RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: How we talk and listen, when we talk about Israel in Vancouver BC
August 2015

We, the below signed rabbis have watched and listened with growing concern as our Vancouver Jewish community is becoming increasingly polarized when we talk about Israel.

Individuals and organizations have been verbally attacked, their loyalty to *Am Yisrael* and *Midinat Yisrael* questioned, funding threatened.

We know that these are challenging times to be a Jew and to be a supporter of Israel, we saw that ever so clearly on the campus of UBC this past spring, we see it on the pages of Facebook and in our congregations every week.

Amongst those of good intentions that pray and work for a safe, secure, democratic and peaceful Israel for all of its citizens there is passionate disagreement over the best path to take toward that eternal goal. Disagreement is part of any democracy and it is certainly part of the Jewish tradition and our rich history of Talmudic debate.

In the midst of these difficult times we are writing to caution that debate cannot become hate. Differences of opinion cannot become a gateway to libel and character assassination of individuals or organizations. *Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, all of the Jewish people are family, even when we disagree we are still family, we still care about each other and are responsible for each other.

To that end we as the spiritual leaders of our respective congregations and organizations have agreed to the following "Seven Rules of Engagement with Israel". We urge you to join us in this *brit* of understanding and respect.

1. We begin with the assumption that members of our congregations and those engaged in broad based Jewish organizations in Vancouver all care about Israel's security and want it to survive and thrive as a Jewish Democratic State. We will not vilify or ostracize those that see different paths to achieve that vision.
2. We are opposed to any form of BDS (Boycott, Sanction and Divestment Campaign) we see it as an effort to delegitimize the State of Israel and as a form of anti-Semitism. We will not partner with or support organizations that advocate BDS.
3. The case for Israel, while based on Israel's accomplishments, must define Israel primarily in terms of being a project, 'in-formation' - a complex work in progress. What Israel can be and not necessarily what it is today.
4. 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.
5. The same standards of pluralism and tolerance that have made Vancouver such an inclusive and stable Jewish community must apply as well to our discourse around Israel.
6. 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.
7. 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.

As we enter in to the month Elul and these coming High Holy Days we urge our communities to embark upon a serious process of *heshbon hanefesh* – a soul-accounting of how we treat and respect one another when we talk and listen regarding Israel or anything else in our community.

Shalu Shalom al Yisrael / We prayer for peace in the State of Israel and amongst the People of Israel there and right here in our Vancouver Jewish Community.