

Visit to a Synagogue

Tonight, I had the opportunity to visit a Jewish Shabbat service, which is something I have never done before. I went to Temple Beit Torah, the inclusive Reform synagogue of the Pikes Peak region. It was interesting from the very beginning upon arriving. I was fortunate enough to bring my mom along with me to this service, and right away when we walked in, we were greeted by a pleasant lady also walking into the room. Throughout the service she was very helpful and explained what was happening, especially the things she knew would be very foreign to us. When we came in and sat down there were song/prayer books in the pews and we noticed right away they had both English and Hebrew text in them, and the book opened right to left. The rabbi started with some announcements and everyone seemed very informal and friendly with each other. It was obviously a very close-knit community. Then after that, a woman went to the front of the room and lit two candles and sat back down. Following that there was singing from the prayer book as well as reading done by the rabbi and the congregation. It was in both English and Hebrew, and at the end when I spoke to the rabbi, he said that most of the congregation don't know Hebrew, but they have many of the songs memorized from childhood.

During some of these songs I noticed a few things, such as that, for some songs, the rabbi turned around and faced the Ark. Some people bowed during some songs, which was explained to me later as a sign of respect for God. A couple of times the rabbi would say a prayer in Hebrew and mention people's names who needed to be prayed for, or those who had died, and then asked the congregation to also name people for the same reasons.

The rabbi at one point went to the Ark to bring out a copy of the Torah written on scrolls, and carried it around the congregation, all the while the members would kiss it or touch their prayer books to it. I was told this was a sign of gratitude for the Torah. When the rabbi proceeded to the front of the room, he opened the scroll and read from Exodus, giving a message as well as clarifying the laws and how they should be carried out. All the while everything felt very casual, but informative and spiritual in nature, as well as humorous as times, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Before ending the service, there was more singing and at the end the rabbi drank from a cup of wine, and uncovered some bread that was passed around to the congregation and everyone tore off a bit of it.

My mom and I were invited at the end to join everyone downstairs for some "nosh", which was basically snacks, and socialize with some people. There, I could ask a few questions to the rabbi and meet a few of the members who were also helpful with questions and very friendly.

Overall this was a very fun experience and I would visit again. It was a unique experience that adds a different aspect of understanding to a religion different from my own, because I was took part in it instead of reading about it and not fully internalizing it.