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Meditative Moment by Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Poland
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Good morning. Thank you very much.

What I would like to reflect upon this morning is something that is very important in my life, perhaps it sounds very simplistic, but sometimes very simplistic things end up being very important, that is how much we can learn from each other. On one level, it is human nature to believe, falsely, that basically I can only learn from those like myself.

I grew up in a traditional Jewish home and went to yeshivot – traditional Jewish schools and, as embarrassing as it may be to say, I often found that within my own, Jewish circles it was believed that everything that was important to say in this world, we have already said it and we really don't need to listen to the others. For me, this was of the important things that I had to learn – that this was simply false.

I remember the first time that I confronted the concept that maybe somebody besides us had something valuable, moral, important to say. It was when I was about 7 years old. I was walking to shul, to synagogue, on Saturday morning with my father, who was a rabbi. And as it often happens, next to his synagogue was a church. On the church, there were these big, black banners, as a 7 year old I was fascinated, because they were not there a week before. I've asked my father: daddy what are these banners for? He said: a great man died. It was Pope John the 23rd. It was the first time when I was confronted with the idea that, maybe beside us, somebody else had something important to say.

But the person that I really learned this from was John Paul the 2nd. I started working here in Poland 20 years ago, where the teachings, the persona of John Paul the 2nd permeated and continues to permeate Polish life. Over the years, I have been enriched by reading what John Paul had to teach us. One of the things that I found most moving was his openness to others, for me, first and foremost – the Jews. When I began reading, I saw that John Paul the 2nd was not only open to Jews but open to everyone and how he was able to learn from everyone. This is something that I find to be incredibly

important in my own life. Being open to others in no way diminishes my own belief. No one can question that John Paul the 2nd, was a deeply believing Catholic and because he was such a deeply believing and spiritual, it enabled him to be that much more open to listen to what others had to say. That is a message that I try to pass on to my students that the more deeply you become steeped in your own faith and tradition, the more it can empower and enable you to be open to what others have to say and to be able to learn from them. I remember reading what John Paul said about how Muslims do certain things with an intense fervor that Catholics could learn from. To put it simply: The more deeply we are who we are, the more we are able and need to be open to others which in turn will enrich our own belief and our own faith tradition.

If I may add just one more quick reflection which came to me while driving here this morning, thinking do all this meetings make sense? (I know I'm not suppose to say that) The same people talking to the same people, does it have impact, does it have effect? It reminded me of a verse in a Jewish prayer on Shabbat morning, where it says: "the nation that sanctifies the 7th day will enjoy and be satisfied from the 7th day". I was always confounded by that, because not all the Jews sanctify Shabbat, how is possible that all nation benefits from it? Then I realized it is true, as long as some of us sanctify the Shabbat creates inspiration for all Jews. For me, there is no question, in the most profound way, that as long as we are speaking with each other, then we actually have the chance to inspire and motivate many others. May God give us the strength to continue to be open to each other and to learn from each other so that many others may also be so moved and inspired.

Thank you.