

**REMARKS BY  
HIS MAJESTY KING ABDULLAH II  
MEETING WITH RABBIS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
21 SEPTEMBER 2005**

*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim:* In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Thank you all for taking the time to be with us today. I am honored to have this opportunity to address not only a distinguished group of Rabbis, but through you the American Jewish community. I pray that our humble efforts will be an important step towards building better relations between Jews and Muslims in America and throughout the world.

The Prophet Muhammad—God’s peace and blessings be upon him—once said: “*None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.*” As all of you know, the Torah also tells us, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Leviticus 19:18) In this spirit, I come to you today as both neighbor and kin. As many of you know, the Hashemite line of Jordan is directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad—God’s peace and blessings be upon him. He in turn was descended from our father, Abraham through his eldest son Isma’il—God’s peace be upon them and upon all the prophets. We are therefore linked to you through Abraham, our common ancestor, and we all participate in God’s promises to him and his two sons.

But it is not just ancestry that connects us. More importantly, we are, all of us—all Jews and all Muslims—joined together by faith in the One God. The Muslim testimony of faith—the *Shahada*—*la ilaha illa Allah*, “There is no god but God”—is prefigured in the Torah by: “*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). While the latter words of the Shema are not found in the Shahada, no Muslim could disagree with them, and they are confirmed by the Quran: “*Truly the believers are those whose hearts quiver when God is remembered.*” (8:2)

Lastly, Jews and Muslims are tied together by culture and history as well. For over a thousand years both our peoples have contributed to the complex tapestry of Middle Eastern civilization. Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews and Muslims borrowed a great deal from each other in the areas of philosophy, science, mysticism, and law. For example, Maimonides was deeply influenced by our Muslim philosophers, while many in the Islamic world to this day read Maimonides as an Arab thinker.

It cannot be denied that the relationship between Jews and Muslims has been very difficult in recent years. Nonetheless, at this moment in history, we have no choice but to take bold strides towards mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. We face a common threat: extremist distortions of religion and the wanton acts of violence that derive therefrom. Such abominations have already divided us from without for far too long. We all too often fail to acknowledge that they also threaten to destroy us from within. This is not simply a matter of importance to Jews and Muslims, it is something that confronts and threatens the whole of humanity.

The only antidote is that we work together in a spirit of mutual co-operation and respect to defeat this common enemy. We must move beyond the language of mere tolerance toward true acceptance. Our common faith in the One God and our shared history are the greatest asset in combating the forces that threaten to undo everything that is sacred to us all.

In Jordan we have taken important steps to combat the extremist threat within the Muslim community. Over the past year, we gathered *fatwas*—legal rulings—from 17 of the most authoritative scholars representing all the schools of Islamic law—Sunni, Shi’ite and Ibadi. We then hosted a conference last July entitled “True Islam and its Role in Modern Society,” which was attended by over 180 Muslim scholars from 45 countries.

The conference issued a joint statement of accord, to help end abuses of our faith. For instance, they agreed that religious edicts cannot be issued by people lacking the proper qualifications and religious

knowledge (like Bin Laden and Zarqawi). And they agreed that no one can call another Muslim an apostate—as the extremists do to those who disagree with them.

Much of what we have thus far accomplished in Jordan concentrates upon internal Islamic affairs. But it has important implications for the international community as well. Muslims from every branch of Islam can now assert without doubt or hesitation that a *fatwa* calling for the killing of innocent civilians—no matter what nationality or religion, Muslim or Jew, Arab or Israeli—is a basic violation of the most fundamental principles of Islam. Both of our religions are based upon an overriding emphasis on the sanctity of every human life. As you know, in Judaism the imperative to save a human life overrides almost every other law. This same principle is clearly stated in the Quran: “*Whoever kills a soul—without right or justification—it is as if he has killed the whole of humanity*” (5:32).

We should thus strive not only for tolerance and co-existence, but for true acceptance. Our communities must see each other as sharing a common heritage, and a common future. It is only by adopting this attitude that we can combat the extremist threat and live in peace with each other.

The basis of such a relationship is stated in our sacred texts. According to the Quran, Judaism and Islam derive from a common source. Regarding the people of the Scriptures, the Quran states:

*Truly those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Christians and the Sabeans -- those who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds, they shall have their reward from their Lord and no fear shall be upon them, nor shall they sorrow.* (Quran, 2:62; see also 5:69).

Whilst some may regard this verse as abrogated, the oldest and most famous of Quranic commentators, Al-Tabari, said, “God’s promises cannot be abrogated.” Moreover, the Quran says, “*We have made you peoples and tribes to know one another. And the most noble of you before God is the most pious.*” (49:13)

In Jewish texts, there is a similar idea regarding Muslims. According to some rabbis, non-Jews are required to observe the seven laws of the sons of Noah and if they do so they are to be treated with reverence and respect. Jewish commentators generally agree that Islam includes these seven laws and is therefore to be esteemed by Jews.

For all the Children of Abraham, the pursuit of peace and justice is paramount. As the Quran says, “*God loves the just.*” (5:42). Expanding upon this, the Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings be upon him—said to his companions: “*Shall I inform you of an act better than fasting, alms and prayers? Making peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by their roots.*” Such statements echo the words of the Holy Torah, “*Justice, Justice shall you pursue.*” (Deuteronomy 16:20) This wise counsel is reflected in the words in the Psalm that states, “*Seek peace and pursue it,*” (Psalms 34:14) and the Quranic verse, *If they incline unto peace, then incline unto it.* (8:61) Let us find a way to unite our peoples in the pursuit of justice and the peace to which true justice gives rise.

It is my hope that we as children of Abraham can go forth from this gathering with a common mission, to work together towards peace, justice and reconciliation. The point on the religious calendar at which we find ourselves can inspire us in this endeavor. This year marks an unusual concurrence of the High Holy Days on the Jewish calendar and Ramadan on the Islamic calendar, each of which begins next month. These are opportunities for self-examination, reflection, repentance, atonement, forgiveness, and renewal. By embracing the true spirit of these sacred times, conferred by God, we can reaffirm the essential principles of our faiths and apply these principles to the challenges before us all. Just as Isaac and Isma’il were able to put aside the differences that had separated their mothers and come together to honor and bury their father, so too must we put aside the differences that some use to tear us apart. We must honor our common heritage, reaffirming the essential principles that lie at the heart of our faith.

I hope that our common message is one that will be heard far beyond this gathering. Thank you very much.

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