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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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# Bodhi Path Buddhist Center: “Buddhist Temple”

by Marianna Booth

I went to the Bodhi Path Buddhist Center on 12 Bodhi Path Natural Bridge, VA 24578. I went on September 27 2015 from 10:30-12:30. It was a little bit over an hour drive from home each way. The Dharma Tsony lead the meditation. He and his wife were from California.

The property where the Buddhist Center was 47 acres which was in the middle of 250 acres, it was donated. When you turned onto the road, there was a sign and they had different arrows pointing different ways. They had a horse farm and riding classes on some of the property. They had many different buildings throughout the massive land but we only went to the one where the meditation was held. It was up on a hill and in the middle of the woods. When you walked in, it was a rectangular shaped building that was very small and it had windows on the sides. It was somewhat separated into two parts but they were still connected. When we walked in, a lady talked to us and asked if we had ever been there before. She was very kind and showed us around. She told us which prayers to say, if we were comfortable, and which order. She then introduced us to Dharma Tsony. He was extremely welcoming and told us where we could sit. He said if we weren't comfortable sitting on the ground with the pads we could sit in the chairs. He offered us pads for our feet and blankets because the room was drafty and cold. The smell of the room was a light incense fragrance but not overwhelming. At the front of the room, there were 3 different

displays. The middle was a statue of Buddha with candles and water and plants in front of it. He was on top of a pedestal with a little canopy. To his left there was an elevated pad with a tree in front of it for when the Tibetan teacher would come. To the right there was a similar setting but it was a chair. Dharma Tsony explained that this is for whichever the teachers prefer. The the right of that was a giant black gong. It belonged to a Chinese family that donated it to the Bodhi Path Buddhist Center. The walls in the building were rather thin, it was amazing for a day like today because as it rained. You could hear it gently hitting the roof.

There were roughly 25 people attending this mediation group. The average age was probably about 40s to 50s. There were two cadets from VMI and they were my age. Everyone was white except one hispanic. Everyone was very kind and talked to us. They didn't make us feel like we weren't welcome. Everyone was friendly and they offered some food at the end of the meditation. After we recited the last prayer, we went and talked to Dharma Tsony. He was very open, calming and informative. He offered his email and said I could message him if I had any questions for after I had left. No one really offered to sit with us, it was a small room so we were all basically sitting together anyways. There wasn't really much to explain because most of it was mediation.

We were given a prayer booklet to recite

prayers at the beginning and the end. I didn't know we weren't suppose to put it on the ground but I had it laying on the ground while we were meditating. During the mediation, that is really a one on one experience with yourself. He spoke twice between meditations. The second time he really talked about trying to go deeper and be aware of your subconscious. He even went further on to say to not try to put your experience into words. That would make the experience less meaningful and powerful. Words could not be put into what was going to happen during our meditation. While he was speaking he made a few jokes. It was very light and airy but definitely serious while we were meditating and emotional. The opening was very casual. I was expecting it to be very formal, I wore a dress. Everyone there was in jeans, there was even a guy with a pony tail and overalls. For the most part, it was very reserved when it came to the prayers. We all recited the same thing. The service seemed ritualistic. We said the first two prayers 3 times in a row and then we mediated for 15 minutes. Then Dharma Tsony spoke for about 10-15 minutes about how we should try to reach a deeper level of the subconscious. He used the analogy of an ocean. We are living at the top where all the chaos lives, we need to go to the depths of the ocean to reach the calm, things are still moving but not as much. Then we meditated probably for another 15-30 minutes. He rang the gong and the session was over. Everyone got up and put their cushions back against the wall where all the extras were. Everyone then talked with each other and ate food.

One of the main attractions was in the middle of the wall at the front of the room, the Buddha. I already described it earlier. It was very serene and peaceful. Today's meditation

was about the subconscious but tomorrow night they have a meditation for the full moon. They have some meditations at the beginning of every month. Overall, I had a really lovely experience here at the Bodhi Path Buddhist Center. •

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