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# Hindu Center of Virginia

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# Hindu Center of Virginia

by Janel Boyles De Rondon

I arrived at the Richmond Temple early on Sunday, November 15, 2015 at 9:30 a.m. The center is located at 6051 Springfield Rd., Glen Allen, Va-23060. The class that I took that day which focused on the religion of the Hindu Temple was led by Veena Lothe, there was a fee of twenty-five dollars for attending.

When I first arrived at the center I didn't quite know what to expect, I googled the center to know which one I would be visiting. The center welcomes many people from vast backgrounds, they didn't discriminate against the newer members and they made it easier to help me enjoy my experience there by being welcoming. The center was overwhelming and intimidating once I first approached it because it is really big and everyone there actually were members and they knew their way around. The temple had many sculptures on its building of gods, animals and many others that were very elaborate. The temple was white and very intimidating because of how elaborate and detailed the building was.

I researched how I needed to dress for the class and the practices so I would know how to act and what we would be doing. Doing research before I attended was helpful because there was so much that I needed to know before I arrived at the center. Everyone had to take off their shoes before entering it was disrespectful if you were to wear your shoes in the temple. You always want to be wearing freshly washed clothes because you want to

look your best and very clean to enter such a holy building.

Once I first entered the temple there were people at the front door greeting the guests that entered. The guests began taking off their shoes as soon as they entered the center. There was a woman and a man at the front door, women went one way and men went the other. It was kind of interesting to me that men and women went their separate ways once they entered the temple. We had to sit separately and couldn't show any signs of affections such as through hugging. As everyone went in we all had to perform Namaste in front of the deities as a sign of respect.

There weren't that many new guests, it looked as though I were the only one visiting for the first time. The members of the temple were men and women from various age groups there were also kids that attended with their parents. The men wore slacks and loose buttoned shirts while the women wore loose shirts and long skirts or they wore Indian clothing. The clothing was supposed to be loose so it would be comfortable to sit down in, which is what we did we had to sit on the floor, there weren't any seats or chairs for us to sit in.

While at the Temple a common ritual known as Puja meaning worship, was the focus of the service, it lasted the whole time that I was there and it was performed behind curtain to

protect the Gods. Within the ritual, bells were ranged and everyone presented their offerings and we chanted to the Gods, it was led by the priest or the teacher. There were also sacred flames that were passed which symbolizes It was important to avoid touching things because it would be disrespectful if I did. I was offered holy water which is a symbolism for cleanliness within the body and the spirit of a person. This is a sacrament that is prominent in Hinduism, offering Holy water and a sacred flame...

When Puja began the priest had to purify himself first and the center itself, when he began chanting I knew I wouldn't be able to follow along because it was in Sanskrit which is the ancient language of India. Once after he finished chanting, he began ringing bells and singing hymns from the Vedas which is a sacred scriptures and texts of Hinduism. The temple was very peaceful and I felt an incredible amount of holiness while there and during Puja. The priest offered food that was vegetarian because in the religion it is believed that animals have feelings just like humans. Flowers were also passed out by the priest while still chanting to the Gods and Deities such as Ganesha, the god of wisdom and food fortune. Part of the ceremony was performed while standing and everyone was singing, ringing bells and clapping. Overtime I had to learn to follow along with what the priest was doing both mentally and physically. Because the puja ended we were given sacraments that were first passed to the Deity. The first offering is the lamp that was offered to the Deity at the highest point of the Puja, the lamp symbolizes being able to see a person in full light when the lamp lights up a person's face. I was nervous for this part because I didn't exactly know what to expect. But I watched the priest

approach other people before myself so I did what they did which was put my hands over the lamp as the priest passed by each person and then placed my hands over my own face.

Other objects were passed around to each person from different deities as the priest came around, such as holy ash that's passed to the Siva shrine which is made by burning cow and it gives out positive energy, it symbolizes the burning of ego and karma. We had to put the ashes onto our foreheads, one line for females and three for males. I didn't really want to because of the fact that it was from burning cow but I did it because everyone else did without hesitation and I wanted to respect their culture and religion. We also received holy water and milk that was offered at first to the Deity and in which the Deity bathed in. At last we were given food that we would take away with us and Flowers we could hang in our homes.

Exiting the Temple was very similar as entering it, we put our shoes back on at the door from where we left them when we entered. Everyone was in good spirits, talking with each other about the ceremony and service. I met a lot of people that were very welcoming and that encouraged me to visit again. I left with flowers and food from the ceremony and it was my first time ever leaving a religious center with something such as flowers in hand •

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