



Reprinted from Moment Magazine, Jan/Feb 2012, "Ask the Rabbis" column

What does it mean to be pro-Israel today?

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

I have always thought that "pro-Israel" is a loaded term that allows for no nuance. It dresses up to appear like "pro-motherhood" or "pro-apple pie." How can one be against it?

But embedded in "pro-Israel" is a particular interpretation and set of assumptions or expected commitments. Like "Israel right or wrong." Or "Never again." Or "Support Greater Israel." This is no longer a question of whether Israel has the right to exist, which, strikingly, we don't debate about other countries, but what kind of Israel one envisions.

And the implicit message is equally clear: You're either for us or against us. Any whiff of dissent evokes condemnation. Note how American politicians attempt to outdo each other in demonstrating their "stand by me" attitude of unflinching loyalty to Israel.

But what if one does have questions? Can one still be pro-Israel or, for that matter, pro-American, if the criticisms are directed locally? In fact, isn't healthy debate exactly what is needed to be pro-anything? Smart leaders surround themselves with aides who aren't afraid to challenge and ask hard questions and deliver bad news. Smart countries do the same thing.

In the end, to the extent that "pro-Israel"- no different than "pro-life" - has become a proprietary word of a select group of people, it is no longer a useful label. What matters is whether all voices can be heard and whether the actions and advocacy of its proponents really are in Israel's best interests or not. Let the debate continue.