RULES OF ENGAGEMENT:

How we talk and listen, when we talk about Israel at Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC

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As we talk about Israel in our congregation it is my hope that our learning about Israel at Temple Sholom will aspire to 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.