

Visit to Taos Jewish Center

My interest in Judaism is high and this assignment option for attending a Jewish temple service excited me. Taos Jewish Center was the closest active Judaism worship location near me living in (***) New Mexico. As I studied the textbook and material related to the subject of Judaism two things stuck me the most. The statement that the textbook made, "...because Jews have served as great transmitters of knowledge" (Coogan 16) was a statement that I would think about during the time I was at the Jewish message service and the second item stuck me was that I had a vision of Judaism being a well-organized, "nice and neat" religion set up by God. As I study some on Judaism and attended the Jewish service, I am surprised to find a religion that has many branches from the original religion and kind-of a mess.

The service started at seven fifteen on Saturday morning, I showed up a little after seven so that I could be on time and find my contact, the lady I spoke to on the phone who is the administrator of the Taos Jewish Center. I had beaten her there but met a lady to whom I explained that I was a Religion student at ENMU, enrolled in the Religions of the World course. She invited me into the library where the service would be located, where I met a gentleman and we all talked about me, school, and this and that as we waited for others to show up. The lady I spoke to on the phone came in and we started, she handed me a prayer book which was written in Old Hebrew, Modern Hebrew and English. The prayer book's first page was at the back of the book, as the gentleman said, it was a backward book. They asked if I wanted to be a part of the service, maybe translate for them. I thanked them but declined, not wanting to disrupt their service flow, not having ever been to a Jewish service before. They did, for the most part, just the right side pages of the prayer book sitting at the tables in the middle of the small library room. Three different times we would stand and face east for the prayers which at first were just spoken but as time went by the more the prayers were sung. They would say or sing the prayer in Hebrew then translate it in English. More people started showing up making our group go up by six. One young gentleman who came in late had his prayer shawl completely looking like the picture of a religious Jew you would see in Israel and had all of the elements in actions of a religious Jew in Israel. Near the end of the prayer service, they "welcomed" in a new month with a special prayer of blessing for the new month. After this the prayer service was over, we picked up the prayer books and had a little intermission. Many others came in, they set out some fruit to snack on and of course I was the topic, who I was, what school I was attending, what was my belief, where did I live and so on. I learned some about each one of them. The lady I spoke to on the phone was a Jew, the lady I met when I came in at the start of the service was a Methodist convert, the gentleman I met at the very beginning was a Church of Christ convert and the young gentleman whom looked and acted like how you see Jews portrayed was a Southern Baptist convert. The gentleman whom sat beside me needing a shower, wearing shorts and a t-shirt was a Jew who had grown up in Israel studying under some important Jewish teachers from what I understood, later he offered to teach me the Hebrew language or also he gave massages. There were a lady and gentleman who showed up for the message part of the service, not together, that were both married to non-observant Jews, a older lady whom did not want to be "put into a religious box" who just believed in the one true God of Israel, and one other Jew who was to be the "leader" of the message service, also in shorts and t-shirt, not really looking like how I thought a Jewish leader would act or look. This was our minyan or as they said (I understood that for a quorum to be a minyan there needed to be ten Jewish men). They let me use a Tanakh out of their library that was like a prayer book. They read in Deuteronomy starting in the thirteenth chapter, then the leader read a commentary and the discussion began. Most of the discussion was on the Tanakh reading, historical events and current events, for which most of the discussion was over my head. If other Jewish groups are like this group, I could see where the textbook statement I quoted earlier in this essay could be true. During the discussion at different times they made their way around the room and allowed each person to read something they brought with them to share. I could see that different branches of Judaism were represented in the group. After the message service they joined in the large entry room for bread, wine, a prayer and then were dismissed.

Coogan, Michael D. Coogan. *The Illustrated Guide To World Religions*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003. 16. Print.