

## Essay 5

In response to this assignment I made another drive to Albuquerque and visited the Albuquerque Buddhist Center. It took me longer than I had anticipated to find the temple. I had a mental picture in my head of some sort of ornate shrine, but the center was a regular-looking building. Walking up I saw a small gentleman in an orange robe setting up water bottles on a small table. I walked up and explained that I was a student looking for an interview, and he led me to the main worship area. I should have learned from my trip to the mosque, but I did not think to bring a loose pair of shoes and again struggled for several minutes to get my boots off before entering.

The inside of the temple was much more to my expectations. I saw prayer mats and smelled the thick scent of incense. Along the walls I saw various pieces of Asian artwork, and in the center of the room there was a large golden statue of the Buddha. I followed my guide who led me to an older monk who was sitting in the lotus position in meditation. My guide introduced me and explained that I was interested in talking to the monk. The monk nodded and ushered me back to some folding chairs in the rear of the room where I began my interview.

The man's name was S- T-, and he was originally from Thailand. I asked him how the practice of Buddhism was different here in America as compared to Thailand. He told me that there was a far greater sense of community in Thailand, and how the work on the sanctuary was left to the laypeople so the monks could focus on their teaching instead of maintaining the shrine. He told me that in his hometown Buddhists made up about 95% of the population. I asked him about the meditation practices. He told me that there were daily lessons that ran about 30 minutes each, and also told me how he preferred walking meditation, though Albuquerque was certainly less serene than his village in Thailand.

I asked him about what it means to be enlightened, his response was "We are human, until death, if we do good, we go to a good place, I don't know where. People do bad things, bad things come." I asked him if anyone could become enlightened. He said that the possibility for enlightenment surrounds us all, but that it is harder and harder to see as time goes on.

I asked him about everyday life and he gestured to a picture of the 5 Principles of Buddhism. He said that abiding by these rules, all else is mere happenstance (paraphrasing).

Next I asked him about holidays or special days in Buddhism. He was having a hard time understanding me so he asked a gentleman sitting nearby to translate. The man was an elderly white man, obviously not from Thailand. When I told him my question he translated, and the monk went on to tell me about the Buddhist version of Lent, as well as the importance of the Buddhist New Year.

Concluding our interview, he asked the man who ushered me in to go get something, and he returned with water, a few pamphlets on Buddhism, and a set of wooden prayer beads. These he gave to me and invited me to come back and practice meditation. Then he suggested I take a picture with him.

All in all, I rather enjoyed my trip to the Albuquerque Buddhist Center. I myself am a Daoist, and so my beliefs do not exactly match up with Buddhist philosophies, but I was humbled for the time. The art and culture the center was able to bring to Albuquerque from Thailand was phenomenal, and I look forward to visiting again to see if I can volunteer to help out around the center.



