

REL 402 - Visit to the Mosque

Visit to the Mosque

For a school project, I was asked to visit a mosque and observe a Muslim religious service. I called a friend, H-, an Egyptian who plays on the same soccer team as I do, explained my school project and asked if he could take me with him to the mosque. He obliged and promised to take me with him to Juammah that Friday. Since I had never been in a mosque, nor actually paid attention to anyone going to the mosque, I was concerned about the dress code. I already knew that Muslims wear jubba, but I had always assumed that they always have to wear that for all their religious purposes. Since I do not own a jubba and not wanting to take any chances, I asked Hamdan about the dress code. His answer was, "according to the Hadith, one is supposed to wear their best clothes to meet Allah." I agreed. Then I asked him if he wanted me to wear my suit (my best clothes) to that Friday service. He said "no" and that I could wear anything decent that covers the body, arms and legs. The clothes should not be too tight and they should not have pictures of any living thing or offensive writings. He explained that the pictures of living things on the clothes are disrespectful to Allah, since He gave life and we did not.

To the Mosque

That Friday afternoon, I went with H- to the mosque which I had driven by so many times, that has a golden colored dome and a minaret from which I had heard prayer calls made. H- led me to a fountain where some men were washing their arms and feet. We joined them and did the same. I understood why most of the men (including H-) were wearing sandals. I had to deal with my shoes and socks just to wash my feet. There were no women at the fountain, and from class lessons I knew that men and women did things separately. During the drive to the mosque, H- explained to me the use of the left and right hands and reasons behind it. He also instructed me to step into the mosque, right foot first, as a sign of respect to Allah. I noticed everyone was bare-footed and went into the mosque right foot first. I did the same.

Inside the Mosque

There were people of different ethnicity in the mosque. I noticed most of them had Middle Eastern features and there were a lot of blacks. I recognized four Africans who played on the same soccer team as H- and I, and they came over and we greeted each other. I noticed there was no furniture in the mosque. The floor was covered with beautiful rugs. I wondered if they were Persian. There were a few chairs along the wall where the old, disabled, and visitors sat. There were Arabic writings praising Allah hanging on the walls, but no pictures. H- pointed out the mihrab to me, and thanks to class lessons, I knew the direction of Mecca. There were no females in sight, just males squatting cross-legged in rows praying, reading, or talking in low voices to each other.

The Service

A man with a long beard appeared from somewhere in the front and shouted, "salaam aleikum." The congregation responded by saying, "aleikum salaam." H- said me, "that is the Imam." The Imam wore a jubba. He said something in Arabic and then in English, and he welcomed all of us to Jummah. The Imam called for prayer, read the Koran from a sura I could not catch, gave a sermon quoting from both the Koran and the Hadith, prayed for Allah to bless all the Prophets, another sermon and more prayers. Sometimes we stood up, other times we bowed from the waist down, at times we were on our knees and touching the ground with our forehead. Before I knew it, there was another man giving announcements and then the service was over with a salutation praising Allah and His Prophets. After that people acknowledged each other with a lot of hand shaking, touching of the chest and bowing slightly. I noticed they used the words "insha Allah" a lot. H- told me it meant "Allah willing" and showed me how these words are used. For example one cannot say to another, "I will see you tomorrow", but rather "Allah willing, I will see you tomorrow." It made sense and reminded me of a Bible verse that said we have no strength to do anything if God does not permit it.

Conclusion

On the drive back, I asked H- to explain to me why Muslims go on their knees and touch the ground with their foreheads. He laughed and told me that as a sign of respect and submission to Allah, one's forehead, nose, palms, knees and toes should touch the ground when one prays. My mouth dropped. I always thought one just has to go on their knees and touch the ground with their foreheads. The look on my face made H- laugh harder. Before we said our good-byes, H- invited me back for another service and also asked me to visit him during Ramadan. I accepted both invitations. I found myself comparing this service to others I have attended my whole life. This was different. Every religious place I have visited has furniture and one did not have to wash their feet and use the right foot to enter the place of service first. I have attended services that one can be on their knees and pray, but I have not been to any service that I have had to touch the ground with forehead, nose, palms, knees and toes. I know I only paid attention to touching my forehead to the ground at the mosque, so the first thing I did when I got home was do it like real Muslims did. It was not as easy as they made it look. I have also decided to adopt and use the words "God willing" since I agree with the way it is used by Muslims.