

A Visit To The Buddhist Temple

Posted on October 3, 2019

As part of the course program, we had to go visit a Buddhist Temple in order to get a view and understand the religion and get the experience that properly enumerates the religion that is Buddhism. I went to visit the Thein Vien Truc Lam Buddhist Temple. The visit was on Sunday, the 15TH of April, 2018.

Observation Description

When driving toward the temple one can clearly see the building as they have a very distinct unique design to them. The building is no more than two stories, and it has columns designed beautifully and extends over the building, reaching toward the sky. Once someone gets to the temple, one can clearly notice the change in the environment. There is a serene theme in the temple, they say that their time is not just on the building but also consists of the environment around it. The design and architecture of the building are meant to inspire inner and outer peace to it. Although not all temples are the same, they say this kind of environment must always be observed.

There are five elements that are keys in the Buddhist religion that will be discussed later in this paper but are what must also be symbolized in the design of the temple. These are Fire, Air, Earth, Water, and wisdom. Once inside, you start noticing some unique shapes, and these are the pagoda styles of design originally used in China and Japan. The other is the Stupa, which is essentially a stone structure that is supposed to be on top of the religious relics of Buddha. The pagoda design would also entail a provision under the temple where the religious teaching would be stored, and every once in a while, they would be removed and read by the religious leaders.

The basic design of the temple has a worship hall where believers congregate to worship and a meditation hall where meditations would take place. (Gethin, 1998) It is important to note that meditation is a critical part of the Buddhism religion. Lastly is the gold warrior-type figure. These figures are believed to be the guardians of heaven. The statue of Buddha in a meditation position, lotus position, is the main piece of the entire temple. Lighting is important, and a psychedelic one is used, which highlights the features of the figure of Buddha, which is curved out of white pieces of emerald jade. Other colors that adorn the room are yellow, orange, and green. There is a memorial bed where prayers for the deceased are done with symbols of monkeys and demons are there which are believed to drive away evil spirits from the temple.

Rituals And Beliefs Witnessed

The first ritual we experienced was the removal of the shoes. This is because the temple is believed to be a holy place. We observed that meditation is a key part of their religion. Buddhism, as a religion, basically teaches about how to end suffering. They believe that one can end suffering by cutting out greed, hatred, and ignorance. It is believed that the original teachings came from Buddha, and so did the accompanying religious practices. It is thought that once Buddha was enlightened, he gave the first lesson and it was based on four noble truths. These truths form the basis of Buddhism; these are; `Dukkha` which is the truth of suffering. `Samudaya` is a follow-up to the truth about the origin of suffering. `Nirodha` is the cessation of suffering, and finally, `Magga` means the truth about the way to the cessation of suffering.

Another distinct belief of the religion is the belief in reincarnation or metempsychosis. They believe that when someone dies, they come back again. This means there is a cycle of `life` also called the samsara. The cycle will, however, stop when one is liberated by insight from the wrong desires. Unlike other religions, the Buddhists don't recognize other rights of passage in life; they are regarded as secular events except for ordination and death. Something I was curious to learn about was Karma, which is a word commonly used that originated from the Buddhist culture. (Harvey, 2013) The word literary means `actions`. They believe that actions one does will have consequences in the future. The Buddhists have special schools, Mahayana schools where they develop new rituals and practices that will aid them in their path to enlightenment. They also have Buddhist Mantras, which are, in essence, sounds that have a great spiritual power.

Responses To Experience

I found the experience of the Temple very enlightening and heartwarming. The atmosphere at the temple was very calm and clearly had an element of a higher power. There is a lot of sense to their belief and symbolism. The environment they have created in and outside shows their elements of Fire, Air, Earth, Water, and wisdom, all coming together to show their staunch belief in their religion. I found the belief in ending suffering very noble and one which, if the whole world would embrace it, would bring forth a whole other generation of people. The Buddha clearly observed the troubles that face the world today and categorized them as they should be, and gave us a solution. Meditation was also a major part of their religion and I got a chance to meditate also. I found the experience very relieving and after the meditation, I felt like a whole different person, it clears the mind and opens your eyes to a whole different perspective on life.

References

Gethin, R. (1998). *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-foundations-of-buddhism-9780192892232>

Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history and practices* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139050531>