

A Visit to the Islamic Center of New Mexico (Albuquerque)

On March 12, I became quite ill with salmonella. . . . We loaded up and arrived at the urgent care center of Lovelace Hospital late that evening. . . . Given my predisposition to discuss religion, I started a conversation with our nurse, A-, who is a Muslim. During our conversation I mentioned that I was taking a class on world religions and was finishing the section on Islam. He asked if I would like to go to his Mosque and observe a prayer session, which I eagerly agreed as long as there was a restroom nearby...

I do not remember what time he said to meet him there, as I was quite ill, but it was in the middle of the day. My wife chose not to attend due to her own personal convictions, but she drove me there and waited in the car. A- was waiting for me outside where he asked me to take off my shoes before we entered and to enter with my right foot first. There was a greeter who said "as-salam alaikum" to which A- responded "wa alaikum-as-salam." (Spelling courtesy of A-. We have stayed in contact, so I asked him what exactly was said.)

The prayer hall was quite plain and felt almost like a Middle School gym with ceiling fans across the roof, some Arabic writing on the walls, and a few bookshelves with copies of the Quran along the walls. There was a wood railing in the alcove at the front of the hall which denoted the direction to Mecca and lines on the floor that kept the people sitting in neat lines facing the alcove. The men were dressed in a variety of clothing including normal business casual, long dress-like garments, and jeans with polo shirts. Some wore a cap, a few wore a turban and yet others did not wear anything on their head. A- asked me to sit at the rear wall and he went to get ready.

The prayer service was about ten minutes or less. The speaker prayed, and then he would move and the people would follow his actions. I did not participate as I was sick, and as a Christian, I do not feel that it is appropriate for me to participate in Islamic rituals. A- understood this and never asked me to wash my hands nor to take part in the actual prayer. Then it was over, and the people began to leave, shaking hands and bowing toward one another. A- strongly suggested beforehand that I avoid shaking hands since I was sick with salmonella, and he instructed me to get back to the hotel and rest. He ushered me out quite quickly so I did not get a chance to talk to anyone.

It was an interesting experience to say the least. While it was short, it was interesting to see how other people perform acts of worship in person. On top of the interesting experience, I made a new friend and have continued to learn more from him about Islam.