Interfaith Understanding

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O mankind! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware.

(Qur’an 49:13; Surah or Chapter ‘The Rooms’).

I will discuss this verse one theme at a time. **First**, God declares the common origins of each individual on this planet. Not only does He signify how biologically we each are born from the union of a single father and a single mother, He also implies how in the bigger picture, we can all trace our roots to ‘a male’ and ‘a female’ – Adam and Eve (or Adham and Hawa in Arabic) – emphasizing how ultimately we are all from one family.

**Second**, God straightforwardly and unequivocally defines why He has divided us into ‘nations and tribes’. Let me pause here for a moment as this fact of life has always made me think. With all of Gods might and glory, had He wished he could easily have placed every nation, every race, every religion on a planet of its own or made all of us look exactly the same. But He chose to divide us, to make us into ‘nations and tribes’. The question begs to be asked: Why? Why not create each of us to look and think in exactly the same ways? The answer to that question lies in this verse: **so that we may ‘come to know one another’**. We were not made differently so that we despise each other, wage never-ending battles and compete with each other – **we were divided so that we would realize our inherent oneness**. This verse to me emphasizes how every culture, race, religion – every group of people on this planet exists for a reason, it implies how each of those groups has something positive to offer and that we exist so we can all learn from one another. Being a Muslim who loves interfaith dialogue, I cannot express the many things I have learned from my interactions with my non-Muslim friends and how that knowledge has in turn made me a better Muslim and a better person. The idea for this blog, in fact, stemmed from exactly this. Many of my Christian friends actively study the Holy Bible and try to apply the wisdom within it to their daily life. Unfortunately, in my experiences in the Muslim world, this kind of group study/discussion/debate is not very common…at least not amongst the youth. During my upbringing, memorization and the fulfillment of religious rituals was focused on while the analysis/study/discussion of scripture was sidelined. I was never really taught to **think** about how religion applied to my life, what the deeper meaning or bigger picture really was. But observing my Christian friends and their dedicated study of the Holy Bible inspired me to take the time to study the Qur’an and think about how it applies to my life, how it gives energy to my being…something I had never given much thought to before. By ‘coming to know’ my friends who belonged to ‘nations and tribes’ other than my own helped bring me closer to God.
The last portion of the verse, to me, reiterates one of the primary messages of the Qur’an. Ultimately, the ‘noblest in the sight of God’, ie the people who will be granted heaven, are not members of one specific denomination. The noblest of people are those who are the most ‘deeply God-conscious’. To me, this means that we (Jews, Christians, Muslims, Atheists, Hindus, Buddhists etc) will each be judged based on our intentions and our actions and the level of our God-consciousness. This last portion brings it all full circle – that although we humans exist in varying colors and with varying beliefs (ie in ‘nations and tribes’), at the End of Time none of those differences will matter. When we stand before our Lord, we will be stripped of all those outward differences. And the only thing that will ultimately matter is what lies in our hearts: we will be judged on our intentions, actions and God-consciousness.