

Continued from page 28

America. With apologies to Chrysler, this may be an "imported from Detroit" product whose value won't depreciate.

A Common Dream

Over the past few years, Bankole and I have written columns for each other's publications and moderated panel discussions together. I have been a guest on his television programs and identified emerging Jewish leaders for Detroit and the *Michigan Chronicle* to honor. I have introduced him to my friends, family and professional colleagues, and he has done the same. In many ways, the creation of the Black-Jewish Forum is an extension of the behavior we have been trying to model for our respective communities and the region.

We invite you to join us on Wednesday (Oct. 26) from 7-9 pm at Temple Beth El, 14 Mile and Telegraph, to listen and learn from our distinguished panelists, to interact with the diverse audience that will be attending, and to embrace an initiative that has the power to strengthen existing black-Jewish initiatives while creating an updated model, and contemporary agenda, for collaboration. (RSVP is required — email: faithandpolitics@globalmarkmakers.com). □

Beyond Differences

Building bridges will help secure future of America and Israel.

Boston

The community relations business today is fraught with a serious deficit of civil discourse, particularly within our own Jewish community. The politics of fear has entered into our communal discourse and, in many places, has led to *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred.

What I have seen and experienced these past several years in Boston and in so many communities across the country is nothing short of *sinat chinam*. Two examples: the discourse in our Jewish community about Israel and the approach we have taken in regards to relationships with our Muslim neighbors.

I cannot tell you how many times while I was executive director of Boston's Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) that rabbis and other communal leaders told me they could not discuss Israel in their congregations or with their friends and colleagues. I consider myself a centrist on Israel, but I was repeatedly defamed and accused of not being supportive enough of Israel because: 1) I chose to engage with members of the mainline Protestant community who had questions; 2) or I failed to get a Methodist church to renege on its contract to rent its facility for a Sabeel conference featuring Desmond Tutu; 3) or it was the JCRC's fault that the Episcopal bishop demonstrated in front of the Israeli consulate about settlements.

We also were criticized for accepting J Street as a member of the JCRC. In Boston, we believe in a "big tent" and felt that if an organization supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict and denounces the BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) movement, it could be in the tent. But we said no to Jewish Voices for Peace.

Valued Echanges

The danger of being too quick to attack someone as anti-Israel, assuming that only those who agree with you really love Israel and that unless everyone agrees with you Israel is doomed, is that you force people out of engagement. Wouldn't it be better to engage them in a civil discourse and hear their concerns than to push them away? What are we so afraid of? Why is healthy discourse about Israel so hard to do in so many of our communities across the country?



Nancy Kaufman

No one person has the answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or it would have been solved long ago. So we must treat one another with respect and engage in discussing it. The whole field of community relations is based on speaking openly with each other about difficult issues in order to promote harmony and community wholeness, *klal Yisrael* — the Nation of Israel. Only when we take the time to build relationships within and outside the Jewish community is our work effective.

As Rabbi Steve Gutow, president and CEO of the New York-based Jewish Council for Public Affairs, explains, "Civility is about how we speak and about how we listen. It is about how we act and how and when we stand up to incivility and call it what it is." Civility is most difficult for us to attain when talking about our work with certain parts of the Muslim community. It is an area fraught with contradictions and concerns, but one that we cannot continue to ignore. The issue we struggled with in Boston is who are our partners and who makes those decisions for us?

The Muslim leaders I worked with in Boston were engaged with us on a whole host of domestic issues we both advocated for, including universal health care for residents of Massachusetts. We do not pick their leaders and they do not pick ours. We need to go in with our eyes wide open, but we are talking about American citizens who have as much of a right to have their houses of prayer as we do

What are we so afraid of? Why is healthy discourse about Israel so hard to do in so many of our communities across the country?

to have ours. Yes, there are probably Muslim cells in America the likes of which perpetrated the heinous crimes of 9-11, but there are many members of that community who are trying to build their community just like we have built ours. Muslims in America are being treated as badly as Jews were treated in another period of American history. Don't they also deserve the benefit of First Amendment protections?

Shaping Alliances

Let us search our hearts and souls for what Rabbi Daniel Pressman calls reservoirs of *ahavat chinam*, causeless love. Let us search for common ground with our fellow Jews and lovers of Israel even though we may differ on ideology or strategy. Let us reach out to our Muslim neighbors even if we have concerns about their affiliations or their organizations. Rather than walk away from our differences, let us embrace our differences and use them to learn from one another and operate based on a climate of hope rather than fear. Let us engage our differences with civility and mutual respect. There is too much at stake both here in the U.S. and in Israel to write off potential allies because they may disagree with us on strategy or tactics.

In this time when we do *teshuvah* — turning — let's turn toward a more civil, respectful way of working together across our lines of difference. As we learn in *Pirkei Avot*: "Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone, as it is said 'From all who would teach me, I have gained understanding.'" If not now, when? □

Nancy Kaufman is president and CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women and former executive director of the JCRC in Boston.

Dry Bones

