

Multifaith Celebration of Spiritual Life at Stanford
University Public Worship
Memorial Church
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Religious Pluralism at Stanford

So I come from the Deep South, and I'll be frank – the most I knew about religious pluralism before coming to Stanford was that *all* the churches were bigger than my mosque – even the tiny little chapels out in the swamp towns – and that I had to make a conscious effort not to say “Jesus Christ!” whenever I was surprised because even though all my other friends did, Muslims just don't do that. I was born and raised a Sunni Muslim, and at seventeen everything I knew even about Shi'a Islam came from World History Class and Wikipedia.

I'd say I had a pretty intellectual set of friends in high school but even though we came from so many mixed backgrounds – Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Agnostic and I'm pretty sure one girl was Wiccan – the deepest we ever dug into pluralism was explaining why Muslims don't yell Jesus even if he is a homeboy.

Coming to Stanford was eye-opening because instead of religion being labeled “We don't talk about that here” (a not uncommon label back home), it was now something people wanted to know about, simply from curiosity. Genuine curiosity – do you know how hard that is to find? Do you know that feeling of relief? And instead of being the only Muslim in the class ... well, okay – sometimes I'm still the only Muslim in the class, but now I can hang out with all the other only Muslims in the class and swap stories.

Here at Stanford, away from my parents, I was able to understand my religion from a personal standpoint and really integrate it as a part of what makes me me. And only then, when you are firm in your own identity and you understand what binds you to your faith and your religion, can you truly begin to explore others and appreciate the lessons you can learn from them.

“Religious pluralism” is one of those phrases that defines a spectrum and not a specific concept. It can mean a lunch group of eight kids who all come from different religions and talk about any but their diversity, but it can also mean a lunch group of eight kids who all come from different religions and actually take the time to understand what it is that makes them different and what unites them.

Stanford is the latter case – there is interfaith programming all year round, all the religious groups party on the same floor of the same building because they want to, and my Jewish friends are patient enough to explain that the black pocket that they carry to synagogue is in fact not a pillowcase but contains the phylactery.

Now that I've been given a chance to reflect on it, I think being at Stanford has made me a better Muslim because part of being a good Muslim is having strong positive bonds with your community and I've been able to do that, not just with Muslims but with the Associated Religions and Stanford as a whole. Whether you're new here or old here, I hope you get a chance to develop and grow with the community as I have.

Anything good I have said is from Allah, and anything wrong that I have said is from myself. I want to thank the Office of Religious Life for giving me a chance to share my experiences, and may Allah bless you all.