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### Roose Assignment

The fact I grew up in the military meant moving around a lot, at times even between nations. My experiences in cultural immersion through my having lived overseas, along with my tendency to make friends more easily with those of differing viewpoints, has made for a personality that's not exactly easy to make uncomfortable. I'm no stranger to new experiences, but this assignment allowed me to add one to the list in attending prayer at a mosque.

I attended with a muslim friend of mine, having been informed before regarding the extensive rules surrounding *ihram*, or their contemplative silence during prayer. No shoes were allowed inside the mosque, but what I found most odd right off the bat was I wasn't allowed to participate. Certainly not of ill will, but it's against custom to allow outsiders to take part in *ihram*. So, I simply did as I could and watched, observing.

It's incredibly odd to think of how there are such starkly contrasting cultures just down the road. As has been with other cultures I've assimilated with, I assumed there would be enough crossover to at least feel as if I could relate to what they were doing. However, the contrast was almost jarring. These people, practicing a religion that has little to do with my own and with customs that differ almost entirely from mine, are living in the same nation, under the same laws, and voting using the same system. Everybody

can say America is a melting pot, but actually experiencing how starkly some of the conflicts of culture stand out was a refreshing experience.

Roose expressed feeling the same way, even if, having been born and raised a Catholic, I can't necessarily relate to his jarring introduction to a more Christian life. It really makes one wonder about seemingly trivial things, such as the life outside of the mosque for people like the imam khatib, or those who happened to enter for this, one of five daily prayers. As Roose got to learn of the people behind the Bible as something more than screaming right-wing radicals, he began to empathize for them. He wonders what sorts of adversity they face for being devoutly religious, and in the same way I feel the same. We live in a society that's becoming more and more adverse towards Muslim populations in general, and it took a visit to a mosque and a chat with the prayer leader in order to curb the bit of unsteadiness I myself felt regarding the religion as a whole.

Personally, I feel as if putting on the role of an outsider helped in my experience, as opposed to going undercover like Roose had. The devoutly religious type of people, bare few exceptions, aren't exactly those who would treat you differently for your lack of shared viewpoint. If anything, being an outsider entitles you to learn more regarding the culture, as those who are willing to teach will be eager to accept you. One of my biggest fears going into this assignment was screwing up around a religion that's notoriously strict and ardent about their faith. However, the only exclusion I felt, the exclusion Roose himself feared should he reveal himself as an outsider, was the set cultural standard of disallowing outsiders to participate. Everyone I encountered in the ordeal was incredibly friendly, and the imam khatib was eager to speak with me regarding

similarities and differences between our faiths. In that sense, I can certainly see where Roose was coming from in wanting to keep his identity a secret, but his methods, in my personal opinion, were unnecessary.

In total, the experience was eye-opening regarding the true layers of the different faiths in one American population. Any time I can allow myself to become more culturally versed is bound to be a valuable experience, and I'm glad to say the immersion in itself was a great success.