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Ekoji Buddhist Sangha

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On Sunday November 22nd I attended a Sunday service at Ekoji Buddhist Sangha located at 3411 Grove Ave Richmond, VA 23221. The service starts at nine in the morning; but it is suggested that you come 15-30 minutes before the service starts. The reason for that is to get an instruction or overview of meditation and how things are done there.

The Buddhist center was located in a residential area. This place of worship was actually a two story older styled house. The inside of the house was older looking as well when you entered. I could tell the place was a little on the older side, because for instance there was a heater that people used in the late1900s. There was a place to the right as soon as you walked in to place your shoes in little cubbies. Once we took our shoes off they started setting up their equipment in the sitting area that was located a few feet from the entrance. They sat pillows out for everyone and books that we had to put under the pillows that we eventually sat on later.

I was greeted warmly, and talked to a little more in depth by a few people. There was one lady there whom was very helpful to me and another young lady who was a newcomer, she kept us on track on what was going on and what we were suppose to be doing at the time. The social class appeared to be possibly middle class. I took notice that there was not a dress code everyone just had on their regular every day clothing. The majority of the attending people that day were Caucasian I am assuming.

There were a few women there but the dominant gender that day was definitely males. While I was there I noticed that the average age in attendance was thirty years of age and above, but there was one child and one teenager who attended with their mother as well. In all there was about fifteen to seventeen people that came that day. I was very comfortable talking and engaging with others but I was not as comfortable when it came to going along with what they were doing and I think it was just because I had no real understanding of what was the reasoning for things and why were they doing things in certain ways.

During my visit here one of the first things they did that I seen was a lady burning something in a bowl. Soon after I heard a ding and we ended up sitting down on the pillows they put out earlier and meditated for thirty minutes and you had to face the wall. There were a few people who came in late after the meditation already started and after they took their shoes off they bowed down before entering the sitting area and then took their seat. The pillow’s that we sat on was a big square one and one smaller circular one that you put your bottom on. I noticed that people used the smaller circular one in different ways I guess to their own personal liking of comfort of how they choose to sit on it. Some people knelt on their knees and put their pillow in between
their legs. They also had a couple of regular chairs for people to sit in I guess for those who didn’t want to get down on the floor. After meditating for thirty minutes there is another ding and we got up and walked around the room. This was called walking meditation; you walked around slowly to the point you were barely moving and after making one complete way around the room from where you started you then went back to meditating for another thirty minutes. Then after that they have their service and that is held for ten minutes and then it goes to their tea and discussion which they only do tea and discussions on Sundays. On certain Sundays they also have book discussion on the current book that they are reading. After the tea and discussion the service is over. The emotional tone of the service was very peaceful and quiet. I think the opening was casual they did not ding anything too dramatic. During the service everyone participated in a way I think was kind of reserved and ritualistic. It seemed like you had to do things certain ways or it may be disrespectful. In the room I saw many different pictures of Asian people. There were different symbolic writings in an Asian language. I also seen a symbolic figure where the teacher sat right in front of him was the small statue. The whole experience was very peaceful and enjoyable, I would not mind going back and being able to learn more about it.

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