



# RELIGIONS

Iranian religions

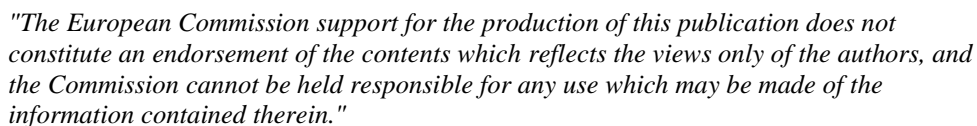
Development of new inter-religious tools





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The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes.

The second part of the paper focuses on the methodology used in the study. It describes the process of selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the results. The authors emphasize the importance of using a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The third part of the paper presents the findings of the study. It discusses the results of the quantitative data analysis and the insights gained from the qualitative interviews. The authors conclude that there are significant cultural differences in the way that students learn and that these differences should be taken into account when designing educational programs.

The final part of the paper discusses the implications of the findings for future research and practice. It suggests that further studies should be conducted to explore the cultural factors that influence learning outcomes. Additionally, it recommends that educators should be trained to recognize and respond to the cultural needs of their students.

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# **IRANIAN RELIGIONS**

Iranian religions are religions which originated in Greater Iran.

# ZOROASTRIANISM



Faravahar

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions.

Zoroastrians do believe in one God, Ahura Mazda, meaning Wise Lord. They believe He created the world. The truth was revealed through His prophet Zoroaster, who is not worshipped but is followed as his directed path of truth and righteousness.

Fire is a central symbol of the faith - they believe that fire represents God's light and wisdom and also that the elements are pure.

The religion is split into two groups: The Iranians and the Parsis.

Zoroastrians who lived under Muslim rule suffered religious persecution in that conquest - they attempted to eradicate the religion by destroying temples and burning libraries. Many Zoroastrians were forced to convert to Islam and subjected to greater taxes, and slowly became the minority religion in Iran.

Zoroastrianism survives in Iran (formerly Persia), where the religion began and is practiced most in India, where the descendants of Zoroastrian Persian immigrants live.

While Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, it is one of the smallest today. It is reported that there are less than 200,000 practicing worldwide.

Many call Zoroastrianism the first ecological religion because followers believe in the purity and goodness of God's creation. Therefore, they try to not pollute or destroy things in nature including rivers and trees.

Practicing Zoroastrians pray regularly, several times a day. Because fire or light represents the divine light of the Ahura Mazda, they pray in the direction of the light. The sacred book of Zoroastrianism is called The Avesta, and has two main sections. The first, the Holy Scriptures. The second (the younger Avesta) contains rituals, laws and observances.

Zoroastrianism is based on the teachings of Zarathushtra. Although chronology and location are uncertain, it is now generally accepted that he lived c1200 BCE, and that he spread his message in Persia (now Iran). The followers of his tradition, who are mostly now in India after fleeing Islamic persecution in the ninth century CE, are often known as "Parsis", which means "Persians". The main doctrine espoused by Zarathushtra, or Zoroaster as he is sometimes called, was monotheism. This had a major influence on other religions, particularly the Abrahamic faiths.

Despite this monotheism, many of the ancient gods of the Iranian pantheon filtered back into Zoroastrianism after his death as holy spirits, or yazatas. There is also a later strain of the religion that is almost dualist in form, in that it makes the spirit of evil independent of God, and co-eternal with him. Zoroastrianism stresses the free will of all humans to choose good or bad. In this later belief-system, even God, Ahura Mazda, pronounces his deliberate choice of good over evil. Goodness is therefore never to be taken for granted, but is always something that must be strived for over evil. Zoroastrianism is based on a series of firm binary oppositions - good/ evil, truth/ untruth, order/ disorder.

ABLUTIONS



Hands and faces are washed before worship, and shoes are removed before entering the temple.

## CHARITY

Hospitality to strangers, and active concern for the underprivileged are central tenets of Zoroastrianism.

## DEATH

Zoroastrians see the world as a transitory abode, and believe that individuals will receive reward or punishment in the afterlife. This is envisioned in two symbols. The first is the Cinvat bridge, or Bridge of the Requirer, which the bad cannot pass, but fall into the mud of the abyss. The second is the image of molten metal, in which souls are tested. It destroys the bad, but to the good it is like a bath in warm milk.

One exceptional belief of Zoroastrianism is that resurrection (Frashkart) at the end of the world will be in spirit and body, and that it will be for all - sinners will be freed from hell. Zoroastrianism holds that the soul of the departed hovers near the body for three days. Death is seen as the triumph of evil, and so a corpse is considered to be polluting. It should therefore be disposed of as quickly as possible.

The traditional method of disposal in India would be to expose the corpse in a "Tower of Silence" (daxma) for vultures to eat. This is because Zoroastrians do not want to pollute fire or earth or water with their bodies. This can create problems for British Zoroastrians, who, if not flying the body back to India, must adopt beliefs to suit available options. Cremation, as the socially acceptable norm in India, is likely to be preferred to burial. Ashes will usually be interred at the Zoroastrian cemetery at Brookwood in Surrey.

Zoroastrian funerals are simple - Zoroastrians believe charity in memory of the deceased is more effective than elaborate, costly funeral rites. Ancestor-worship also plays an important part in Zoroastrianism.

## DIETARY PRACTICES

Zoroastrians are permitted to eat anything edible in the good part of creation. It is meritorious to kill animals of the evil creation (such as snakes, insects, and frogs), but those are not to be eaten. Silence is maintained while eating so as not to confuse the two functions of the mouth, eating and speaking. Eating or drinking at night is discouraged, because that is when demons might be able to steal some of what is consumed. There are no formal rules for slaughtering an animal, though a portion of what is killed should be consecrated. As a result of Hindu influences, some Parsis practice vegetarianism.

## DRESS

The wearing of traditional symbols of faith has declined, but Zoroastrians may wear the sudreh and kusti. The sudreh is a sacred shirt, like a white vest, symbolising purity and renewal. The kusti is a long cord tied round the waist. It has seventy-two strands, symbolising the seventy-two chapters of the holy book, the Yasna, as well as universal fellowship. The sudreh and kusti are both seen as protection against evil, and are thought of as being the armour and sword-belt of Zoroastrians, arming them for the battle against evil.

## ETHICS

As in many other religions, "Do in holiness anything you will" is the golden rule. A strict adherence to truth is central to the faith, since lies are thought to belong to the realm of evil. Scrupulous honesty in business dealings is practiced.

## FAMILY PLANNING

Zoroastrianism is not an ascetic religion – it believes all material things to have been

created by Ahura Mazda for enjoyment. Zoroastrians have reverence for physical things, especially those that are in their purest or most natural forms, such as the elements. It is considered a primal duty to assist life's fertility wherever possible, both within the family unit, and in a wider social context. For early Zoroastrians, this meant being good husbandmen to the land, as well as being parents – farming was revered. However, Zoroastrianism also stresses purity and control, so promiscuity and prostitution are unacceptable. British Zoroastrians almost always have small families – rarely more than two children. Perhaps because of the small numbers of Zoroastrians, and because of their history of religious persecution, resistance to intermarriage is high.

### FESTIVALS

There are seven main festivals, each relating to major spirits that are worshipped – the six Amesha Spentas, or Holy Immortals, and Ahura Mazda himself. These seven spirits together are known as the divine Heptad, and each is responsible for a certain area of creation. The seven festivals culminate with No Ruz, or New Day, which prefigures the New Day at the end of the world when creation will be transformed, and the dead be resurrected. Since different traditions adopted different calendars, the dates of these festivals vary, but No Ruz is usually at the time of the spring equinox, 20/1 March. There are also minor festivals, but it is the observance of these seven that is obligatory.

### RITUAL

Zoroastrianism has many rituals, all of which are important and serve a vital role for the faith, however the rituals below are the most important, the most common and most widely celebrated, affecting most if not all Zoroastrians. Fire plays an important role in Zoroastrian ritual. It is seen as the symbol of Ahura Mazda, and also as the formless living symbol of the source of heat and life. Zoroastrians are often called "fire worshippers", but find this deeply offensive.

### WEDDING

There are two stages to a Zoroastrian wedding, whether Parsi or Persian.

The first thing that happens however, is the signing of the marriage contract by the bride, groom, and their parents. Then, already married female relatives hold white scarves over the new couples heads while two crystallized sugar cones are rubbed together in order to "sweeten the couples life together." The scarves are then sewn together to symbolize the new union, and a cord is tied around the bride and grooms hands, binding them to each other.

The second stage is traditionally last from 3 to 7 days.

Traditionally, both bride and the bridegroom dress in white. The colour white is a symbol of purity in Zoroastrianism.

### DEATH RITES

When a Zoroastrian dies, there is 3 day mourning period for the family, during this time the body is brought before a four-eyed dog (four eyed dogs are dogs that have spots over their eyes). After this, the body is taken to the Tower of Silence, which is a tall, round tower without a roof. The body is placed naked within the Tower in the right circle, there are 3 circles, one for women, one for men, and the last one for children. The body is left exposed to scavengers and other elements of nature to help with its decomposition. When only the bones remain, they are swept into the central well shared by all. On the 5th morning after death, a Zoroastrian's soul enters into the spirit world where the deities will pass judgement. Zoroastrians can be buried or cremated as well, however this is often frowned upon by the religion.

## rites of passage

During the fifth month of a woman's pregnancy, a lamp is lit, representing the divine light that Zoroaster's mother displayed during her pregnancy. Shortly after birth a newborn is given a taste of parahom (a mixture of haoma and milk) if it is available. After delivery the mother traditionally was isolated for 40 days to allow the impurities of birth to diminish. The twentieth century has seen a decline of these practices. The primary ritual for a child is initiation. The Parsis call the initiation navjote (new birth).

### rites of passage (navjote)

The Navjote is the coming of age ritual that all Zoroastrians must participate in between the ages of 7-12. This is when the young Zoroastrians are presented with a sudreh (an undergarment to remind them of their modesty, as well as to be trustworthy) as a kusti (a string made of 72 strings, one for each chapter of the Yasna) which they wear for the rest of their lives. The child must learn prayers and the rudiments of the faith. In the ceremony he or she is given the sadre and the kusti (sacred cord). The child then receives the blessings of a priest and is sprinkled with rice. A large party celebrating the boy or girl follows.

## Purification Rituals

There are three types of purification rituals. The first is padyab, which is ablution, or washing of one's body/body part. The second type is nahn, which is a bath. The third purification is bareshnum, which is a complicated ritual performed with the participation of a dog, whose left ear is touched by the candidate and whose gaze puts the evil spirits to flight that can last several days.

## Other Rituals

Yasna: the sacrifice of haoma, which means "sacred liquor." This is the main ritual and is practiced at all gatherings. It is celebrated before the sacred fire during the recitation of large portions of the Avesta and usually involves offerings of bread and milk as well.

Penance: this ritual involves the confession of sins to a dastur, followed by a recitation of the patet and firm resolve not to sin or to try harder to avoid sin again.

Gahanbars: seasonal festivals that are celebrated every two months, including Noruz (the New Year's Festival), Rapithwin (the summer festival) and Mithra (the autumn festival - also known as Mehragan)

## Food

Zoroastrian festivals celebrate the material, so feasting plays an important part. The feasts cross class boundaries, with rich and poor eating together. It is considered a sin to fast, since to do so weakens the body, and also one's resistance to evil. Often ceremonial foods will revolve around the number seven (such as having seven kinds of dried fruits and nuts), with reference to the divine Heptad. Zarathushtra declaimed against drunkenness, and advocated moderation. There are no specific dietary restrictions, but some Zoroastrians interpret their religion as advocating the avoidance of pork and beef, or as advising vegetarianism.

## Nature

Zoroastrians have particular reverence for cattle. Additionally, they believe that humankind, as the pinnacle of creation, and the only creatures capable of deliberate choice, should care for the world to the best of their capabilities.

## Worship

Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure and that fire represents God's light or wisdom.

Zoroaster placed less emphasis on ritual worship, instead focusing on the central ethics of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts and Good Deeds'. Zoroastrian worship is not prescriptive. Its followers can choose whether they wish to pray and how.

Communal worship is usually centred around seasonal festivals (of which the Zoroastrians have many), but there are other opportunities for worshipers to gather, such as the Navjote, the initiation ceremony where a child is accepted into the Zoroastrian fellowship.

### HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND HOLY PLACES

In Zoroastrianism the primary religious activity is the daily maintenance of a sacred fire. There are various levels of fires, some of which may even be in the possession of an individual. Most sacred fires are in a fire temple, where priests maintain them. To allow the fire to be extinguished would be a catastrophic sin. Some of the major fires have survived for centuries.

Every temple has an atashkadeh ("place of fire"), an enclosed chamber that contains a continuously burning fire on a metal grate or vase (atashdan). The fire receives continual tending. In addition to the atashkadeh there is also an area called the dar-i Mihr ("court of Mithra"; Mithra is the most important divinity, or yazata, in the tradition and is connected especially with the sun and the maintenance of covenants). This is a room that contains one or more pawi, rectangular consecrated spaces marked off by furrows. Each pawi contains a fire vase and two platforms; on one the priest sits, and on the other the priest prepares the offerings that are consecrated during the yasna.

These temples often contain schools for training priests. Both Iranian and Indian communities have sacred sites (connected either with legends or with historical memory) that are the object of popular pilgrimage. The main act of worship, prayer five times a day, is not performed at the temple but rather anywhere before a fire or the sun by all Zoroastrians.

### PRAYERS

Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day. Some wear a kusti, which is a cord knotted three times, to remind them of the maxim, 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, Good Deeds'. They wrap the kusti around the outside of a sudreh, a long, clean, white cotton shirt. They may engage in a purification ritual, such as the washing of the hands, then untie and then retie it while reciting prayers.

Prayers are primarily invocational, calling upon and celebrating Ahura Mazda and his good essence that runs through all things. Prayers are said facing the sun, fire or other source of light representing Ahura Mazda's divine light and energy.

Purification is strongly emphasised in Zoroastrian rituals. Zoroastrians focus on keeping their minds, bodies and environments pure in the quest to defeat evil (Angra Mainyu). Fire is seen as the supreme symbol of purity, and sacred fires are maintained in Fire Temples (*Agiaries*). These fires represent the light of God (Ahura Mazda) as well as the illuminated mind, and are never extinguished. No Zoroastrian ritual or ceremony is performed without the presence of a sacred fire.

### HOLY BOOK

The holy book of Zoroastrianism is called Avesta. It is written in an eastern Iranian dialect/language that is called avestan for the lack of more suitable terms.

### REINCARNATION

The concept of reincarnation is foreign to Zoroastrianism.

## ❖ BEHAFARIDIANS

Behafaridians, an 8th-century cult movement around the prophet Behafarid. Behāfarīd was Persian Zoroastrian heresiarch who started a religious peasant revolt with elements from Zoroastrianism and Islam. He believed in Zoroaster and upheld all Zoroastrian institutions.

Behafarid's holy book was in Persian and easy to understand for Iranians.

Behafarid's followers prayed seven times a day towards the sun instead of Kaaba which was branded as Mithraism.

He banned some of controversial habits such as marriage between close family members and drinking wine, prohibited intoxicants, and kept their hair long and disallowed sacrifices of cattle except when they were decrepit.

According to Behafarid teachings, a man's wealth should not exceed 400 Dirhams and he should spend one seventh of his wealth in public affairs such as construction of bridges and roads.

Zoroastrian priests submitted a complaint with Abu Muslim who had gained power in Khorasan.

Convinced that Behafaridian religion is neither Islam, nor Zoroastrianism and could destabilize hegemony of both religions, an army of 10,000 men was sent to fight him. Behafarid refused to fight Iranians and was thus arrested. Abu Muslim ordered his execution for the crime of prophecy fearing from dangerous ideas similar to Mazdakism and Manichaeism. He was hanged and all Behafarid's followers were also massacred.

Behafaridian faith was recognized as one of 4 sects of Zoroastrianism for some time until it vanished.

## ❖ MAZDAKISM

Mazdak (died c. 524 or 528) (also Mazdak the Younger) was the chief representative of a religious and philosophical teaching called Mazdakism, which he viewed as a reformed and purified version of Zoroastrianism, although his teaching has been argued to display influences from Manichaeism as well.

Mazdak was a mobad or Zoroastrian priest, but most of the clergy regarded his teaching as heresy.

Like both Zoroastrianism (at least as practised at the time) and Manichaeism, Mazdakism had a dualistic cosmology and worldview. This doctrine taught that there were two original principles of the universe: Light, the good one; and Darkness, the evil one.

Two distinguishing factors of Mazdak's teaching were the reduction of the importance of religious formalities—the true religious person being the one who understood and related correctly to the principles of the universe—and a criticism of the strong position of mainstream clergy, who, he believed, had oppressed the Persian population and caused much poverty.

Mazdak proposed a peace-loving, classless and egalitarian society. The doctrines of his

teachings included not taking life and not eating flesh - a pacifist and vegetarian doctrine. Metaphorically, the guiding principle was to increase the light over darkness through tolerance, justice, kindness, friendship and love (cf. Mithraic traits in Zoroastrianism). Greed and envy were seen as agents of darkness and that an insatiable desire for material goods and pleasures was a source of greed and envy. Up to this point all the ethical principles were in concert with mainstream Zoroastrianism. Where it diverged was in the application of the principles. In order to eliminate greed and envy, Mazdak proposed social reform, the giving up a quest for material wealth, and owning what property was needed in common. These principles would greatly alleviate the burdens placed on peasants and artisans and the movement quickly gained popularity amongst them. According to some sources, the spirit of sharing included sexual partners. Since this is a standard accusation against heretical sects, its veracity has been doubted by researchers. However, this could have been an interpretation amongst splinter sects.

Mazdak's teaching acquired many followers, to the point when even King Kavadh I, ruling from 488 until 531, converted to Mazdakism.

With the King's backing Mazdak could embark on a program of social reform, which involved pacifism, anti-clericalism and aid programs for helping the poor. Mazdak had government warehouses opened to help the poor. He also had all the Zoroastrian fire temples closed except the three major ones.

Fear among the nobility and Zoroastrian clergy grew so strong that King Kavadh was overthrown in 496, but he managed to regain the throne three years later with the help of the Hephthalite Empire. Scared by the resistance among the powerful, he chose to distance himself from Mazdak. He allowed Anushiravan to launch a campaign against the Mazdakites in 524 or 528, culminating in a massacre of most of the adherents - including Mazdak himself - and restoring orthodox Zoroastrianism as the state religion.

## ❖ ZURVANISM

Zurvanism is an extinct heretical branch of Zoroastrianism in which the divinity Zurvan is a First Principle (primordial creator deity) who engendered equal-but-opposite twins, Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. Zurvanism is also known as "Zurvanite Zoroastrianism", and may be contrasted with Mazdaism, which is the surviving form of Zoroastrianism and in which Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu are either themselves primordial (the traditional view), or the 19th/20th century developments in which Ahura Mazda is no longer the Creator of only the good, but also perceived as the origin of Angra Mainyu.

In Zurvanism, Zurvan was perceived as the god of infinite time and space and was aka ("one", "alone"). Zurvan was portrayed as a transcendental and neutral god, without passion, and one for whom there was no distinction between good or evil. The name 'Zurvan' is a normalized rendition of the word, which in Middle Persian appears as either *Zurvān*, *Zruvān* or *Zarvān*. The Middle Persian name derives from Avestan *zruvan-*, "time", which is grammatically without gender.

## ❖ **KHURRAMITES (syncretism with Shi'a Islam)**

The Khurramites (meaning "those of the Joyful Religion") were an Iranian religious and political movement with its roots in the movement founded by Mazdak. An alternative name for the movement is the Muḥammira ("Red-Wearing Ones"), a reference to their symbolic red dress.

The sect was founded by the Persian cleric Sunpadh and was a revitalization of an earlier sect that had mixed Shī'a Islam and Zoroastrianism; however, its true claim to fame was its adoption by Bābak Khorramdīn as a basis for rebelling against the Abbasid Caliphate.

### **Beliefs**

Al-Maqdisi mentions several facts. He observes that "the basis of their doctrine is belief in light and darkness"; more specifically, "the principle of the universe is Light, of which a part has been effaced and has turned into Darkness". They "avoid carefully the shedding of blood, except when they raise the banner of revolt". They are "extremely concerned with cleanliness and purification, and with approaching people with kindness and beneficence". Some of them "believed in free sex, provided that the women agreed to it, and also in the freedom of enjoying all pleasures and of satisfying one's inclinations so long as this does not entail any harm to others". (their name is most frequently derived from the Persian word khurram "happy, cheerful"). Regarding the variety of faiths, they believe that "the prophets, despite the difference of their laws and their religions, do not constitute but a single spirit". Naubakhti states that they also believe in reincarnation (metempsychosis) as the only existing kind of afterlife and retribution and in the cancellation of all religious prescriptions and obligations. They highly revere Abu Muslim and their imams. In their rituals, which are rather simple, they "seek the greatest sacramental effect from wine and drinks". As a whole, they were estimated by Al-Maqdisi as "Mazdaeans... who cover themselves under the guise of Islam".

# GNOSTIC RELIGIONS

Gnosticism is a modern name for a variety of ancient religious ideas and systems, originating in Jewish-Christian milieus in the first and second century AD. These systems believed that the material world is created by an emanation of the highest God, trapping the divine spark within the human body.

The Gnostic ideas and systems flourished in the Mediterranean world in the second century AD, in conjunction with and influenced by the early Christian movements and Middle Platonism. After the Second Century, a decline set in, but Gnosticism persisted throughout the centuries as an undercurrent of western culture, re-manifesting with the Renaissance as Western esotericism, taking prominence with modern spirituality. In the Persian Empire, Gnosticism spread as far as China with Manicheism, while Mandaeanism is still alive in Iraq.

A major question in scholarly research is the qualification of Gnosticism, based on the study of its texts, as either an interreligious phenomenon or as an independent religion.

Gnostics tended toward asceticism, especially in their sexual and dietary practice. In other areas of morality, Gnostics were less rigorously ascetic, and took a more moderate approach to correct behavior. In normative early Christianity the Church administered and prescribed the correct behavior for Christians, while in Gnosticism it was the internalised motivation that was important. Ritualistic behavior was not important unless it was based on a personal, internal motivation.

## ❖ MANDAEISM



Mandaean cross

According to most scholars, Mandaeanism originated sometime in the first three centuries AD, in Mesopotamia.

Mandaeanism or Mandaeanism is a gnostic religion with a strongly dualistic worldview. Its adherents, the Mandaeans, revere Adam, Abel, Seth, Enos, Noah, Shem, Aram, and especially John the Baptist.

Mandaeanism, as the religion of the Mandaean people, is based more on a common heritage than on any set of religious creeds and doctrines. A basic guide to Mandaean theology does not exist.

Mandaeans believe in marriage and procreation, and in the importance of leading an ethical and moral lifestyle in this world. They also place a high priority upon family life. Consequently, Mandaeans do not practice celibacy or asceticism. Mandaeans will, however, abstain from strong drink and red meat. While they agree with other gnostic sects that the world is a prison governed by the planetary archons, they do not view it as a



cruel and inhospitable one.

The Mandaean Community is divided into priests and laity. There are three different ranks of priests. They include ordinary priests (tarmide, 'disciples, pupils'), bishops or 'treasurers' (ganzibre) and the 'head of the people' (rishama). The priest acts as the representative of heavenly messengers and angels (uthre) and thus he is equated with them repeatedly in the rituals.

The Mandaean worldview is stamped by gnostic dualism. A World of Light (nhura) and a World of Darkness (hshuka) exist in mutual hostility.

## **BELIEFS**

**Life** - Recognition of the existence of one God, whom Nasurai call "Hayyi" which in Aramaic

means "the Living" or life itself. The Great Life (or Supreme Deity) is a personification of the creative and sustaining force of the universe, and is spoken of always in the impersonal plural, it remains mystery and abstraction. The modern Jewish practice of saying "To Life! and of wearing the Chai (Life) letters as pendants may be related to this Mandaean reverence for Life. The symbol of the Great Life is flowing 'living' water or yardna. Because of this, flowing water holds a central place in all Nasurai rituals, hence the necessity of living near rivers.

**Light** - The second vivifying power is light, which is represented by a personification of light, Melka d Nhura (the King of Light) and the light spirits, who bestow health, strength, virtue and justice. In the ethical system of the Mandaeans, as in that of the Zoroastrians, cleanliness, health of body and ritual obedience must be accompanied by purity of mind, health of conscience and obedience to moral laws. A phrase in the Manual of Discipline reads: that they may behold the Light of Life.

**Immortality** - The third important rite of the religion is the belief in the immortality of the soul, and its close relationship with the souls of its ancestors, immediate and divine. The fate of the soul is a chief concern, while the body is treated with disdain. Belief in the existence of the next life, in which there will be reward and punishment. The sinner will be punished in al-Matarathi and then enter Paradise. There is no eternal punishment because God is merciful and forgiving.

## **PRAYER**

Mandaeans must face the North (Pole) Star during prayers. This mis-conception of star worship comes from the fact that although the Mandaean are monotheists, they pay adoration to the angels and the good and free spirits which they believe reside in the stars and from which they govern the world under the Supreme Deity. Kneeling and prostration during prayer is unknown, neither is the covering of the face with the hands at any time. The head is held erect, and the hands are not used. Priests are required to pray a different set prayer each day of the week. Prayer hours are dawn, noon and dusk.

## **ASCETICISM**

Asceticism, self-denial and simplicity as religious attitudes. There should be no sale of foodstuffs as these should be offered to the needy. There should be no embellishment of graves nor visiting them. A good deed should be done in secret and not for show.

## **CIRCUMCISION**

One of their inviolable beliefs was the integrity of the physical body. No part of it should be cut off, for just as God created the person sound and complete so should this trust be returned to him. Circumcision is included in this prohibition.

## **RESPECT FOR RIVERS**

Respect for and sanctification of rivers is such that Mandaean always try to live near their banks. A major sin as mentioned in the Holy Books is that a person should urinate in a river. However, it is recommended to throw left-over food in water, especially the food remaining from ceremonies remembering a deceased person which will be eaten by the river fish. This is because the river or Yardna represents Life and Light from which everything was formed and so will return to it. - It involves communion with the Light World and the long departed Souls.

### **BAPTISM**

The central rite of the Mandaean cult is immersion in water, which is regarded not only as a symbol of Life, but to a certain degree as life itself. The chief purpose and significance of baptism is first that the neophyte, by immersion in the yardna, enters into close communion with the World of Light receiving physical well being, protection against the powers of death and promise of ever lasting life to the Soul. The second quality is purificatory, just as it washes away filth, infections and impurity from the body, it washes away transgressions and sins from the Soul. The greater the number of ablutions performed or received the better, for without baptism no Mandaean (or his Soul) may pass onto the next world. Baptism was at one time so essential such that unbaptised children were not considered to belong to the community. Baptism takes place on Sundays (habshaba), the first day of the week, which is for the Mandaeans, a holiday.

### **ABSOLUTIONS**

Ablutions (rishama) are performed before the prayers, and this means washing the face and the rest of the limbs while reciting certain prayers.

### **DIET & PURITY**

Food is also ritually cleansed, such as fruits and vegetables before consumption. Other items like the rasta (robes) and kitchen utensils such as pots and pans undergo frequent ritual purifications. Salt is the only exception. Ganzivri (Bishops) and priests must only eat of the food they prepare themselves and their bread may not be baked with that of lay persons. For Ganzivri (Bishops) wine, coffee and tobacco are forbidden to them and they must avoid eating hot or cooked food. All their fruits and vegetables must be eaten raw. Water is the only beverage of a priest and this must be taken directly from the river or spring. The Mandaeans also use other terms to differentiate amongst themselves on basis of ritual cleanliness, Suwadi is used for laymen, Hallali is applied to ritually pure men, who of their own will follow a high religious standard, and of course Nasurai used for priests. Only that grows from a seed is lawful for food (hence a mushroom is forbidden). In practice little meat is eaten, and the attitude towards slaughter is always apologetic, perhaps because all original Nasurai were vegetarians and meat eating only crept in after a departure from their original faith. All killing and blood letting is supposedly sinful and it is forbidden to kill female beasts. Flies, scorpions and all harmful stinging things may be slain without sin. Under Mandaean customs every mother must suckle her own child, it is forbidden to act as a foster mother for hire. The child's education and upbringing is the duty of the father, until the child reaches the age of 15 (or 20 according to others, which was the age of adulthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Pythagorean tradition).

### **RISHAMA BAPTISM**

The first of the miqvah purifications performed is the rishama (signing), the priests presence is not required, such that each man is his own priest. This should be performed daily, and with covered head, just before sunrise after the evacuation of the bowels and before all religious ceremonies.

## TAMASHA BAPTISM

The second, the tamasha, is a simple triple immersion in the river, again this is performed without the aid of the priest or priestess. It must be performed by women after menstruation and after childbirth. Both man and woman must perform this ablation immediately after sexual intercourse, it must be performed after touching a dead body, after nocturnal pollution or any serious defilement or contact with a defiled person, as impurity is contagious - a person touching an unclean person, himself becomes unclean. These practices are related to the ritual purity laws of the Jews and were no doubt taught and practiced to some degree, and after their own fashion, by early Nazarenes.

## MASBUTA BAPTISM

The third ablation, or 'full baptism', encompasses all aspects of baptism and must be performed by a priest or priestess. This ablation is known as masbuta (maswetta) includes the sacraments of oil, bread (known as pihtha) and water (from the river only, known as mambuha), the kushta (the hand grasp and kiss) and the final blessing by laying the right hand of the priest on the head of the baptized person. The masbuta should take place on Sunday, after major defilement's (i.e.. childbirth, marriage, illness and even after a journey) and especially for those who have lied or who have had violent quarrels, indeed after any action which is ashamed of. Major sins such as theft, murder, and adultery require more than one baptism.

## CLOTHING

The rasta or ritual dress, also called the ustlia` in Mandaean texts, must be worn on all religious occasions such as baptism, marriage and death (in particular). It is a white dress, symbolic of the dress of light in which the pure soul is clad. All Mandaeans, laymen and priests, must possess one. The rasta consists of seven items for laymen and nine items for priests. though ritually clean, the rasta, except when new, is seldom white, it may not be washed with soap but may be washed in the river. It is the greatest misfortune for a person to die in his lay clothes, for his soul cannot reach Abathur. At one time the Mandaeans continually wore the rasta as it was a sin to wear a color. Wear white only, no colors are permitted regardless if they are natural or dyed. Of the fabrics, natural silk is most preferred and recommended, wool can only be used if shorn from a live animal, those that are fleeced after they die cannot be used to make clothing. No synthetic fiber's allowed i.e., nylon, rayon polyester etc. The Rule of the Garden of Peace mandates that all residents where natural white clothing, just like the Mandaeans, ancient Essenes and ancient Pythagoreans.

## BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

As death approaches the dying person is bathed, water is brought in from the river, the dying person is undressed and then washed with a threefold sprinkling from head to feet. He/she is then lifted and placed on clean bedding facing the North Star and is then dressed in a new rasta, with gold or gold threads sown on the right side of the stole and silver or silver threads sown on the left side. Weeping is forbidden. (To die at the sacred season of Panja means that the soul of the deceased will fly quickly to the worlds of light and escape the tortures and dangers of the purgatories. ) The dead person is interned facing north and the tomb goes unmarked - .. the body is dirt and rubbish, once the Soul has left it is a Mandaean saying. At the moment the body is being lowered into the tomb the lofani (ritual meal) is begun. A Zidqa Brikha, prayers and baptisms are also performed.

## BANNERS

During the immersion ceremonies, a white silk banner, the dravsha, is erected on the bank of the pool to the south-east and right of the hut. The banner is purely a light symbol and the Mandaean's imagine the light of the sun, moon and stars as streaming from such banners. The silk is looped up so as not to touch the ground and then thrown around the peak, the end is fringed. A myrtle wreath is slipped over the peak of the banner, and, just beneath the cross (hidden from sight) a piece of gold wire called the aran dravshi, twisted into a 'letter' secures seven twigs of myrtle in place. The use of this cross emblem has confused many as to the Mandaean's relationship with Christianity. It is possible that it is pre-Christian and may be an alternative source for the Christian use of the cross. It seems natural that something to hang one's clothing or prayer shawl on during Miqvah immersions would exist in a culture of daily immersers. The Seer Cayce told one woman that she helped prepare paintings for the walls, and drawings that could be carried about, and were used as banners. (The Mandaean's do not presently carry their dravsha banner in procession.)

### PRIESTHOOD

Priesthood is allowable to both males and females within the Mandaean culture, and historically there have been female priests, or priestesses, although there are none known of at present. Priestly training begins in a boy's early years, he puts on his rasta and acts as his father's Shganda. He begins to learn his letters when he is 3 or 4 years old, when he is literate he is called a Yalufa. He begins to commit prayers and rituals to memory as soon as he can speak. A child destined for priesthood must not cut his hair or shave his beard. He must be without any physical blemish. He must be of pure Mandaean blood, his family must be physically and ritually immaculate for several generations back on both sides of the family. If any of his female ancestors within three generations were married when widows or non-virgins, then the would-be priest cannot be consecrated. When a boy has memorized enough of the rituals and prayers, acted in the proper manner of the Shganda under the guidance and instruction of the priest or Ganzivra, he becomes ready to receive initiation into the first degree of priesthood, becoming a Tarmida.

### NEW NAME

Every Mandaean has two names, that of his earthly name (laqab) and the religiously important Malwasha (zodiacal name). The latter is his real name and is used on all religious occasions, this name is linked and derived from the mother and not the father.

The priest uses the time of birth, the day, the zodiac sign and astrological chart to determine this name - but the giving of this religious name protects that person from the evil powers of the zodiac sign in which he was born - remember that the "12" and "7" are mentioned in the religious books as being evil and represent the zodiac signs and the then known planets, respectively. The purpose of the Malwasha is to protect that person from his star sign, the Malwasha is used in the religious ceremonies and prayers, the other name given by the parents is an earthly name of no significance to the religion.

### CELIBACY

Celibacy is regarded as a sin, while the procreation of children is regarded as a religious duty.

Women are not forced into marriages, although divorce is not accepted and only separation is sanctioned. Polygamy is not uncommon in the community, although this is a personal matter and is not universal.

### SCRIPTURES

The Ginza Rba (The Great Treasure) or Sidra Rba (The Great Book). This consists of two

parts, the right Ginza and the smaller left Ginza which is written upside down. The contents of the right side are mostly cosmogony, accounts of creation, prayers and legends. The second part (the left) deals only with the souls and its 'ascent' (masiqta) to the realm of light, its hymns are chanted during mass for the dead.

#### PLACE OF WORSHIP

A mandī is a place of worship for followers of Mandaicism. A mandī must be built beside a river in order to perform maṣbuta (or baptism) because water is an essential element in the Mandaic faith. Modern mandīs sometimes have a bath inside a building instead. Each mandī is adorned with a darfash, which is a cross of olive wood half covered with a piece of white pure silk cloth. The cross bears no relation to the Christian cross. Instead the four arms of the cross symbolise the four corners of the universe, while the pure silk cloth represents the Light of God.

## ❖ MANICHAISM



Cross of Light and Life



Mani is the founder of Manichaeism. An Iranian prophet, he was born in 216 AD in Babylonia (Iraq) and died in 274 AD in Gundeshapur (Iran). As a teenager, an angel appeared to him twice and he was then determined to be a prophet like Jesus, Buddha, and Zoroaster. In his mid 20's, he decided that he would fast and chastise so that he could receive salvation. Through his Manichaean journey, he wrote the Gospel of Mani for his followers and converted many important rulers during the 3rd century. His religion was then spread throughout the Silk Road regions (Europe to Asia).

Mani believed that the teachings of Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus were incomplete, and that his revelations were for the entire world, calling his teachings the "Religion of Light". Manichaeism, the Gnostic and Dualistic religion founded by Mani, emphasizes on good and evil/light and dark.

Manichaeans believed that there is only 1 true God, and that all creation is from God and we are all part of His creation. Additionally, they believed that all physical matter is not permanent, while all the light is real therefore eternal. Manichaeism also teaches that all suffering in the world is rooted in our ignorance of our true nature and due to our distraction from the real purpose in life. Manichaeism also tells us that everyone in the world is equal, no matter their race, gender etc. Therefore, everyone deserves to be protected, including animals and other life forms.

Mani's doctrines were strictly Gnostic and puritanical. They included the strict abomination of all matter, especially the flesh. The Devil created the material world and also made sex to entrap the ethereal souls in the prison of the flesh. Similar views were taught by the Essenes. The Manichaeans abstained from sex, from all animal food, and

eggs, believing all flesh was evil if begotten by copulation.

Fish was edible on the pretense the fish did not propagate sexually but spontaneously came from the "living waters." On the practical side perhaps some Manichaeans thought they should eat sometime besides seeds and weeds. The adoption of the Christian Aphroditic fish symbol to represent Christ was perhaps derived from Manichaeism.

Manichaeism's view on God's love is that it can be experienced by humanity through the love, compassion, kindness and selfless acts, and that the peace of God is reflected in the world through the actions of the faithful. Through them, the world can experience a taste of the peace that awaits them in the Eternal Kingdom of Light. Mani also taught that salvation is possible for the ones who are strict with their religion.

Manichaeans live according to the Evangelion, or the Gospel of Mani.

Only a portion of the faithful followed the strict ascetic life advocated in Manichaeism.

The community was divided into the elect, who felt able to embrace a rigorous rule, and the hearers who supported the elect with works and alms.

The essentials of the Manichaean sacramental rites were prayers, almsgiving, and fasting.

#### PRAYER

Prayer was obligatory four times a day: at noon, late in the afternoon, after sunset, and three hours later. Prayer was made facing the sun or, in the night, the moon; when neither sun nor moon was visible, then the North, the throne of the Light-King. It was preceded by a ceremonial purification with water or for lack of water with some other substance in the Mohammedan fashion. The daily prayers were accompanied by twelve prostrations and addressed to the various personalities in the realm of light: the Father of Majesty, the First-Man, the Legatus Tertius, the Paraclete (Mani), the Five Elements, and so on. They consist mainly of a string of laudatory epithets and contain but little supplication.

#### FASTING

They had weekly, monthly and yearly fasts. All fasted on the first day of the week in honor of the sun, the Perfect also fasted on the second day in honor of the moon. All kept the fast during two days after every new moon; and once a year at the full moon, and at the beginning of the first quarter of the moon. Moreover, a monthly fast, observed till sunset, was begun on the eighth day of the month.

The Manichees had no sacrifices.

They observed Sunday, with the intention of honouring the sun, for them equivalent with the redeemer.

They rejected all festivals.

#### rites and Ceremonies

Of rites and ceremonies among the Manichæans but very little is known to us. They had one great solemnity (in March), that of the Bema, the anniversary of Mani's death. This was kept with a vigil of prayers and spiritual reading. An empty chair was placed on a raised platform to which five steps led up.

The sacraments were mysteries of the elect alone, so little information has come down to us concerning these.

Confession and the singing of hymns were also important in their communal life.

The Manichaean scriptural canon includes seven works attributed to Mani, written originally in Syriac.

In Manichaeism, heaven and hell are only temporary states. Also, they are located somewhere along Earth's atmosphere. Additionally, those who are in heaven are not necessarily saved, because paradise may one day be destroyed.

## WOMAN

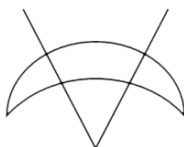
The equal treatment of women has always been of great importance in Manichaeism. A man has no greater status in society than a woman or vice versa.

## SYMBOLS

This symbol is known as the Manichaean Cross of Light and Life. Depicted are the 5 Steps of the Holy Bema, the 8 Arms of the Cross and the circle depicts the presence of Mir Izgadda and His calling for all the sparks of Light to be regathered into the Cross of Life and Life. (Mir Izgadda is a man who wrote teachings related to Manichaeism. Some consider him the Messiah of modern times.)

Second symbol shows us light rays flowing downward. The light stands for the Pure Light. The cloud is the trap in which the light tries to escape from. The 5 rays stand for Excellent Reason, Excellent Mind, Excellent Intelligence, Excellent Thought, and Excellent Understanding.

## ❖ MITHRAISM



V-Rod significant Mithraic symbol

Mithraism is an ancient religion, the mysteries of which were regarded by the Romans as having Persian or Zoroastrian sources. Its primary focus is on the deity Mithra, a god of the sun. It was a notable religion in pre-modern Europe and ancient Persia, but it declined due to increasing conversion to Roman Catholicism and Islam.

Mithraic artifacts, most notably the Orbs, play a major role in Amnesia's backstory. The Orbs contain great power in them, which Alexander wants to use to power the Traveler's Locket and return home.

Mithraism was a mystery religion practised from the 1st to 4th centuries. The religion entered Europe after Alexander the Great's conquests, and saw a rapid spread during the Roman Empire. After the rise of Christianity, many Mithraic temples were abandoned, leaving their great power untouched for centuries. In the early Industrial Age of Europe, several Mithraic temples called a mithraeum were discovered.

The origin of the cult of Mithra dates from the time that the Hindus and Aryans still formed one people, for the god Mithra occurs in the religion and the sacred books of both races, i.e. in the Vedas and in the Avesta. In Avesta Mithra is referred to as a Yazata, a divine entity different from the God (Ahura mazda) which one can interpret as a lesser deity or an arch angel.

The first principle or highest God was according to Mithraism "Infinite Time"; this was called Aion or Saeculum, Kronos or Saturnus.

A common misconception about Mithra is that it is the deity or the spirit of sun, while in fact Mithra is the deity of sunshine.

Followers of Mithraism were organized into small autonomous groups of initiates. As in its Persian form, Roman Mithraism was a religion of loyalty, contracts and friendship between men, especially between officials and rulers. There are no known women followers of Mithraism.

Initiates met for fellowship and worship in small temples of distinctive design they simply called "caves." ("Mithraea" and "Mithraic" are modern terms.) The cave-temple was an "image of the universe" and Porphyry noted that the archetypal Mithraeum was designed as a kind of microcosmic model.

Mithraic temples were sometimes actual caves or set against rock faces; otherwise they were made to imitate caves by the use of dim underground rooms or special vaulting and decoration. They were in all cases the antithesis of the classical temple, entirely lacking in exterior decoration and grandeur for public ritual.

One unvarying feature of Mithraic temples is a pair of platforms flanking a central aisle. These furnishings were used for a communal meal. Based on the reliefs that show a feast between Mithras and the sun god, this ritual meal was the human counterpart of the divine banquet.

Another central ritual was initiation into seven successive levels. Contemporary sources indicate this included ablutions (or baptism), purifications, chastisements, fetters and liberation, and ceremonial passwords. Frescoes at Capua (Italy) show the initiates blindfolded and kneeling.

A simulated death and resurrection was probably part of the ceremony, as the ascent through the initiation grades was seen as prefiguring the ascent of the soul after death.

Mithraic initiates were ranked in a series of seven grades, each named and each under the protection of one of the planets:

- Raven (Mercury)
- Nymphus (Venus)
- Soldier (Mars)
- Lion (Jupiter)
- Persian (Moon)
- Heliodromus (Sun)
- Father (Saturn)



## BABI MOVEMENT

The Babi movement, or Babism (Babiyya) was a post-Islamic religion that emerged from the matrix of Shaykhism in 19th-century Iran and derives its name from the Iranian prophet, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi (b. 1819–d. 1850), the Bab (Arabic: Gate). The movement began amidst a milieu of profound messianic expectation for the Hidden Imam (Qa'im), whom the Twelver-Imami-Shi'a believe had miraculously gone into occultation (ghayba) in the year 260/870, and who would return at the end of time (akhir al-zaman) to redress the wrongs suffered by the Shi'a faithful and to fill the world with justice. Some of the Bab's doctrines had resonances with the so-called Shi'a heterodoxies of the past (batinis, ghulat, Isma'ilis, Nusayris, etc.). However, the Bab went radically beyond them by not only abrogating Islamic law (Sharia) but actually replacing it with a new religious and ritual law code. The Bab's messianic claims seems to have gone through several stages during his short-lived life and ministry, such as the bab to the Hidden Imam, the Imam himself, and finally the Manifestation of the Godhead (mazhar). Through an allusive and esoteric style, the Bab early on in his first scriptural texts deployed the well-known technique of arcanization (taqiyya) to veil his messianic self-conception, a fact that the head of the Kirmani Shaykhis Karim Khan gleaned from the text and which led him to brand the Bab a heretic in several scathing polemical tracts. The writings of the Bab, often collectively called Bayan (exposition) (his two law books in Arabic and Persian are also called Bayan specifically), were couched in enigmatic and arcane locutions as they were phrased in the mystical and esoteric lexicon of its Shi'i-Shaykhi milieu, but with the distinctiveness of a new authorial voice claiming divine revelation (wahy). The Bab often deliberately created out of his oeuvre a kind of messianic cryptogram to be properly decoded by the Babi messianic figure, namely, "Him whom God shall make manifest" (man yuzhiruhu'llah), whom the Baha'is consider to be Mirza Husayn-'Ali Nuri (b. 1817–d. 1892), better known as Baha'u'llah. This claim was rejected by his half-brother and head of the Babi community Yaha Azal (b. 1831–d. 1912), resulting in a split, with the majority of the Babis siding with Baha'u'llah whilst a minority sided with Yahya Azal. The former group metamorphosed into the Baha'i faith and the latter into Azalis or Bayanis. The Bab's claim to be the bearer of a new divine message had both religious and sociopolitical implications and was deemed heretical by the Shi'a clerical establishment. The movement destabilized the status quo and created mass upheaval in Qajar society. Several regions of the country witnessed massacres and violent suppression of the new faith. The Bab was subsequently tried for heresy before a court of clerics and executed by the Qajar state in 1850.

## ❖ AZALI



Babi star

The Azali religion or Azali Babism (for short:Azali) is an Iranian religion founded in 1860s by Subh-i-Azal.

Azali is a monotheistic religion, believing in one god. Its teaching comes from Abrahamic and old Iranian religions like Zoroastrianism and Indian like Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism Both Azali and Baha'i Faith split from religion of bayan (Babism), but some people categoring the Azali religion as one of Babism divisions.

The Azalīs rejected the divine claims of Bahā' Ullāh as premature, arguing that the world must first accept Bābī laws in order to be ready for "him whom God shall manifest."

The Azalīs have retained the original teachings of the Bāb's Bayān ("Revelation") and supplemented them with the instructions of Ṣoḥḥ-e Azal.

Azali Babism represents the conservative core of the original Babi movement, opposed to innovation and preaching a religion for a non-clerical gnostic elite rather than the masses. It also retains the original Babi antagonism to the Qajar state and a commitment to political activism, in distinction to the quietist stance of Baha'ism.

## ❖ BABISM



A Bayanic Symbol, or Babism Symbol

Bábism is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion which professes that there is one incorporeal, unknown, and incomprehensible God who manifests his will in an unending series of theophanies, called Manifestations of God. It is an extremely small religion, with no more than a few thousand adherents according to current estimates, most of which are concentrated in Iran. It was founded by 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi who first assumed the title of Báb (lit. "Gate") from which the religion gets its name, out of the belief that he was the gate to the Twelfth Imam. However throughout his ministry his titles and claims underwent much evolution as the Báb progressively outlined his teachings.

A series of violent insurrections by the Bab's followers led to his arrest in 1845 and execution in 1850. The movement itself was violently persecuted, with its followers either exiled to Baghdad or imprisoned and executed. Among those exiled was Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, who in 1864 proclaimed himself to be the prophet foretold by the movement's

founder. The movement then split between those who accepted Mirza Husayn's claim (later known as Baha'is) and the minority (the Azalis) who continued to follow the then leader Subh-i Azal. Since the 19th century the movement has declined in strength and today perhaps only a few hundred Babis remain.

The belief in Babism is centered around the Bab, who is considered to be the mirror of God.

Numbers play a sacred role in Babism, '19' being the most sacred. The year is therefore divided into 19 months, and every month is made up of 19 days. There are 19 members of the council that administer the community of the Babis. And the Bab had declared that there would be a span of 19 years from his death until the next human manifestation of God would arrive.

Every year all Babis between 11 and 42 years of age are expected to undergo a fast of one month (19 days; sunset 1 March to sunset 20 March). Fasting implies abstain from all food, liquid, and sex between dawn and dusk, focusing instead on the divine. Children were supposed to fast from dawn until noon for the first eleven days only, an acknowledgment of the arduousness of the task.

The Babis should not fear that which gives pleasure. Rich clothes, silken goods, embroideries and jewels not only may, but ought to be procured by the faithful, according to the measure of their resources.

The holy book of the Babis is the Bayan (Declaration).

Smoking is banned during the fast, as it is deemed to be an act of consumption.

Prayers are not compulsory, but advisable, and can be performed without ablutions. Babis pray 3-5 times daily.

Women do not have to wear veils, and enjoy relative freedom.

Travelling is restricted, especially sea travel.

Woman is respected, and she enjoys the same rights with man.

Marriage in Babism is obligatory. Marriage cannot be contracted without the consent of the young couple. Monogamy is recommended. There is only one exception made. If a wife be barren, a man is allowed to take a second wife without separating from the first one, but concubinage is strictly forbidden.

Babism reject easy divorce.

Women can have property in their own right.

The Babists believe in a future life and in eternity, but they do not admit the existence of Hell, or of Paradise, or of Purgatory.

Holy Days - February 26 – March 1: Festival of Ayyam-i-Ha; March 2-21: Nineteen-Day Fast; March 21: Naw-Ruz (New Year)

Babism is a very small religion with only a couple of thousands of followers. Most of them live in Iran.

# ❖ BAHÁ'Í FAITH



Bahai star

The Bahá'í Faith is one of the youngest of the world's major religions. It was founded in the 19th century by Bahá'u'lláh, who was born in Persia (modern day Iran) and is honoured by Baha'is as the latest in a line of messengers from God that includes Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad. This continuity is reflected in Baha'u'llah's teachings, which stress the oneness of the world's religions, and the oneness of humankind. Bahá'is strive to abolish all prejudices and to gain equality for all, regardless of race or sex. Bahá'is have no priesthood or liturgy. They come from many different cultural, racial, social and religious backgrounds and support democratically elected institutions at local, national and international levels. They are required to obey the government but may choose to abstain from partisan politics, which can be seen as creating disunity in the community. Baha'is integrate scientific attitudes into their faith and have an holistic approach to life.

Bahá'í teachings are in some ways similar to other monotheistic faiths: God is considered single and all-powerful. However, Bahá'u'lláh taught that religion is orderly and progressively revealed by one God through Manifestations of God who are the founders of major world religions throughout history; Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad being the most recent in the period before the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. As such, Bahá'ís regard the major religions as fundamentally unified in purpose, though varied in social practices and interpretations. There is a similar emphasis on the unity of all people, openly rejecting notions of racism and nationalism. At the heart of Bahá'í teachings is the goal of a unified world order that ensures the prosperity of all nations, races, creeds, and classes.

## ABLUTIONS AND OBLIGATORY PRAYER

Bahá'ís should perform ritual washing before reciting the obligatory prayer. If water is not available or cannot be applied to the hands and the face, the believer may recite 5 times the verse "In the name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure". The obligatory prayer is performed facing the holy shrine at Bahji in Israel. There are alternative forms of obligatory prayer. In the West the short form is usually recited, once in 24 hours, between noon and sunset. Those who are ill or over 70 are exempt. Menstruating women are exempt if they recite 95 times "Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty".

## BIRTH

Baha'is believe that the soul comes into being at conception. Methods of contraception that prevent implantation of the fertilised ovum are considered unacceptable. Sterilisation and abortion are forbidden except on compelling medical grounds.

## DEATH

The dead body should be washed and wrapped in a shroud of cotton or silk. A special ring is placed on the finger and the corpse is laid in a wooden coffin. Bahá'ís may not be cremated or embalmed and may not be buried more than an hour's journey from the place of death.

The Baha'i faith does not prohibit donation of the body to medical science.

#### FUNERAL CUSTOMS

Baha'i funeral services are normally held within two or three days after the death. Guests may dress according to personal preference and local custom. The family arranges for the officiate to read the prayers. One key requirement for a Baha'i funeral is reading of the Prayer for the Dead. The prayer, which includes six verses to be repeated 19 times each, is recited by one person on behalf of everyone present.

Baha'i funeral customs do not discourage non-believers from attending or being present when the Prayer for the Dead is read. If you are non-Baha'i attending a Baha'i funeral, please keep in mind that this is a sacred tradition and be appropriately respectful during the reading.

Bahá'í law specifies that Bahá'ís should not be cremated. The body of the deceased is to be washed and wrapped in cotton or silk and placed in a coffin of wood, stone, or crystal, and a burial ring is to be placed on the finger. The body should not be transported more than an hour's distance from the place of death and should be buried facing the qiblah, the holiest place to Bahá'ís.

#### DIET

The Bahá'í faith does not ban any types of food - its scriptures declare all things should be "clean" - nor does it require anything to be eaten or drunk. The only dietary restrictions on Bahá'ís involve a ban on alcohol and other substances that are significantly mind-altering, such as hashish, unless the substance has been prescribed by a physician as part of a medical treatment.

They practise moderation in diet. Some Baha'is are vegetarian.

#### FASTING

During the fasting period (March 2-21), Bahá'ís may not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. Fasting is not obligatory for those under 15 or over 70, for menstruating, pregnant or nursing women, for the sick or for travellers.

#### FESTIVALS

The Baha'i New Year (Naw-Ruz) is on 21st March. No work is done on this day, and Baha'is may wish to be at home for this occasion. The period leading up to Naw-Ruz (2-20 March) is a period of reflection and preparation for the coming year, and it is marked by fasting. Another important festival period is Ridvan, from 21st April to 2nd May. This celebrates Baha'u'llah's declaration of his mission. The 1st, 9th and 12th days within this festival are holy days on which work is suspended.

#### GENDER ISSUES

Bahá'í teaching has always been that women and men are equal. It commands Bahá'ís to educate women and give them the opportunities that they need in order to take advantage of that equality.

#### GREETING

Some Bahá'ís might shake hands, some might bow, some might hug close friends. Often Bahá'ís will greet each other by saying "Alláh-u-Abhá".

#### IN BAHÁ'Í HOMES

There may be a plaque with the Arabic inscription "Ya Bahá'u'l-Abhá" ("O Glory of the All Glorious").

#### INCARNATION

Bahá'ís believe that God cannot become incarnate in a human being.

#### MARRIAGE

Bahá'u'lláh highly praised marriage, discouraged divorce, and required chastity outside of marriage. Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture. The Bahá'í marriage ceremony is simple; the only compulsory part of the wedding is the reading of the wedding vows prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh which both the groom and the bride read, in the presence of two witnesses. The vows are "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." Baha'is have free choice in marriage, but parental consent is sought to help create unity between the two families.

Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture.

#### **DIVORCE**

Bahá'ís disapprove strongly of divorce - Bahá'u'lláha and Abdu'l-Bahá made it clear that divorce is abhorred - but it is not banned.

There are no specific grounds for divorce laid down for Bahá'ís.

Bahá'ís wanting a divorce are required to announce their intention to divorce and then live apart for a year before they get it. During the year they should attempt a reconciliation with the help of the local spiritual assembly. This cooling-off period gives the couple a chance to put things right.

#### **FAMILY LIFE**

A strong family life is important to Bahá'ís because the family is seen as the fundamental building block of communities and nations. They believe that strong and loving families are essential for society to work properly.

#### **DRESS CODE**

Beyond the requirement that Bahá'ís dress modestly (a requirement that is itself defined according to local cultural norms) and cleanly, the Bahá'í faith does not prescribe a mode of dress for members. But Bahaullah specified that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be "playthings of the ignorant," suggesting that they should avoid fads and frivolous dress. They are exhorted to exercise moderation in all things.

#### **CALENDAR**

The Bahá'í calendar is based upon the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months, each having 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year. The Bahá'í New Year corresponds to the traditional Persian New Year, called Naw Rúz, and occurs on the vernal equinox, near 21 March, at the end of the month of fasting. Bahá'í communities gather at the beginning of each month at a meeting called a Feast for worship, consultation and socializing.

#### **MEDICAL PROCEDURES**

Blood transfusions and organ donations are allowed.

Bahá'u'lláh prohibited a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle. Monasticism is forbidden, and Bahá'ís are taught to practice spirituality while engaging in useful work.

#### **rites of Passage**

The Bahá'í faith does not have a prescribed baptism, a rite of passage for youth, or a required ceremony for converts.

#### **HOW TO BE BAHAI**

When someone wishes to become a Bahá'í, he or she first declares his or her faith in some manner, often by signing an enrollment card. Sometimes one or more persons appointed by the local Spiritual Assembly meet with the declarant to make sure the person understands the Bahá'í faith, at least at a minimal level. Then the person is enrolled as a member of the Bahá'í community. Membership is clearly defined because it has privileges: Only members can attend Feast, vote or be voted for in Bahá'í elections,

and contribute money to the Bahá'í faith.

### **PILGRIMAGE**

Bahá'ís are encouraged to go on pilgrimage once in their lifetime if they are able. Pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center is a nine-day event that includes visits to various holy places, such as the tombs of the Bab and Bahaullah. Unlike the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, it can be performed any time of the year, but it requires submitting an application to the Universal House of Justice.

### **RELIGIOUS TEXTS**

The most sacred text is the Kitab-i-Aqbas which was written by Bahá'u'lláh in 1873. This book of laws contains teachings on personal status, prophecies and outlines Baha'i religious practices. It also establishes Baha'i administrative institutions.

Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh's Prayers and Meditations, Epistle to the Son of Wolf, the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys are other holy texts that guide the lives of Bahá'ís.

### **SACRED PLACES**

The two most holiest places in the Baha'i religion are the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Acre and the Shrine of Bab in Haifa, Israel.

The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh marks the location of Bahá'u'lláh's passing. Baha'is all around the world also pray towards the direction of this sacred place.

The Shrine of Bab contains the remains of The Bab. It is considered the second holiest place in the Baha'i faith for this reason, after the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

Baha'is pray and meditate at the Shrine of Bab and the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, including the surrounding gardens.

### **SACRED SYMBOLS**

The Bahá'í faith has two sacred symbols that are variants of the Arabic word Baha (glory). The Greatest Name (ya Baha ul-abha, "O Glory of the Most Glorious"), written in calligraphic Arabic script, is often displayed on walls in a place of honor. The ringstone symbol, derived from the Arabic letters in Baha, is incorporated in jewelry and is sometimes placed on walls. Bahá'ís commonly use the nine-pointed star as the principal Bahá'í symbol, but it is not an official symbol of the faith.

Bahaullah was painted and photographed, but pictures of him are regarded as too sacred to publish. Only a few copies exist. They are displayed only in the archives at the Bahá'í World Center, and only on special occasions, and are treated with great reverence. The same practices are followed with a painted portrait of the Bab. Many photographs and painted portraits of Abdul-Baha exist, as well as a short motion picture. The pictures are widely displayed but are treated with great respect.

### **WORSHIP**

Baha'is do their acts of worship in their homes and in certain temples around the world. There are currently seven temples located around the world in North America, Australia, Uganda, Germany, Panama, Samoa, and India. These temples serve as a peaceful place in which Baha'is may reflect and meditate without interruption.

# YAZDANISM



Yazdânism, or the Cult of Angels, is a proposed pre-Islamic, native religion of the Kurds. The term was introduced by Kurdish scholar Mehrdad Izady to represent what he considers the "original" religion of the Kurds as the primary inhabitants of the Zagros Mountains, until their increasing Islamization in the course of the 10th century.

According to Izady, Yazdânism is now continued in the denominations of Yazidism, Yarsanism, and Alevism. The three traditions subsumed under the term Yazdânism are primarily practiced in relatively isolated communities, from Khurasan to Anatolia and parts of western Iran.

In Yazdani theologies, an absolute transcendental God (Hâk or Haq) encompasses the whole universe. He binds together the cosmos with his essence, and manifests as the heft sirr (the "Heptad", "Seven Mysteries", "Seven Angels"), who sustain universal life and can incarnate in persons, bâbâ ("Gates" or "Avatar").

Yazdânism teaches the cyclic nature of the world with reincarnation of the deity and of people being a common feature, traversing incarnations of the soul of a man into human form or an animal or even a plant. These religions also teach that there are seven cycles of the universe, six of which have already happened, while the seventh one is yet to unfold. In each cycle, there is a set of six reincarnated persons (one female, five male) who will herald the new cycle and preside over it (the seventh one in the set being the ever-lasting, the ever-present Almighty).

The principal feature of Yazdânism is the belief in seven benevolent divine beings that defend the world from an equal number of malign entities. While this concept exists in its purest form in Yârsânism and Yazidism, it evolves into "seven saints/spiritual persons", which are called "Yedi Ulu Ozan" in Alevism. Another important feature of these religions is a doctrine of reincarnation.

❖ **ALEVI (this is contested; most Alevi consider themselves to be Shia or Sufi Muslims, but a minority adhere to the Yazdani interpretation)**



Baglamahas – Alevi powerful symbol of group identity



Alevism is a syncretic, heterodox form of Islam, following Shia, Sufi, Sunni and local traditions, whose adherents follow the mystical (bâtenî) teachings of Ali, the Twelve Imams, and a descendant—the 13th century Alevi saint Haji Bektash Veli.

Alevism is a syncretic religion, meaning their traditions and beliefs draw from a number of different faiths. Many Alevi will quite proudly attest to the fact that throughout its history it has incorporated elements from a diverse array of religions including but not limited to Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Altaic Shamanism.

Alevi are found primarily in Turkey among ethnic Turks and Kurds, and make up between 10-25% of Turkey's population, the largest branches of Islam there after the majority Sunni.

When it comes to belief in the almighty, Alevi do not promote fear of God. Instead they always say a person must love God.

#### RITUALS

The Alevi do not build or use mosques but come together for worship in typical Turkish meeting houses, called cem evi, under the leadership of an elder, known as a dede. Once or twice a year the whole community gets together to pray and discuss social issues. Integrated in their many rituals are music and dance, indicating their relationship to Sufi worship.

Prayers have at some point in history been abolished, due to security, reflecting a problematic relationship with mainstream Islam.

Unlike most other Muslim practices, Alevi rituals are conducted mostly in Turkish, and some in Kurdish.

#### LIFE STYLE

Alevi do not wear any distinctive dress, and cannot be discerned from other Muslim Turks. Central values to Alevism is that work and education are among the greatest acts.

#### WOMAN

In Alevism, men and women are regarded as equals, in both sacred and secular spaces. Alevi women worship side by side with men (men and women pray together in the same room), are less likely to veil and more likely to freely interact with unrelated men. Alevi women are not required to wear a headscarf or other bodily coverings. Alevi women are free to dress in modern clothing, Alevi women are encouraged to get the best education they can, and Alevi women are free to go into any occupation they choose.

#### FASTING

Alevi who fast generally do not observe their major fast for 30 days during the month of Ramazan. The main Alevi fast is held during the first 12 days of the Muslim month of Muharrem (Muharrem or Mâtem Orucu), which comes 20 days after the Feast of Sacrifice (Kurban Bayrami). Then Alevi fast for 12 days in memory of the 12 imams and the martyr Hussein. Another Alevi fast is the three-day Hızır fast (Hızır Orucu), generally observed 13-14-15 February.

#### OFFERINGS

Alevi are not expected to give Zakat in the Islamic mode, and there is no set formula or prescribed amount for charity. A common method of Alevi almsgiving is through donating food (especially sacrificial animals) to be shared with worshippers and guests. Alevi also donate money to be used to help the poor, to support the religious, educational and cultural activities of Alevi centers and organizations (dergâh, vakıf, dernek), and to provide scholarships for students.

#### RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The Alevis do not acknowledge the Koran as God's word because they believe the text to have been corrupted by alterations. They recognize it, but it plays little role within their sacred texts. Most important of the latter are the Buyruks, which contain the basic principles of Alevi belief plus legends, guidelines for the rituals, religious poetry, moral advice, narratives from early Islamic history, and instructions for the "path." Buyruks are written in Turkish, but contain some prayers in Arabic. There are basically two kinds of Buyruk: those (the more frequent) traced back to the Safavids and called Şeyh Safi Buyruğu, and those attributed to the sixth Shiite Imam Jafar al-Sadiq.

#### CALENDAR OF FEAST

The Alevi calendar of feasts includes the Feast of Sacrifice (Kurban Bayramı). Nevruz, the Iranian New Year at spring equinox, which they equate with 'Ali's birthday, is celebrated with a special cem, the Nevruz Cemi. In the month of Muharrem, the time of mourning in remembrance of the passion of al-Husayn and the Battle of Kerbela (680 ad), Alevis fast for twelve days, the Fast of Grief (matem orucu). The end of this fast is celebrated with the Ashura feast. Iranian Shiites celebrate Ashura on the 10th of Muharrem, but Alevis three days later, after the fast. Another three-day fast is the mid-February Hızır fast in honor of the legendary Hızır, a popular helper-saint. The conclusion of the Hızır fast is celebrated with a special cem, the Hızır Cemi. Specifically Alevi feasts are in honor of Hacı Bektaş and his disciple Abdal Musa. Alevis also have an additional commemoration day in Muharrem for al-Husayn. Hıdrellez, the night of May 5th to 6th, is also observed: but this is not a uniquely Alevi celebration.

#### DEATH & MOURNING

The period of mourning lasts 40 days during which there is no music played and no poem reading.

Alevi believe in reincarnation. In Alevi villages, no food is generally cooked in a home where there has been a death. In Elbistan, no food is cooked for three days; it is brought by neighbors. These visits are called *sofralı gitme* (loosely translated, "meal visits."). In Adana, this lasts for seven days, and is known as *ölü aş* (dead person food). Seven, forty and fifty-two days after the death, meals are served, and *aşure* is made as well.

#### SACRED PLACES

Some of the most frequently visited sites are the shrines of Shahkulu and Karacaahmet (both in Istanbul), Abdal Musa (Antalya), Seyit Gazi (Eskishehir), the annual celebrations held at Hacıbektaş (16 August) and Sivas (the Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Etkinlikleri, 23-24 June).

#### IMPORTANT PLACES

For the Alevis, Karbala (the site where Ali's son Hussein was killed) in Iraq is an important place.

#### PILGRIMAGES

While Alevism does not recognize an obligation to go on pilgrimage, visiting *ziyarat* and performing *dua* at the tombs of Alevi-Bektashi saints or Pirs is quite common. Some Alevis make pilgrimages to mountains and other natural sites believed to be imbued with holiness.

#### MARRIAGE

In traditional Alevism marriage is regarded as a sacred institution. Alevi people are monogamous. So a person cannot marry more than once, unlike in Islam.

#### DIVORCE

Except in very exceptional circumstances no divorce or separation is allowed. In the

Alevi faith, women are sacred and to divorce a woman is the most difficult thing.

#### DIET

Alevi dietary taboos are in accordance with Shia practice, though the consumption of alcohol is permitted and, in many groups is even part of the rites.

#### PLACE OF WORSHIP

Some of the differences that mark Alevi from mainstream Muslims are the use of cemevi halls rather than mosques. Alevi worship takes place in assembly houses (cemevi) rather than mosques. The explanation given for the deviations above is that mosques were desanctified when Ali was murdered in a mosque.

#### WORSHIP

They do not condemn Muslims who do worship in the traditional ways but consider the Alevi

worship as being on a higher level and therefore closer to the divine. The central Alevi corporate worship service is the Cem ceremony.

#### CEM

The central ceremony of Alevism is the cem (ayin-i cem). These are held periodically, frequently once a year; but there are communities in which it is celebrated at shorter intervals, even weekly, especially in winter. Furthermore, there are special cems for certain feasts. Cems today are held in congregational houses (cemevi) built from the 1990s on for this purpose, in Turkey as well as in the diaspora. The ceremony, in which both men and women participate, is guided by the dede. The ritual language is usually Turkish; among the Kurdish Alevi either Turkish or Kurdish is used. The ceremony can begin only if all the members are in peace among themselves. If this is not the case, the problem between the two parties is referred to the dede, who publicly mediates and attempts to settle the conflict. The cem ceremony itself includes religious instruction, the remembrance of the community's dead, the confession of individual wrongdoings and the intended amends for them, prayers, ritual dancing (semah), ritual drinking (dolu) of wine, arrack, or sherbet, the performance of religious songs (nefes/deyiş), a common meal (lokma), and animal sacrifice (kurban). An integral part of the cem are the "twelve services" (oniki hizmet) carried out by twelve helpers designated by the dede before the ritual. These services include supervision of the orderly run, the lighting of the "eternal light," lute music, the cleaning of the house of prayer, distribution of ritual food etc. Today, cems are open to the public, but for most of Alevi history, the ceremony was practiced secretly in private houses.

#### PRAYING

Alevi do not pray openly five times a day. They don't have special praying times. They pray when they want. An exact prayer form does not exist, except secde.

#### RELIGIOUS POETRY

Religious poetry plays an important role in Alevism, and these songs and poems are also an important part of Turkish folk poetry and folk music. They are called nefes ("breath") or deyiş ("saying") and are sung by bards (aşiks) at religious gatherings, backed by the saz, a long-necked lute. These songs and poems are a key to Alevi religious concepts and ideas.

For the Alevi, the bağlamahas become a powerful symbol of group identity.

# ❖ YARSANI



Tambur - sacred symbol of Yarsanism and is played during religious ceremonies

Yarsanism is a syncretic religion. Its followers, known as the Yarsani, are a religious group primarily found in western Iran and eastern Iraq, and are mostly ethnic Goran Kurds, though there are also smaller groups of Turk, Persian, Lori, Azeri and Arab adherents. The total number of Yarsanis is about 5,000,000, of which an estimated 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 are in Iran. Because many Yarsanis hide their religion due to fears of persecution by the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is no exact count of their population.

The central religious book of Yarsanis is called the Kalâm-e Saranjâm.

The goal of Yarsanism is to teach humans about how to achieve ultimate truth. Yarsani believe sun and fire are holy things and follow the principles of equalization, purity, righteousness, and oneness, which leads some researchers to find Mithraic roots in this religion.

The followers of Yarsanism perform their rituals and ceremonies in secret.

The Yarsani follow the mystical teachings of Sultan Sahak. From the Yarsani point of view, the universe is composed of two distinct yet interrelated worlds: the internal (Bâtinî) and the external (zâhirî), each having its own order and rules. Although humans are only aware of the outer world, their lives are governed according to the rules of the inner world.

Among other important pillars of their belief system are that the Divine Essence has successive manifestations in human form (mazhariyyat) and the belief in transmigration of the soul (dunaduni in Kurdish).

There is no compulsion or exclusion in Yarsan - anyone who chooses to follow its precepts is welcome. The Yarsani faith's features include millenarism, Innatism, egalitarianism, metempsychosis, angelology, divine manifestation and dualism. Many of these features are found in Yazidism, and they also have many things in common with Zoroastrians and Christians.

Yarsanism explicitly reject class, caste and rank, which sets them apart from the Yezidis and Zoroastrians.

## HOLY SITES

Two important sanctuaries of the Yarsani are the tomb of Bâbâ Yâdgâr about 40km away from Sarpol-e Zahab in Kermanshah Province and the tomb of Dawoud at Zarde about three kilometres east of Sarpol-e Zahab. Another important shrine is that of Sultan Suhak in Sheykhān near Perdîvār bridge in Kermanshah Province. Also important are the tombs of Pir Benjamin and Pir Musi in the town of Kerend in Kermanshah Province, Iran.

## PILGRIMAGE

All Yarsani males must pilgrimage to the shrine of the Sultan Sahak. This can be done at any time.

RELIGIOUS BOOK  
Central religious book is called the Kalâm-e Saranjâm, written in the 15th century based on the teachings of Sultan Sahak.

## CUSTOMS

One of Yarsani men's apparent signs is to have a full moustache, because in the holy book Kalâm-e Saranjâm it says that every man has to have a moustache to take part in their religious rites. The concourse of Yarsanis is called the " jam khana", they gather there and they use "Tambour" for meditation.

#### **KHANDANS OR SPIRITUAL HOUSES**

Yarsanism is organised into spiritual houses or Khandans. Every Yarsani therefore belongs to one specific khandan, which is led by a spiritual leader called a say-yed, to whom each member must swear obedience. The say-yed is the spiritual leader of the community and is normally present during the ceremonies attended by the followers. Say-yeds are the only ones allowed to have full access to the religious texts of Yarsanism, and have traditionally competed with each other to have the largest number of followers. The position of Say-yed is hereditary, being passed down through the generations from the original founders. As the say-yed are considered spiritual 'parents', it is the tradition for them not to marry their followers.

#### **THE 12 FAMILIES OF THE YARSANI**

The original 7 families or Sadat-e Haqiqat established during the time of Sultan were Shah Ebrahim, Baba Yadegar, Ali Qalandar, Khamush, Mir Sur, Seyyed Mosaffa and Hajji Babu Isa. The 5 families established after Sultan Sahak are Atesh Bag, Baba Heydar, Zolnour, Shah Hayas and Hajj Nematollah.

#### **KEY FIGURES**

The Haft Tan "Seven Archangels" are key figures in the Yârsân belief system and their history. The only female among them is Khatun-e Rezbar, the mother of Sultan Sahak.

#### **MARRIAGE**

Yarsan people believe in monogamy that a man is permitted to marry only one wife. Temporary marriage isn't common among Yarsan people. Yarsan people don't consider religion as requirement part for marriages.

#### **WORSHIP**

In Yari religion practices (every Thursday) take place in Jamkhaneh (specific place for performing Yari praying like mosque ) But any place can act as a Jamkhaneh, provided that it has sufficient space for constructing circular seating (adaptation of sky circular) for participants. The circle center is considered to be God's place, from circle center God shines to all prayers similarly. Jamkhaneh ceremony has its own rituals In Jamkhaneh, Sarkalam (who prays for others) along with Tambour (a kind of music instrument such as guitar) playing reads kalameh haq (religious book). At the time of performance of blessing, participants are not allowed to leave the assembly. Until the ceremony ends, the number of participants should not be less than seven persons. The participants should be mature, wise Sarsepordan (literally a person who entrusts his head mean a process they should pass to allow to participate and inter to this religion something like Baptism in Christianity). Participants should observe the following rules: wearing cap to observe cleanliness, and wearing the fasting belt as a symbol of readiness to help other people and the connection of individual souls to each other's body.

#### **FAST AND FESTIVALS**

The followers of Yari are bound to fast for three days in Aban (October/November). This is observed because in this month Sultan Sahak and his followers were besieged. The followers give their spiritual and moral commitment to fasting, and after three days have a spiritual solidarity with the poor and indigent, and can understand their hunger. Thus on the day, which is called Khawendkar, a rooster and some of rice are blessed. The Yari are

bound on this day not have any animosity towards none, and to kiss very sincerely the hands of all men and women old and young, for loyalty, peace and brotherhood.

Yarsan celebrate two festivals which are, Newroz (Kurdish New Year) and Xawenkar. Newroz is traditional and ancient Yersinias' national feast which is highly regarded as sanctified and special.

### RELIGIOUS SONG

The Yari's religious songs called Kelam for the establishment of spiritual growth, to bind together the followers and to keep their moral commitments alive. The different songs are selected from the religious books and are accompanied by music on the Tambur. They can be sung in groups or solo.

There is a special sang for any certain ceremonial events like death, or praying and so on.

### WOMAN

Women are not allowed to learn any of the secrets of the faith, or be active participants in the jams (although women do play music sometimes in larger performances). They function primarily as a support system for the men. They are not valued or given any special roles or rights, in spite of the belief that one of the divine incarnations was a woman. Generally, women are the most ignorant of the teachings of Sultan Sahak.

## ❖ YAZIDI



Melek Taus, Yazidy Holy Symbol

They practice a syncretic religion influenced by pre-Islamic Assyrian traditions, Sufi and Shiite Islam, Nestorian Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Their rich oral tradition is their primary way of passing on their beliefs, which makes it complicated for scholars and historians to pin down the nuances of their religion.

Yezidi's believe in one God (Xwede) who created the universe and then left it in the capable hands of his seven mightiest angels. God is uninterested in the affairs of earth, even if he is all forgiving and merciful. He has left the workings of the world to the governing of Tawsi Melek (the Peacock Angel) who is both his servant and an occasional manifestation of himself.

The central figure in the Yezidi faith is this Tawsi Melek. It is believed that Tawsi Melek is the Yezidi's direct connection with God. They pray to and venerate him as God, though they do recognize a distinction between the two. Some would refer to the peacock angel as God's 'alter ego'.

Yezidis believe that they are a separate people from all others that walk the earth. They consider themselves to be born only of Adam, not Adam and Eve, and therefore to marry or commune with a non-Yezidi is to lose the purity of their race. One cannot convert to Yezidism, but one can certainly and irrevocably be removed from it. They do believe in

the eternality of the soul, but not necessarily in heaven. Instead, souls transmigrate or are reincarnated, presumably back into the Yazidi community.

The Yazidi community is based in Iraq, near their primary shrine, Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir's tomb in Lalish, near Mosul. Yazidis can also be found in Iran, Syria and Turkey, though many have migrated to Europe and America since the first Gulf War.

The Peacock Angel, Melek Taus - The concept of Melek Taus is the most misunderstood part of the Yazidi religion, and is one of the reasons why their community has suffered such historical persecution. They believe that once God created Adam and Eve, he ordered the angels to bow to his creations. While the other angels did so, Melek Taus was the only one to refuse, because he believed that he should submit to no one but the Supreme God. He was then thrown into Hell, until his tears of remorse quenched the fires and he became reconciled to God. He now serves as an intermediary between God and humanity.

#### SCRIPTURES?ORAL TRADITION

Yezidi's don't have a written text that is has been passed down throughout the generations. Many of the traditions of their faith have been passed down through stories and songs that can only be spoken by their holy men.

#### RITUALS

Yezidis follow several rituals that are similar to other religions. They do pray, fast, observe holy days, and go on pilgrimages.

#### PRAY

No Yezidi is required to pray, nor are there set times of corporate or individual prayer. The most religious do pray at 5 times during the day; dawn, sunrise, noon afternoon and sunset. When they pray they must first wash their hands and face, cross their arms over their body, and lift their faces to the sun. There are no rote prayers to be said. All prayers are addressed to Tawsi Melek or Shams (the sun). Most prayers are completed while standing and are ended by kissing the hem of their garment or an east facing wall.

#### FASTING

Fasting is usually only done for three days every December. Again, this is not a requirement but something the most religious do. It is done in memory of Sultan Ezi. Those in higher levels of the religious and social strata do fast for 40 days during the summer and during the winter.

#### HOLY DAYS

The Yezidi holy day is Wednesday. Much like the sacred days of other religions, no work is to be done on the holy day. Those who are close enough to visit a shrine would do so on this day. However, there is no formal requirement to meet with other community members or have any kind of corporate worship. Each Yezidi is to pass the day as they wish. Other holy days require pilgrimages.

#### HOLY FESTIVALS

Yezidi religious year includes four holy festivals:

- The New Year
- The Feast of Sacrifice
- The Feast of Seven Days, Sept 23-30
- The first Friday of December feast following three days of fasting.

#### RITES OF PASSAGE

There are six rites of passage that all Yezidi males and most females will pass through.

They are haircut, baptism, circumcision, brother (or sister) of the hereafter, wedding, and funeral.

### **FIRST HAIRCUT PARTY**

Yezidi boys are not allowed to have their hair cut until they are six months to a year old. Tradition calls for the child's 'godfather' (brother of the hereafter) to cut off a portion of the forelock and keep it. Gifts are given to the boy's family and he is officially considered part of Yezidi society.

### **BAPTISM**

Baptism at LalishGirls must wait to join society until they can be baptized. This is usually done when they are very young, but can be done at any time in a person's life. The child (either male or female) is baptized in the waters of the baptistry of Lalish (the most holy shrine of the Yezidi). The only people present for the baptism are the holy man, the child, and the child's parents. Baptism is more than just joining society, it also indicates that the child is now a servant of Sultan Ezi.

### **CIRCUMCISION**

Males are circumcised twenty days after their baptism. The parents choose a kefir for this occasion. The kefir is generally chosen from a caste with which the child is not permitted to intermarry as the kefir is considered a brother to the child. Often the kefir is someone from outside the Yezidi faith.

### **BROTHERS FOR THE AFTERLIFE**

The brothers of the hereafter are chosen during a lifetime. Every Yezidi must have two to help and protect them as they navigate the rites of life. Men may only choose from the two upper classes of society, whereas women are free to choose any they wish. However, should a woman marry, her husband's brother or sister will then become her brother (or sister).

### **ARRANGED MARRIAGES**

Most marriages happen young (15-16 years old) and are arranged by the fathers of the couple. There is a bride price paid by the groom's family and the wedding must be carried out by a holy man. The bride undergoes the application of henna, is arrayed in red and is escorted from her family home to that of her groom. There is usually a sheep slaughtered in sacrifice, followed by feasting and dancing. Marriage is only allowed within the Yezidi community, but even that is limited by castes and social standing. Marriages can occur at any time during the year, except in the holy month of April.

### **DEATH**

A funeral does not denote the passing of a soul, but only the end of its time in that body. The soul will transmigrate to a new body after undergoing its Judgement Day and will have no remembrance of its previous life. The corpse is washed, dressed in a white shroud, and placed in a sarcophagus. Soil from the shrine of Sheik Adi is placed in the mouth, and the body is buried with its head facing east.

After the funeral, a seer is asked by the family to determine the destiny of the deceased. If the soul is seen to have entered returned as a Yezidi the family celebrates with a feast. If however, it is found to be housed in any other living being the family offers sacrifices to 'redeem' their soul. For one week after this, the brother of the hereafter visits the family. His job is to console, sing praise to Tawsi Melek, and share happy memories of the deceased. After four days, an ox is sacrificed on the tomb and its meat is given to passersby as alms.









