

My Visit to a Synagogue

Upon reading the requirements for this essay, a multitude of questions arose in my mind. The first question to myself was whether or not I could open my mind, and get past what I had heard about Judaism and hopefully learn the truth. And the second question that I had was what assignment I could do that would provide me greater insight into Judaism.

All week long I struggled with how I was going to complete the assignment. I was speaking with one of my neighbors, who happened to be Jewish, and I asked her what she thought would be the best thing to do in my situation. She immediately invited me to join her and her family for the Sabbath.

Friday afternoon, I joined my neighbors and helped them prepare for the Sabbath. I quickly learned that it was much more than just a time of rest and reflection. First of all, her family did not use anything electronic while observing the Sabbath. This included phones, music players, and they did not even use the lights in their home. Anything that we did, we did by candlelight. They also didn't cook on the Sabbath. They prepared their meals beforehand and ate very simply. We did not even wash the dishes after our meal, as that was seen as work.

After the meal, we gathered together, and the father read a portion from the Torah, in Hebrew. Afterwards he explained to me that the passage was about the story of God meeting with Moses on the mountain and giving him the Ten Commandments.

I was invited to spend the night at their home as part of my immersion into Judaism. The next morning we all awoke and bathed. It was symbolic that we were washing away the old week and starting the new week clean. They even had a special soap from Israel that they used.

For the end of my Sabbath, I went to synagogue with my neighbors. Before we left we all had to be properly dressed to enter the synagogue. The men of the family wore pants, long sleeve shirts, and yarmulkes. The women wore long sleeve shirts, long skirts, and the unmarried women, including myself, wore a head scarf because showing my ears in the synagogue was considered improper and a sign of impurity.

Before the service began, I got to meet the rabbi. He explained some of the customs during the service to me, and asked me to keep an open mind during the time I was there. He told me that after the service he would meet with me again to answer any questions.

At the synagogue, I sat in the back with the rest of the women for the opening part of the service. There were a few songs sung in Hebrew, no musical accompaniment at all. There was also a reading from the Torah, in Hebrew. Then about halfway through, we went into another room and had a women's service. My neighbor later told me that the readings were from the book of Ruth, and were teachings on how a woman should honor and respect her husband.

After the service was over, and the Sabbath was done, the rabbi invited me to his home so that I could visit with him and he could answer any questions I had about Judaism. I had a few questions about the different branches of Judaism, which he explained to me. I also asked him about feminism and Judaism. The text book had a small mention of it, but I wanted to know more.

The rabbi explained to me that we are all God's creations, and we are equal in the eyes of God. He went on to explain that it is more the roles that Judaism considers proper for each gender to fill. I found them to be similar to gender roles in any other religious belief. The rabbi told me that if anybody read the Torah, then they would know what God said about the roles of a man and woman. He told me that it was the outside influences that corrupted a person's view.

The meeting with the rabbi was very helpful to me. It was a very educational experience, meeting with a man who had devoted himself to Judaism and the study of the Torah. I also found it very nice that he took my questions about his faith with an open mind. He, or any of the other Jews I met, did not criticize my lack of knowledge about Judaism. They didn't look down on me because I was not a Jew. I was pleasantly surprised with my journey into Judaism.

For me this entire assignment has been much more than about writing a paper. I genuinely learned a lot more about Judaism than I ever expected I would. I'm pretty sure that I won't be converting to Judaism anytime soon, but I have more of an open mind about it now.