

# LISTENING AND SPEAKING RESPECTFULLY ABOUT ISRAEL

## (A pastoral letter from your rabbis)

We have been bound together by *ahavat Yisrael*, our love for our people and the State of Israel. In appreciation of our differences we have also valued *Machloket*, argument. It is part of our DNA. Filled with passion and conviction, however, the tenor of our arguments has sometimes caused us to descend into intra-Jewish anger, hatred, and even violence. Our Sages labeled these eruptions *sinat chinam*, "causeless hatred" and concluded that they have only led to catastrophe.

Yet, our Sages also saw the fruit of arguments that were conducted *l'shem Shamayim*, "for the sake of Heaven." They fervently believed that great minds, engaged in earnest seeking, could lead to better and richer solutions. They refrained from insisting on uniformity, seeking always to preserve minority as well as majority opinions. Emphasizing the importance of retaining multiple points of view, they coined the phrase, *Eilu v'elu divrei Elokim chayim*, "both these and those are the words of the living God." Hillel and Shammai, frequent disputants in the First Century, were the model.

Today, in debating issues and policies relating to Israel, we risk tearing the fabric of our own community. We believe that our multiple points of view stem from the same source: an unbreakable bond with our people and with Israel.

We rabbis represent a very wide spectrum of perspectives, and we differ in many ways including our positions on various Israeli governmental policies. However, just as we stand together in support of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state living in peace and security with its neighbors, so, too, on our commitment to treating one another with decency and to engaging in respectful dialogue do we speak in one voice.

As a contribution to the JCRC-Jewish Community Federation's declared *Year of Civil Discourse*, we, the undersigned rabbis, urgently call for a sincere effort by all parties in the debate to listen and to learn from one another even in the midst of passionate argument. We will model civil discourse in our synagogues and institutions and ask our congregants and constituents to join us. We ask that all individuals, groups, and communities pledge to open their hearts to healthy, respectful dialogue based upon our love for our people and for the State of Israel.

We believe that this path will help us to achieve the wisdom, justice and peace that we all seek.

Rabbi Ruth Abusch-Magder  
Rabbi Ruth Adar  
Rabbi Leslie Alexander  
Rabbi Camille Angel  
Rabbi Melanie Aron  
Rabbi Raphael Asher  
Rabbi Tsvi Bar-David  
Rabbi Michael Barenbaum  
Rabbi Ryan Bauer  
Rabbi Allen Bennett  
Rabbi Eve Ben-Ora  
Rabbi Josh Berkenwald  
Rabbi Allan Berkowitz  
Rabbi Shalom Bochner  
Rabbi Ira Book  
Rabbi David Booth  
Rabbi Mikki Bourne  
Rabbi Jim Brandt  
Rabbi Samuel Broude  
Rabbi Lee Bycel  
Rabbi Carol Caine  
Rabbi Ari Cartun  
Rabbi Steven Chester  
Rabbi Karen Citrin  
Rabbi Micah Citrin  
Rabbi Jennifer Clayman  
Rabbi Eli Cohen  
Rabbi Yonatan Cohen  
Rabbi David J. Cooper  
Rabbi Mychal Copeland

Rabbi Jill Cozen-Harel  
Rabbi Menachem Creditor  
Rabbi Judah Dardik  
Rabbi Lavey Derby  
Rabbi Shoshanah Devorah  
Rabbi Sheldon Dorph  
Rabbi Amy Eilberg  
Rabbi Dennis Eisner  
Rabbi Diane Elliot  
Rabbi Nathaniel Ezray  
Rabbi Yeshai'a Charles Familant  
Rabbi Daniel Feder  
Rabbi Theodore Feldman  
Rabbi Yitzchok Feldman  
Rabbi Natan Fenner  
Rabbi Steven Fisdell  
Rabbi John Fishman  
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Rabbi Lawrence Friedman  
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Rabbi Pamela Frydman Baugh  
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Rabbi Rosalind Glazer  
Rabbi Borukh Goldberg  
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Rabbi Arthur Gould  
Rabbi Roberto Graetz

Rabbi Sarah Graff  
Rabbi Bruce Greenbaum  
Rabbi Michelle Greenberg  
Rabbi Nicole Greninger  
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Rabbi Peretz Wolf-Prusan  
Rabbi Bridget Wynne  
Rabbi Shlomo Zarchi  
Rabbi Reuben Zellman

For more information on the Year of Civil Discourse Initiative, contact Randi Dodick Fields at [rdfields@jcrc.org](mailto:rdfields@jcrc.org)



121 Steuart Street, San Francisco, CA 94105 415.777.0411 [www.jewishfed.org](http://www.jewishfed.org)

