesset widely available online.

I agree with everything the Prime Minister said and applaud his conviction in making such important remarks on such a public stage. There were of course points where I wish he went further and others I found missing, but on the substance of what he said I agree wholeheartedly.

The Prime Minister's speech to the Knesset was remarkable for three reasons:

One: His clear and unflinching stand with Israel as a Jewish state and the eternal homeland of the Jewish people.

> "Our view on Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state is absolute and non-negotiable."

It should not be a courageous thing to make such a statement in defense of the only true democracy in the Middle East but we know that it is. When too many nations and leaders have abandoned Israel, sacrificing it on the pyre of moral relativism and political correctness; PM Harper made clear that Canada would not in his words, 'go along to get along'.

Two: His speech as remarkable because he spoke passionately and knowledgably about the rise of a new anti-Semitism masked as anti-Zionism in the world today and his refusal to single out Israel for criticism on the international stage. He acknowledged like all nations, Israel is not without fault, but in the Prime Minster's own words:

> "People who would never say they hate and blame the Jews for their own failings or the problems of the world, instead declare their hatred of Israel and blame the only Jewish state for the problems of the Middle East."

Third: It was remarkable because, while he passionately spoke about what all Israelis and Jews agree about (Israel as the eternal Jewish homeland and the rise of a new anti-Semitism, the threat of a nuclear Iran); he was silent on those things that divide us.

He didn't make more than a passing mention of the settlements on which Canada has a clear policy position. He didn't speak of the struggle for migrant worker rights in Israel, on which Canada could speak from its own experience. And he didn't speak about the rights of women and progressive Jews around the world to pray

and be recognized in Israel as they are in Jewish communities around the world – including here in Canada.

I say this too was remarkable because one of the most important roles a friend plays in our life is to tell us the truth, even when the truth is hard or painful for us to hear. Indeed some truths we will only hear when they come from the voice of a friend. I admire all that PM Harper said to the Knesset, I just wanted him to say more, because there is indeed more that needs to be said in support of Israel.

As we talk about Israel in our congregation I intend for us to speak about what the PM said and what he didn't say. It is my hope that our learning about Israel at Temple Sholom will attempt a broader perspective and understanding of the complexity of modern Israel. Not left vs. right, but fact vs. fiction.

My approach to our learning and talking about Israel at Temple Sholom is guided by six rules – taught to me by my teacher Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman of the Sholom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

1. Israel engagement in the synagogue must be based primarily on Jewish values as distinct from a factual, historical conversation.
2. The case for Israel, while based on Israel's accomplishments, must define Israel primarily in terms of being a project in formation - a work in progress. What Israel can be and not necessarily always what it is today.
3. Israel is a project of the Jewish people worldwide, not just of the Israelis. As Jews living *'chutz l'aretz'* (outside the land) we still have a vested and valid interest in Israel, and Israel must have an interest in us and our Judaism beyond our financial support.
4. When certain ideas and opinions are stifled or branded as non-loyal and treacherous, the result is not an increase in support and love for Israel but rather departures from the camp of supporters of Israel. A monopoly on what constitutes a loyal supporter of Israel does not generate greater loyalty but rather indifference and alienation.
    a. While all opinions and ideas of our members must be respected in the course of dialogue and debate there are organizational boundaries. As the spiritual leader of Temple Sholom I will not invite to address our congregation or support programs that promote involvement in the global boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement or efforts to deny Jewish self-determination or equality for all Israeli citizens.
5. We must be educated not merely as to the Jewish values at the root of Zionism but also in the general intellectual, moral and legal foundations which support the legitimacy of a homeland for the Jewish people and our right to defend it within obvious moral constraints.
6. We have to agree to disagree. Our disagreements are legendary, the Talmud is filled with great debates – some that go unresolved. Discourse without discord is our strength, not our weakness.

I invite you to join me as we deepen our support for Israel through study, prayer, advocacy and travel. I'm under no illusion that we will solve Israel's problems internally or externally in our shul, that's not my goal. Rather my mission as always is to teach and for all of us to learn so that we are more knowledgeable about Israel and are able to share that knowledge with the broader community.