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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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All Dulles Area Muslim Society Mosque: “Friday Muslim Prayer”

by Chandni Malik

On September 4th, 2015 I attended a Friday Jumma prayer at a local Mosque in Northern Virginia that was scheduled at 1:00PM. The Mosque I chose was called Adams Center and is located 15 minutes from my home at 4431 Brookfield corporate Dr. Chantilly, VA. In Islam the presiding officials go by the name “Mullah”. The Mullah at the Jumma prayer I attended was named Mullah Owais Balti. While visiting I met people of all the sects of Islam including, Sunnis, Shi’as, and Wahhabis.

The Mosque’s outside appearance resembled a warehouse, it was very simple looking and it was under renovations. At the entrance there are a set of stairs, once you go up there are tables with food to buy and the money is donated to the Mosque. The mosque is divided into two sections where men and women are separate with women to the left and men to the right. It was a very conservative environment where women have to dress in long sleeves and full length pants to cover the skin as well as a scarf over their heads to represent modesty and respect to Allah, their God. Muslims are required to take a bath and do “Wudu” before attending prayer. Wudu consists of thoroughly cleaning your body with water and soap while reciting “Surahs” from the Quran. There was no formal greeting as I walked in but everyone was friendly and would say “Salam” to one another meaning “hello”.

The Mosque was filled with people of all races

but mainly people of Pakistani decent and Middle Easterners. The people who attended this mosque mostly consisted of Sunnis but also included Shi’as, and Wahhabis. The dominating gender was defiantly male over woman and the average age varied from young teens to elderly.

When I walked in I did feel a little uncomfortable sitting and talking with the people attending just because I felt out of place and I had no idea what I was really doing, although the people were generally nice, they just seemed to be very extroverted. I was fortunate enough to meet a friendly girl around my age named Leila who assisted me during the prayer and answered all my questions.

The service started off with a lecture called “Khutba” from the Mullah who spoke in English so that the people attended would clearly understand the message he was trying to convey. He mostly talked about the importance of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, and how it should be a guide for Muslims in their journey to Jannah (Heaven). One thing that caught my attention was the significance he implied on family and respect. It made me think and start to reevaluate my relationship with my parents and how I treat them, which was quite inspirational.

The service was generally serious and very quiet, during the lecture as well as the prayer I noticed the tone was dramatic more than

casual. According to Leila the Friday prayer is ritualistic rather than spontaneous. Every Friday prayer starts with the Khutba and ends with prayer. However, each Khutba is different with the Mullah speaking about a different subject or topic of importance. The congregational participation all depends on the person but it generally seemed like an emotional experience. However, for me I didn't feel the level of emotions as others because it was my first time and it was a lot to take in as a beginner.

After the Khutba the Mullah started reciting "Sura al Fatiha", which is recited in Arabic, and Muslims are required to perform four Rakats. Rakat is the act of bending down on your knees and resting your head on the "Janamaz" or prayer rug. In Islam they do not believe in idolism so there were no symbolic images, just plaques with "Allah" written in Arabic hanging from the walls. The prayer rugs were rectangular with colorful designs. The one I used was black and gold with a picture of the Kabbah, a building in the middle of the most sacred site in Islam, stitched on it with fringes coming off the top and bottom.

The Mullah stands in the front while everyone stands behind him in uniform lines that face towards the Kabbah in Mecca. I didn't understand what was being recited because it was in a foreign language to me, but when I looked up meaning the main points were that "Allah is all mighty" and "Allah is the greatest" and how we should make it our goal to follow Allah and do right by him. Leila, the girl I met, was Sunni and she advised me to rest my hands on my chest as women are instructed to do in Islam. Leila also explained how other sects, such as Shi'as rest their hands by their sides. I could sense a bit of prejudice when she was

explaining the different sects, and felt that she didn't approve of the other Muslim's ways, almost as if her way was the right way.

Overall it was a moving experience which forced me to get out of my comfort zone due to the fact that I never really grew up with any religious background or influence. It was definitely something new to me, but I am glad I chose to visit a Mosque. Next, I am looking forward to exploring a different institution and gaining more insight and knowledge about their religion. •

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