

JACIAN FARES, AMERICAN SOLDIER

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Description: Now my God has a name.

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My name is Jacian Fares. I come from the Al-Fares family of Hebron. My mother was born in Lebanon, my father is a Spaniard. I was the first generation born in America (Dearborn, Michigan in fact).

My mother took no stock in religion nor did she live it, although my grandparents are devout Muslims, I do imagine her choice and path in life had saddened their hearts. Needless to say my siblings and I were born without a specific religion. We were to be raised as American kids.

Under odd circumstances I was the only one of the three of us to go live in Lebanon for six years, during which I was a teenager. I shall call this time period 'my first encounter with Middle East culture'.

My second phase of encounter came when I was in the U.S. Marine Corps. I led the invasion into Iraq - not a war I agreed with, but I was a soldier just doing his job.

In Fallujah and other areas of the Al-Anbar province, I came to know locals. I had witnessed other Arabs during Ramadan over the years. I had watched how devoted to their religion they were.

Unfortunately I was shot in Iraq and injured badly - but it is as Allah wills. I had always believed everything happens for a reason.

When I had come home I was depressed and feeling like I had nothing to follow in life. I was used to having routine and now it was taken from me. My relationship at the time went downhill. So I was alone. My grandparents had hinted at Islam, as well as my aunt. During August of 2008 I read the Quran. And it just clicked. It made sense to me, more so than the Bible or the Torah. It was very straight to the point. Muslim life has routine. I needed this change in my life, to find my true self.

"This Quran does indeed show the straightest way. It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward." (Al-Israa17:9)

Finally I had routine. I had reasons to live for and make my life that much better.

I can say I had made many friends over the past year, all of different Middle Eastern countries; from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Qatar. And these friends helped in developing who I am now. And for that I am forever thankful.

This year I have witnessed my second Ramadan. Sadly, I could not fast because of being unwell. But I donated food, money, and time to people in need for all thirty days. And this year is special, my birthday falls on Eid al-Fitr.

And while I am stuck here in America, alone, I am not alone. People in the Muslim communities treat me as any other family member.

And I have to say this life we live, the *Deen* (Islamic way of life) we live, it brings us all together. It brings us together and makes us brothers and sisters every day of our lives — even without feasts.

So I promise I will always treat everyone as my brother or sister, help out ones in need, even in times without special purpose. I will do this every day of my life.

"Worship God; join nothing with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and to your slaves: For God does not like arrogant, boastful people." (An-Nisaa4:36)

I love Ramadan and what it represents. It reminds us what being a good Muslim is. But I propose that we make everyday of our lives like Ramadan and share with our fellow man and woman.

As Muslims we can make this world a better place, no matter how the media tries projecting us as, no matter how ignorant people believe we are, we can honestly make this world a better place.

"Show forgiveness, speak for justice and avoid the ignorant." (Al-Aaraf 7:199)

We should never push our God onto anyone, but we should inform the ones interested correctly. That's how it was done with me; I've come a long way with the support and help of my brothers and sisters, my friends and family in Islam.

I choose Islam because it's part of who I am. I've reverted back to what my family has believed. I now live how they live. This is all because reading the Quran was suggested to me. I'm happy and proud of myself for doing so. The Quran has led me to finding my true self. And now my God has a name: Allah.

I suggest to non-believers to keep an open mind and just look at what the Quran has to say. There is more there to it, if read with open eyes. The Quran is simply a tool and guide that we should use to live a correct path. It promotes peace, love, and a strong trust in Allah.

"What will explain to you what the steep path is? It is to free a slave, to feed at a time of hunger an orphaned relative or a poor person in distress, and to be one of those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion." (Al-Balad 12-17)

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