

Essay 1: Synagogue Visit

For this assignment I decided to accompany my friend Mikayla to a synagogue in Albuquerque New Mexico. I don't know much about Judaism so I was fortunate to know Mikayla whose parents happen to be Jewish so she helped me find a synagogue to visit. From what I understand there is only a handful of synagogues in Albuquerque so the one I went to was the Congregation B'Nai Israel which is a conservative synagogue.

I went to the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evening because I have never been to a synagogue before and it was interesting to say the least. As we entered the Synagogue two women were on stage and had already began singing as we found our seats. The spiritual leader or Rabbi as they are called was a woman named Rabbi Baz; she greeted everybody when the song was finished and talked about celebrating the Torah. After her short message she invited up two families who she mentioned were having bar mitzvahs soon and those two families lit the Shabbat candles I believe they were called as more songs began. Soon after we were asked to stand and face the door as if we were welcoming as we sang, forgive me if I can't spell or say the Jewish names the Rabb said because they were hard to remember. Rabbi Baz wore a blue scarf type thing around her neck and the other lady who did most of the singing wore a white scarf. I did find it hard to keep up or understand some of the prayers and songs during the service because they are in a Hebrew so without any Jewish background it is tough even though I looked along with Mikayla at her prayer book that had English translations. I felt a little strange at times because I couldn't sing along of course because I don't speak Hebrew so I mostly stood there wondering what was going on. The music and songs lasted maybe a half hour, then Rabbi Baz began to give her message. Rabbi Baz spoke about what Mikayla told me were the chapter numbers in the Old Testament and the theme of the Rabbi's message was about being faithful to Yahweh. The 'feel' of the meeting was very laid back and Rabbi Baz expressed how we were there to celebrate the fellowship of everyone who attended so the vibe was joyous I would say. After the short message the Rabbi invited people up to open the curtains behind her and we all stood up and the singing began again. After that the Rabbi gave a closing message about loved ones who been lost, then everyone recited on last prayer then that was it. I expected the message or sermon to be longer but it was only in-between songs for a minute or two and the Rabbi spoke in English which was of course easy for me to understand compared to the songs.

I would say that I enjoyed the architecture of the synagogue the most, it was nicer than any church I've been to before. The roof was pitched like a huge hut inside and the seats circled around the stage which was pretty cool yet simple. Mikayla introduced me to a few people afterwards. I find the hats Jewish men wear amusing, but the people were nice and welcoming despite me not being Jewish; they invited me next week to try the water coloring class taught by another rabbi; however it cost \$40 for non-members.

My visit was unique, as I mentioned earlier my favorite part was the appreciation of the building because I haven't seen anything like it, which makes me wonder if all Jewish Synagogues are that unique or was it just that expensive-looking one. I was kind of taken back by how expensive the classes were and how much being a member mattered - it almost reminded me of Mormon churches. In all the Christian churches I've been too everything is so open and free but the Synagogue reminded me almost of belonging to a club. So my visit was pleasant but I have to admit I was of course lost most of the time with all the Hebrew words for everything. I didn't ask Mikayla about things during the service because I wanted to be respectful, the only thing I honestly knew about the service was when they would refer to the Torah I just knew they were talking about the Old Testament of Christianity. Judaism has been one of the religions I have struggled with, so the only thing that really stuck with me from the textbook was Jewish funerals. In this case the service I went to wasn't a funeral so I didn't really relate anything from the textbook to the service besides lighting of the Shabbat candles and reading the Torah. The big remaining question I have is what Jewish people think of Jesus and why does Judaism not consider the New Testament because it seems to me contradictory not to do so.