

Visiting a Mosque

This past week I visited the Islamic student center in Portales New Mexico which acts as a mosque for the Islamic students of ENMU and other residents of Portales. Luckily my friend B- is Muslim and attends worshipping services at the Islamic Student center. Having my friend guide I through the Islamic worshipping traditions made it easier to really grasp and see how services are held.

The dress code for a mosque is very casual, you can wear anything you really want, just as long as the knees are covered because Islamic traditions say that while praying your bare knees must not touch the ground for it is unholy and seen as a sign of disrespect to God. Before entering the mosque's praying area you must first take off your shoes as a sign of respect to the holy ground on which you pray to God. As it was in Jewish worshipping services, women and men pray separately, and have separate teachings from the Quran. Women's attire is much stricter than men's since the Koran calls for women to hide their faces and bodies from men who are not their family. The women wear the traditional Muslim head dress, the hijab.

The service opened with the traditional Muslim prayer led by the Muslim religious leader the imam (leader of the prayer). My friend B- told me as I was walking in the prayer hall, to make sure not to walk in front of people who were praying, since that is considered a sign of disrespect to the prayer as well as to God. The Imam then starts the services with a teaching from the Quran that he feels is appropriate for that Friday service; teachings range mainly through what you have to do to be a good Muslim - which are things like forgiveness, acceptance, repentance, and discipline. According to the Imam at the Islamic student center, these are the four most important teachings Mohammed said are needed in order to stay or become a good Muslim.

The ceremony lasted for only 45 minutes but felt very well organized, as well as taught a lot in a short period of time. What I took from my first experience visiting the Mosque is that the ceremonies are very concentrated on a teaching from the Quran, and that they don't stray at all from that day's teaching. The services and traditions practiced are very important and enforced heavily throughout the prayer hall, but overall it was a very enlightening experience and look into the Islamic world of worship.