

REL 402 - Islam - Mosque

I decided to go ahead and visit the Mosque here in A- called Islamic Valley. While I know that not all Muslims are bad people I had a certain fear about going to a Mosque. The Islamic Valley is a sunni traditional mosque. I was escorted by a student who attends class at A- College, who was nice enough to take me. I was expected to dress in formal Muslim woman's attire so that I would not stand out so badly, and was told to not say a word.

The women are allowed to worship at the mosque but are separated from the men. I was not allowed to worship there, which was fine, I just wanted to see what it was like for my friend. Worship is always performed facing east or northeast. Muslims pray five times a day and do not need to attend a Mosque to do this. Women walk in one door and men walk in another as it is considered distracting if done together. Women are always separated from the men. I do not believe I have ever attended a place of religion that was quite so quiet. We had to leave our shoes at the shoe rack by the door and had to remove them before entering. My mind was certainly moving ninety miles per hour with all kinds of thoughts but in all everyone was very kind considering I could not speak to them. I believe that was her father's rule rather than the rule of the mosque.

I would have loved to visit with others but unfortunately was asked by my friend's father to be silent while in the mosque. I chose to have respect and do as I was told. I have spoken to several of my students here at A- and have been given a lot of good information about their religion, and I feel very fortunate to have been allowed to attend the mosque. I know that to them I am an outsider, especially to the men. I found the dress to be quite uncomfortable, as I am not used to having my head covered. I am not sure if everyone who visits is required to do this but my friend's father thought it best. I believe I may have been an embarrassment for him especially when I came to their house with dress pants, which is my fault for not thinking. According to my student, the only time women are allowed to have their hair showing is when they are around close family members - and that is the only time. According to my student she is allowed to have her hair cut by a Muslim who only cuts other Muslims' hair in privacy, and who is the only other person who is allowed to see her hair. I found that the student with whom I went to the mosque believes that they cannot eat pork, and according to her father they must not eat any slaughtered animals that were not slaughtered in the name of God. Basically from what I got from my conversation with him is that anything that bleeds is forbidden. According to my student, I am lucky that her father even spoke to me, so I guess I was doing something right. I knew that whenever we fed our students pizza I always had to order a cheese pizza for those students who were Islamic, but I never knew why until her father explained that it was forbidden. According to my student, they may not even eat anything that might have been fried on a grill that had been used to fry meat.

*I have learned that the Quran is like the Old Testament of the Bible and that many things are similar. I have found that many religions use the same Bible but it is interpreted differently by each religion.*¹ I find that fact curious as it is funny how one man can interpret the same words so much differently in the ways they worship and believe. Muslim women are considered inferior to the Muslim men. According to my student they are less important. I have found that many Muslim women, especially the younger generations, are more willing to move away from the most strict rules that their families have adhered to for so long. One of my students said that as soon as she can move from her family's house she will stop wearing a scarf over her hair and wear what she wants to, even though she knows her father will be furious. I guess what I see from my students is that many are no different from us in that they are happy to change some of their beliefs in order to be happy. My student is already promised in marriage to a Muslim man that her father has picked out for her, but she will not allow it so her family is very displeased with her. According to her, women in Iraq are killed for less, which makes me very sad.

I have found this trip to a mosque a very interesting, weird, crazy, informational experience. I know there are bad Muslims out there but there are some very good ones as well. I learned that though their views of each other and themselves are different from ours, they are not much different from us. Some Muslims believe the Quran tells them to kill others who do not believe, but others do not believe this. Again it is all in how a person perceives the written word. The family I have spoken about in this essay are good people who are trying to fit in in America. They had to leave their home due to the threat of death as her father was an interpreter for Americans. I believe they have made a great sacrifice to help our American soldiers, and deserve and have earned the right to live here. According to my student's family there is still much prejudice and when people see them they are automatically scared. I feel for them as they are not much different from me or anyone else, and some keep moving closer to being more American than sticking with the old rules of Muslims.

¹ These statements are not correct