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## Ekoji Buddhist Sangha

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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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# Ekochi Buddhist Sangha

by Hallea Ross

On November 25, I attended a Hindu temple in Richmond Virginia. Ekochi Buddhist Sangha of Richmond, Virginia, is a multi-denominational community of Buddhist and Buddhist-inspired groups. All groups are open to the public. I attended one of the meditations that was offered at Wednesday night at 8:45 with the sitting meditation group. Before attending the church I did some research on their website to check to see if there were any specific rules that I had to follow in order to participate in the mediation. Before attending any services that the temple has to offer it is advised that you speak with one of the leaders of the group first. The temple has many different kinds of meditation groups to offer, they are called Sangha Groups. The Sangha groups that are offered are Ekochi Pure Land group, the Richmond Zen group, Tibetan Buddhist group, Insight Meditation Community, Richmond Meditative Inquiry Group. Ligmincha Richmond, Shambhala Meditation, and Ekochi Buddhist Sangha. I chose to go to the Richmond Meditative Inquiry group. Before attending I spoke with Mark Bryant, who as extremely helpful in the orientation and meditation instruction. He was great at answering any questions that I had and explain to me the instructions of how to do the meditation.

The outside of the building had a modest and humble tone to its structure. The first thing I noticed upon entering the temple was the large pointed arrow at the top of the building. On the pathway to the building there was a

big beautiful red bush on the side, and in the front of the bush was a brown wooden statue. The statue almost stood as if it was guarding the front doors of the temple. The structure had on an oriental farmer's hat, and carried a staff. The whole tone of the building was a very safe and warming tone. It was very welcoming. Upon entering the temple there are tables step with pamphlets full of information about the different services they have to offer and information on the religion and its history. When I first walked in I immediately felt a sense of welcoming and calming tone. The people who attended the temple were of all different variety. There were a lot of people who looked Middle Eastern, or looked Indian, there were some white people, and few black people as well. I went at a later meditation session so there were a lot of middle aged people, middle class people. I found there to be a lot more women that I had expected. I was expecting this to a more predominantly male practice, just because I have never heard of too many women that practice or study Buddhism. I was extremely quiet the whole time. I didn't feel like it was appropriate to talk because of the strong emphasis on silence because it is a mediation environment.

While meditating, they sit on a mat on the floor kneeling or with their legs crossed, some, and some may use a chair, being quiet and motionless. They sit because they think the sitting may make it possible for a human being to come in touch with an inner stability

which is the free and effortless gathering and flowing of energy. They believe that the sitting is supposed to allow one be in touch with the ever changing conditions of each moment. The room was completely silent, so quiet I could actually hear my own breath. Sitting quietly, and focusing on your breathing bring awareness of the human body and mind. All those constant stream of thoughts, feelings, and pain, are fading away in the silence. It was the most calming and relaxing time, I have ever had. I was able to clear my mind, and be at peace.

The emotional tone of the temple overall was a very calming and serene tone. I came out way more relaxed than in the beginning. The meditation was very casual, I was able to wear a pair of sweats and be comfortable. I found meditation to be very self-reflective. No one seemed to really interact with each other because this is more about yourself. It was an overall great experience, that I thoroughly enjoyed. It was one of the most relaxing times I have had at a church/ temple. •

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