

The World Needs Mediators

During last year's debate over the so-called Charter of Quebec values, I worked with members of the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh communities of Montreal to raise awareness about the discriminatory effects of that proposed legislature.

There were amazing moments in the process. One day I sat with a diverse group of religious leaders including a rabbi who is openly lesbian, a Mormon, and a Catholic marriage counsellor who had done an internship in Montreal's most famous gender reassignment clinic. Together we created a social media campaign that contributed to the defeat of the charter.

Had I not been at that table, the voices of atheists and agnostics might not have been included in that campaign. Had the CUC joined the boycott movement against Israel, as the United and Presbyterian Churches have done, it would have limited me from having a real voice for local change (a loss that my UCC colleagues painfully felt during the debate). I've learned that I can have more effect in the conflict between Jews and Palestinians by being someone who can communicate with both groups. The world needs those who stand in opposition to certain wrongs, but it also needs mediators.

I still consider myself a Jew, and I have always been grateful that Unitarianism enables me to embrace my multifaceted identity. I do not support the actions of the Israeli government, but I also recognize that there is a difference between the actions of a government, its people, and the love-centred Judaism that I grew up with.

Every day, as the Gaza War raged this summer, I cried as I read accounts from Palestinians, Israelis, Jews, Arabs, and Christians living in the midst of the crisis. How can you live with the needless loss of any human life? How can you forgive the deaths of inno-

cent children or adults? Like so many of us, I want to do something to stop the hatred and fear that is fuelling the ongoing violence.

I believe that ours is a faith that is called to build bridges, not divisiveness. This fall, the Unitarian Church of Montreal was approached to serve as neutral ground for members of the local Jewish community who are opening a critically needed conversation about human rights. As one Jewish friend wrote to me, "This is a fraught, fractured, and critical moment within the Jewish community. In the aftermath of the recent Gaza War, difficult questions are being asked—questions that were continuously swept under the carpet or locked in a closet in the past."

Unlike the United or Presbyterian Church, we are a people who share a diversity of religious backgrounds and perspectives. That puts us in an ideal position to be bridge builders within our congregations, our communities and the wider world.

I honour the right of individuals to join the sanctions movement. But to take such an action as a religious body would have little effect on Israel. If anything, we're more likely to add to the hardening resolve of Israel's right wing. At the same time, we would alienate many in our movement and weaken our interfaith voice—the one place where we can have significant influence in this very debate.

I encourage us to be communities that create forums for Palestinians and Jews to share their stories, that offer a space for compassionate communication. Let us find a way to stand up for human rights with compassion.

With love and respect for all your care and concern for human rights and for your desire to make this world a better place,

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UUs working for a solution for Israel and Palestine
that affirms the dignity, freedom, and security of all peoples involved.