

### **My Visit to the Islamic Center of the South Plains in Lubbock Texas**

I was able to visit the Islamic Center of the South Plains thanks to my dad. My dad talked to a chaplain who was able to get me in contact with the Islamic Center of the South Plains, located in Lubbock, Texas. I contacted the Islamic Center of the South Plains by phone and talked to one of the members whose name was L-. I set an appointment to meet with L- and visit the Islamic Center of the South Plains.

When I arrived at the Islamic Center of the South Plains I met with L- and he invited me into the Mosque. When we first entered the Mosque we removed our shoes and L- showed me the cleansing (washing) room and explained that cleanliness was mandatory for worship in a Mosque. One had to wash one's hands up to the elbow, feet, face and neck. L- introduced me to Imam Salmar and the Imam invited me to stay for the service.

In the Mosque people did not sit on chairs but on the floor and greeted each other by saying as-salamu alaykum which means in Arabic peace be upon you. Everyone faced to the east which is the direction of the City of Mecca. During the sermon I sat on the floor by L- where he explained to me what was going on. The sermon was started with a call to prayer which lasted about five minutes. During the Imam's sermon he would first speak in Arabic and then repeat what he had said in English. The sermon was about people's arrogance and pride and how Allah has instructed the people through the Prophet Mohammad that Allah wants people to be humble, assist one another and show brotherly love. At the end of the sermon all the people in the Mosque gathered to one side of the room and began to pray and bow.

After the service I sat down with L- and Imam Salmar and asked the questions I prepared for the visit. The first question I asked was what is the difference between Islamic and Muslim? Imam Salmar and L- told me that Islam was the religion and Muslims are the people who practice the religion. I then asked what essential things must one do to be a member of a Mosque (Islamic faith). L- told me that a person must pronounce his faith and believe in the one God - Allah, and the prophet Mohammed. Imam Salmar told me that every Muslim is a member of a Mosque and that Mosques are open to all Muslims.

I asked how the stories of the prophets in Islam compare with those in Christianity and Judaism? They told me that the prophets in Islam were closely related and were mostly the same prophets as in Christianity and Judaism. Some prophets they mentioned that were similar to Christianity and Judaism were Moses, Jacob, and Abraham. Imam Salmar also added an interesting fact saying that Adam was the first Muslim and Mohammed was the final prophet of Islam.

I asked what Muslims believe about angels and demons? They told me that angels are here to protect us and are God's soldiers and that there are angels for everything - death, the ocean, mountains, etc. They also stated that Satan does exist and that demons are here to harm us and lead us astray. The next question I asked was what is a jinn (genie) and what is the jinn's purpose? They responded that jinn are beings that exist in the world as people do but we cannot see them though they can see us. They went on to say that jinn have the choice to do right and wrong just like people and also have the choice to believe in God. Imam Salmar then stated that that was all God wanted us to know about the jinn and that further questions should not be asked.

I then asked what Muslims believe about the afterlife. They told me that the afterlife is the main life, that there is a Heaven and Hell. They also said that in Heaven there will be peace for all time and happiness forever. I inquired how Islam views the relationship between Allah (God) and people. They responded saying that God is close to all people and that people should pray directly to God and God only, that praying to any other symbol, saint, or prophet is not acceptable.

The next question I asked them was how does Islam differ from other religions? They stated that the main difference between Islam and other world religions is the belief in one God. They went on to say that Islam is 90% similar to Christianity and Judaism and that Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are the divine religions because of the belief in the one God.

The last question I asked was what do Muslims believe about Jesus? They told me that Muslims believe that Jesus was a "holy special prophet" but not God, and that he did miracles by the permission of God. They continued by saying that Jesus was a messenger and prophet from the day he was born and that is what distinguished him from all other prophets.

After I was finished asking the questions I thanked L- and Imam Salmar for allowing me to visit the Mosque. Visiting the Mosque was very enjoyable and a life experience. L- and Imam Salmar were very kind and I enjoyed talking to them very much. My visit to the Islamic Center of the South Plains is something I will always remember.