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Ekaji Buddhist Sangha

by Emilie Urquidi

The institution that I visited on this recent Sunday was the Ekaji Buddhist Sangha. This Buddhist temple was located on 3411 Grove Avenue, Richmond, VA, 23221. The presiding official that was around us and helped me and my friends gather up a group and make the process of attending our first Buddhist temple smooth and easy was named Kevin Heffernan. I went to this temple on Sunday October 24th around 9-10:30.

The Ekaji Buddhist Sangha temple looked like a regular small town house in Richmond at first looks. This temple townhouse was in a regular Richmond neighborhood surrounding more townhouses. I was terrible confused. I wasn't sure what to expect at all, but I sort of expected something more professional or something more proper. I assume this expectation derived from my own Christian background being used to attending an extravagant Christian church with stained glass and all. The whole process felt a little improper but it definitely felt causal and relaxed which goes with the whole feeling of this specific denomination.

The inside of this Buddhist temple included several black mats in an organized shape, almost like a circle. Looking around the inside of the temple I noticed several Buddhist statues and the regular type of Buddhist decorations or symbols that you would expect to see. The temple townhouse had a type of Buddhist feel, almost like a completely different vibe that

you wouldn't feel in a regular Christian church. The temple townhouse had Buddhism originated music playing. Buddhist chants were said as the service had begun. Several candles were lit and providing warmth, adding to the vibe that the temple gave surrounding the Buddhist statues.

The Buddhist service contained people from many different social classes, different genders, and all sorts of different ages, reminding me of small example of a melting pot community. The service contained a small group of people with a vast amount of differences between each other, this resonated to me because I understood why this religion has become so appealing to a large population of our community. In the beginning I did not feel very comfortable because I was so confused and because all of this was completely new to me. I also felt uncomfortable because I had already constructed several expectations for this experience, although I wish I hadn't. During the service I felt more and more comfortable because I have actually practiced Buddhism in my own room at my home by myself before. I was aware of the several Buddhism terms and the majority of the process of meditation. Before and after the service I talked with my friends who came with me, but not really anybody new. No one offered to sit with them aside from my friends in the temple townhouse.

During the service and the mediation, I felt

really sore during which was surprising because we were all just sitting down while chanting. The meditation part of a Buddhist temple can be quite exhausting since you have to focus extremely hard and sit still for a long period of time. During the service, the person leading the service provided the followers with a message about learning how to cope in a busy world and learning to be mindful and clearing your mind. The emotional tone of the service was serious, passionate yet repetitive. I felt like they repeated messages they were reciting to us was a general message but it still obviously meant something to the religion and could be applied to your own personal life. During the service, the chants contained religious Buddhism terms with heavy connotations. The words used held a clear significance behind them and the way that they were being said provided an aural visual for their significance. The opening of the service was very casual yet it was clear that it was very emotional. The entire service felt very ritualistic. The ending of the service ended with a final Buddhism chant that we had to repeat. After the service I got up and walked around for a little bit and examined the statues that seemed significant and interested me. The decorations that I had looked at included several Buddhist symbols, beads, tapestries, statues, candles, bowls and intricate pottery. Overall, I had a fantastic experience even if in the beginning I was a little scare, I'm very glad that I had the opportunity to experience this. •

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