

Rabbi Shaul Osadchey
Beth Tzedec Congregation, Calgary, AB Canada

Remarks on the Occasion of

**H.M. King Abdullah II ibn Hussein Award for UN World
Interfaith Harmony Week Ceremony**

April 30, 2017
Amman, Jordan

There is a blessing in the Jewish tradition that one recites when in the presence of a king or head of state. It is my honour to do so for the first time in my life.

“ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שנתן מכבודו לבשר ודם - Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe who has given of Your Glory to flesh and blood.”

Your Majesty King Abdullah, HRH Prince Ghazi, Dr. Minwer and distinguished members of the Royal Aal-al Bayt Institute, on behalf of the 2017 Prize Winners, I convey our gratitude for your commitment to promoting religious harmony throughout the world. Your Majesty, you have correctly identified that one of the root causes of strife and conflict in our world is religious enmity. It is my contention that the root cause of such hatred is religious illiteracy.

Ignorance of others' religious beliefs and practices leads to stereotyping, misinformation and prejudice which precludes the formation of healthy, respectful and collaborative relationships. We advocate the Biblical principle of “ואהבת לרעיק - כמכה - Love Your Neighbour as Yourself.” But love cannot take hold when partners do not know each other well. Actions become suspect when we do not understand the values and beliefs that undergirds them.

Fortunately, the antidote is religious literacy. At its heart is the recognition that we are all created, “בצלם אלהים - in the image of Adonai, Allah, God” and that religion can be a powerful and compassionate force for diminishing human suffering. Our faith traditions offer the building blocks upon which a pluralistic order for a globalized world can emerge. In our highly interconnected and interdependent world, religious literacy is essential for human progress.

It is with that in mind, that I humbly encourage the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week to launch a religious literacy campaign with a specific youth component. Religious youth groups from around the world would be encouraged to create Interfaith Harmony Week programs of learning, dialogue and action to envelope the upcoming generation of leaders with a vision of a world infused with interfaith harmony and committed to healing the brokenness of life. Our youth must learn not only how to find commonality with others but also how to disagree in a civil way that preserves and protects the human spirit.

It is a humble but noble challenge that bears the potential to bring the best of our religious traditions to the cause of peace and harmony in our time and for the next generation.

Thank you for your hospitality this weekend and may you be rewarded with the Divine blessing and gift of Salaam, Shalom, peace.