

We have a Synagogue here in Amarillo called Temple B'Nai Israel. My plan was to visit and talk with someone who practiced and or taught there regularly, or at least something close to those lines. I wanted to pick the brain of a practicing believer of the religion. I tried calling to set up a time to meet with someone but I kept getting a recording machine. So I figured that I would just go and see if I could get lucky enough to catch someone there who was willing to share their thoughts and ideas with me. So off I went this past week on an evening journey in search of knowledge of a religion I knew next to nothing about.

The synagogue itself is not a massive building but a nice size just right for gatherings, teachings, and celebrations. There was no one there when I arrived so the doors were locked blocking entry to view the inside. This dampened my spirits a bit because I was very curious to get a look at the class rooms and worship areas. I wandered around the grounds of the building for a bit walking along a few small stone paths and around a small garden area. There was a peaceful feeling all around the building. I took my son along with me on this little outing to let him get a glimpse at something outside of the ordinary for us. He wandered around taking in the sight of the area and the simple design of the building. He asked a ton of questions of why we were there and what we were looking for. I had taken my textbook along with me to give me ideas for questions to ask if I met someone at the synagogue. My son and I found a bench in the garden area and sat for a little while. He thumbed through my book and read some of the pages here and there. As we sat and discussed some of the things in the book, a car pulled into the parking lot and an older man got out. He walked toward the synagogue until he noticed us and walked over to where we were. He asked if we were waiting for someone. I told him why I had originally come there that evening and he said he had a little time he could spare to talk with us. He told us his name, which was difficult to pronounce, but that everyone calls him Doc. We followed Doc to the front of the building and went in after him. On the wall just inside the door is the flag of Israel. My son asked him what it meant. He told him how the blue stripes symbolize the traditional Jewish prayer shawl, the tallit. He went on to say that the Star of David represents the State of Israel, his birth place. He invited us into a sitting room by the main offices of the building. I asked him if he could walk us through some of what he and his family do before and during their celebration times throughout the year. He told us that since there are a small number of members at their synagogue compared to some in larger cities, they tend to come together there as one complete family to share in preparations for each event. The women have certain duties, the men have others and the children help where needed. Food is prepared and kept there for any meals that are to be consumed and they are done so together as a large family. The Festival of Booths is one of the biggest for them as a whole. They set up in the class rooms giving each separate family the same amount of space but then they also set up a larger area that can hold everyone together. Any celebration that requires more than a day means that everyone stays at the synagogue the entire time. They set up areas for sleeping and the rest of the time is spent throughout the rest of the building and on the grounds outside. Part of the garden area is dedicated to growing vegetables and herbs that are turned into some of the spices used in their food preparation and cooking. We talked for almost two hours as he went into stories of growing up and moving from Israel to the States when he was 12. We got a lot of first-hand insights into his life and his beliefs. He was an extremely happy and humble man. He invited us to come back to sit in during a class or two that they have there. It is not a class that tries to get you to convert but rather a history lesson on how Judaism came about and how it has grown through times of struggle as well as times of prosperity and happiness. It is something we are thinking about doing just to see what we can learn. Doc was a wonderful person and I look forward to getting to talk to him again one day.