

## My Visit to Congregation B'Nai Israel

As I had never been to a synagogue before I was a little nervous but when it was all said and done I was very happy that I went as the visit was enlightening and educational. I contacted the Congregation B'Nai Israel Synagogue to make an appointment to visit. I spoke with C- who is Treasurer of the synagogue. She told me to meet her at ten thirty at the synagogue on September 4. When I first got to the Synagogue I was a bit worried because no one was there but I was a little early so I waited and in a matter of minutes she showed up and invited me inside the Congregation B'Nai Israel Synagogue.

When I first walked into the synagogue, C- handed me a Yarmulke (skullcap) and asked that I put it on. She explained to me that all men have to put on the Yarmulke before they enter the sanctuary. After I put on the Yarmulke she opened the doors to the sanctuary and we went in. Upon entering we went directly to the sanctuary, as we walked up to the Ark she explained to me that the Ark is always facing towards Jerusalem then she opened the Ark and pulled back the curtains inside to reveal the Torah. I was not expecting the scroll to be so big, and because of its size she was afraid that she would damage it if she tried to move it. She told me that normally her husband would get the Torah down and I offered to help but neither of us felt comfortable removing the Torah from the Ark. So instead of reading from the Torah scroll itself C- went to a cabinet and pulled out a book that held the same literature as the Torah. She then started to read from it in Hebrew and showed me what she was reading was also in English in the book.

After she finished reading from the book she pulled out a ram's horn that was called a Shofar. She told me that the Shofar was used to announce holidays and was even used during Biblical times. Right after she finished speaking she gave me a demonstration and blew the Shofar. After showing me the Shofar she then showed me the washing cup. The cup had two handles so both hands could be washed easily without touching. After showing me all these fascinating things we went to a table in a back room and she asked me if I had any questions.

The first question I asked C- was how does Judaism view the relationship between people and God? She told me that the relationship between people and God is very personal and a way of life. That the Jewish people pray three times a day and study the Torah regularly, observing the Sabbath, and keep the Dietary Laws. The second question I asked her was what are the names for God that are used in the Torah? She told me that the name for God in the Torah was Adonai.

As our discussion continued I asked her what was necessary in order to convert to Judaism? She told me that if a woman was Jewish, her child would be Jewish automatically. If the mother was not Jewish and a person did want to convert to Judaism they would have to approach a Rabbi of a synagogue three times expressing that they want to commit and to study the beth din. Next I asked what is believed in Judaism to happen to someone after they die? Is there some idea of an afterlife, or is that purely a Christian invention? She told me that the Jewish people believe that the spirit still lives on after a person dies and that there is a Heaven and a Hell. She went on to say that in Heaven the spirit will reunite with God but that if the spirit goes to the cursed valley of Hell the spirit will suffer from great torment for all eternity.

I continued by asking what does Judaism think of Jesus? What place, if any, does he have in the religion? She told me that Jesus had no place in the actual religion but that they believed he was a teacher and that the Jewish people are strictly Old Testament. I then asked do the Jewish people expect a literal Messiah? All she told me was that the Jewish people hope for a Messiah and that they are still waiting for one.

I then asked her what is the Law of Moses? She told me that the Law of Moses was the Ten Commandments and that they should be followed. The next question I asked was C-'s favorite to answer, the question was should we say that Jews are members of a race, or followers of a religion? She went on to say that the Jews are God's chosen people and most Rabbis consider the Jewish people as a culture and a religion, but that it is a topic of discussion and will always be debated.

The last question I asked C- was what the seven laws of Noah were. She told me that the Laws of Noah were elementary moral precepts that everyone, including non-Jews, should follow. The Laws of Noah were the prohibition of idolatry, the prohibition of murder, the prohibition of theft, the prohibition of sexual immorality, the prohibition of blasphemy, the prohibition of eating flesh taken from an animal while it is still alive, and the requirement of maintaining courts to provide legal recourse.

After I asked her these nine questions I thanked C- (she was awesome) for such a great experience, and it was now time to go. As I stated previously this visit was enlightening and educational. I thoroughly enjoyed visiting Congregation B'Nai Israel and learned so much while there. I am excited and looking forward to visiting the other places of worship for other religions in the future.