

Judaism - Visit to a synagogue

The essay assignment for this week was to either use one of the Jewish spiritual aids as described in the book or visit a synagogue. I chose to visit an actual synagogue with a Jewish friend of mine. With the ENMU Football team playing a game in Dallas I saw it as the perfect opportunity to visit an actual full sized synagogue. Obviously this was my first trip to a synagogue so I was not very familiar with any of the customs. Luckily, my Jewish friend B--- was very good about helping and teaching me the things I needed to do so I did not make a fool of myself. It also greatly helped that everyone at the synagogue was very warm and welcoming and made me feel very comfortable. I was also lucky enough to get to experience the celebrations of Yom Kippur.

Something that made me especially happy was that during the services I was permitted to wear a yamaka or a kippah. Ever since I was a little child I have wanted to wear one and never really had a reason as to why. Anyway, I also had to grab a book from a bookcase that contained the songs and various psalms. The book itself contained both Hebrew and English so I did not have any trouble keeping up. The teaching of the message was much like that of the Christian churches I had been to when growing up. It also felt like there was a certain feeling in the room that everyone was happy and rejoicing. It was an uplifting feeling to be a part of a whole instead of just an individual. The service did not feel weird or uncomfortable to me, and this is not to say that I want to start following the Jewish faith, but to say that I found it interesting and it did not leave me with an awkward feeling upon leaving.

I wore semi-formal wear to the synagogue and found that regular church wear was the norm for the service. I also tried to keep a spectator's view on the entire experience so I could remember things for later writing, but of course at times I was required to stand and wait while something happened. The Friday night service I went to was called the Kabbalat Shabbat or for all those who do not know what that means, the welcoming the Sabbath service. It was a good thing my friend B--- was there because this service is a little bit different than some others and she helped to keep me up to date on what I needed to do. It wasn't until later on that I learned there were actually some beginner's services at some synagogues so I missed the boat on that one, but I was also glad that I went to a normal Friday night service because I got to see the service for everything it was and not a somewhat censored version.

I feel like I built up the synagogue, and the people in it, to be scarier than they actually were. The people overall were great and the service did not make me nervous. Prior to entering I was very nervous and a little bit afraid, as it was something completely new to me. It was actually pretty funny because some of the people there were as curious about me as I was about them. A newcomer in a synagogue is not always something that goes unnoticed. Some people even went so far as to ask me what brought me there? Or if I enjoyed myself? However, none of the questions were asked in a rude manner, at least not intentionally. The only downside that I could find was that I was not allowed to sit with my friend B--- because seating is separated by gender. However, before the Service we were able to make some friends and I sat by those gentlemen. I also have to admit that beforehand I went on the Internet to look up customs that a first-timer should follow. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and the experience, and would not be against going again. The people were great and the service was interesting and even a little bit inspiring. I thanked my friend B--- upon our exit for taking me and making my transition through my first synagogue as smooth as possible. She said that she was glad that I attended and hopefully I learned more about her religion and would be more understanding of it in the future. I have gained a newfound respect for the people of the Jewish faith and I commend them on all that they do. I also wouldn't mind being allowed to wear a yamaka again.