



Statement on Civility

In American society, especially in our diverse Jewish community, we value robust and vigorous debate about pressing issues. Such debate is one of the greatest features of our democracy and one of the hallmarks of our people. We revel in our tradition of debate: A frank and civil exchange of ideas helps to inform our decisions, provoke new ways of thinking, and sometimes even change our minds.

And yet today, the expression and exchange of views is often an uncivil, highly unpleasant experience. Community events and public discussions are often interrupted by raised voices, personal insults, and outrageous charges. Such incivility serves no purpose but to cheapen our democracy. When differences spiral down into uncivil acrimony, the dignity of individuals and community is diminished, and our precious democracy is weakened. People holding diverse views cease to listen to each other. Lack of civility makes it more difficult, if not impossible, to open minds, much less find common ground.

Therefore we as a community and as individuals must pledge to uphold the basic norms of civil discussion and debate at our public events. We do this not to stifle free expression of views, but rather to protect it.

We will discover civility in the guarding of our tongues and the rejection of false witness. We will find it wherever we show care for the dignity of every human being, even those with whom we may strongly disagree. We will find it by listening carefully when others speak, seeking to understand what is being said and trying to learn from it.

This pursuit has deep roots in Torah and in our community's traditions. Our Sages 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 search and questioning, could find better and richer solutions to the problems they faced. They refrained from insisting on uniformity. They sought to preserve and thereby honor the views of the minority as well as the majority. They did so through their understanding of the great teaching of *Eilu v'elu divrei Elokim chayim*, "both these words and those are the words of the living God."

As a community, we must commit ourselves and ask others to open their hearts and minds to healthy, respectful dialogue based on our love for our neighbors and our people.

We therefore agree to treat others with decency and honor and to set ourselves as models for civil discourse, even when we disagree with each other.

We commit ourselves to this course to preserve an essential element of a community – the ability to meet and talk as brothers and sisters.