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# Muhammad Mosque No. 24: “My Islam Experience”

by Toni Taylor

After weeks of contemplating about which religious service I wanted to attend, I finally decided to go to a Mosque. Since I'm interested in learning more about this religion at hand, I attended a Mosque by the name of “Muhammad Mosque No.24” which I attended a couple of months ago before they moved downtown on Main St., as well as recently for this assignment. I will use both of my experiences for this paper. They are now located Downtown at 408 E. Main St. They only have a Study Group on Fridays so I attended what they call a “general lecture” service on Sunday September 6th from 11am to approximately 1pm. The service was led by Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Last January they were forced to give up their large, steepled space on South Side. Muhammad Mosque No.24 is now currently operating out of a leased space that doesn't really give a feel of a Mosque so I will use my older experience which I think will show how a greeting at a Muslim service is really like. Their current building is white with simple windows. It looks like a random building you would see in a city. Their older building was actually an old church building that still had the cross on top. It was a pretty big building made of red brick. When you enter the building you're greeted by a man and women. In the Christian religion these would probably be referred to as “ushers”. After they greet you, they escort the women to one room and the men to another room to be searched. I

was taken back by this at first but my friend quickly explained to me why all Mosques partake in this. She told me that after the assassination of Malcolm X every Mosque in the world started searching and confiscating things like pocket knives. They even take badges from police officers because they believe that in the Mosque those rights are basically nonexistent, and everyone is equal there. When I entered the room they just did a simple pat down and then pointed us in the direction of the room where the service would be held. When I walked in I noticed that all women sat on one side and all men sat on the other side. There were two women (ushers) standing on the wall of the women's side and two men standing on the wall of the men's side. When I looked toward the front where the minister would soon speak, I saw two men standing. One on each side of the pulpit. They were the minister's security. I never knew the nation of Islam still took the death of Malcolm X so personally even now so many years later. At first I really couldn't understand why they were so uptight with everything considering how long ago he was assassinated, but then I had to sit back and appreciate their religion and their loss of one of their icons, and it all started to make more sense to me. After taking everything in I looked around and noticed that the Mosque was filled with only African Americans which wasn't that shocking to me because of the location of this Mosque at that time. There were about 30 to 40 people and most of them were middle aged. When waiting

for the service to start, I felt pretty uncomfortable because I was basically the only one not dressed in Muslim attire. I soon felt at ease about it because I went with my friend and her family who were dressed like the rest of the congregation.

When the service started I got much more comfortable because things felt more familiar. Their service is almost identical to a Christian church service. The only difference is that they don't have a choir and their offering is taken up at the end of service instead of the middle of service. It was also brought to my attention that their offering is for charity whereas at my Christian church we take up several different offerings, most of them for the church and the pastor.

During service they said things like "teach" and "go head" which also reminded me of my church. After service most people walked around and greeted one another. Everyone seemed very friendly and I like how they welcomed me even though I wasn't of their faith. They asked me questions like how I enjoyed their service and would I come visit them again. I told them how their service was comforting because parts of it reminded me of my church and they were happy to hear that I was planning to attend another service in the future.

After about thirty minutes of socializing, we all walked outside and there were stands with bean pies and newspapers. Bean pies were created in the 1930s, born out of the strict dietary code of the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad was the leader of this movement and is also the Nation of Islam Leader and messenger. His book entitled "How To Eat To Live" set guidelines for eating to prolong life.

Most Ministers, including Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan (the minister of the mosque I attended) lead based on the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, so it's only right that they sell bean pies after service. "Final Call" is also a product of Elijah Muhammad. He published this Muslim Newspaper in the 1930s as well and it's been evolving ever since. It is the official communication organ of the Nation of Islam. At first I thought that the bean pies and the newspaper were just nice gestures after service but then after doing some research I found out how symbolic and meaningful these two things are for their religion. My experience was very enjoyable and I would definitely go again just for the great experience. •

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