

The Yezidis



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With over 6000 years of history, the peaceful Kurdish Yezidis, who now number 600,000, live primarily in the Lalesh Valley, situated just 60 km north of Mossoul.

Throughout the centuries, members of this ethnic group have migrated towards Syria, Georgia, Armenia, and Europe.

The Yezidis' religion blends elements of Sufism, Judaism, Christianity (*like baptism and referencing Jesus in certain prayers*), Hinduism (*they believe in reincarnation and have caste system*), and even Zoroastrianism. The Yezidis, pray facing the sun as opposed to Mecca.

They are not Muslim but they are seen by Islamic State terrorists as Devil-Worshippers and heretical Muslims.



Lalesh is the Yezidis' sacred village. To enter the, they ask first that you remove your shoes. There is no risk of cutting your feet though. Some men are tasked with sweeping everything daily.



Yezidi religious buildings are characterized by their pointed roofs. They symbolize the voyage from earth to the heavens. At the very top sits a metal ornament, usually depicting some sort of plant. It's a sign of life and rebirth.

The Yezidi temple in Lalesh was destroyed many times in history (mostly by Muslims) but was rebuilt in each instance by believers.



At the entrance of the temple of Lalesh, there is a black snake. The animal is the symbol of wisdom for Yezidis. Those who oppose Yezidis say that they are devil worshippers, an inaccurate but nonetheless popular belief. Yezidis respect the snake since it saved Noah's ark since it filled a leaky hole in the ship with its body.



To enter the temple, worshipers must step over the threshold of the door without touching it with their foot.



The bas-reliefs carved on the temple are the most common symbols of the Yezidis' religion: the sun, moon, stars, and a peacock.



Yezidis are separated into one of three castes: Sheikhs, Pirs, and Murids. A caste is inherited from one's parents. Many Pirs live in Lalesh's Temple to receive the faithful. They facilitate marriages, circumcisions, funerals, and provide consultations.



The son of a Pir and himself a Pir, this young man has the power to cure aches and pains in the head.



Located in front of the temple, this indian style painting depicting a young woman kindling the holy fire, is evidence of the Hindu influence on the Yezidi religion.

According to Sharia law, Yezidis are considered infidels due to their belief in the peacock angel.



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من (٢٠١٢ ، ٨ ، ٢) بدایة
برات ، عالی ان تقوم لجنة
زه الاموال بما یخدم الدیانة
بین ، مع اهتمامی بکاف
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Arab inscriptions can be found in Lalesh. They are a sign of peace to the Yezidis who have been persecuted by Muslim extremists for quite some time. It is said that a Muslim who kills a Yezidi will be rewarded with 72 virgins in the afterlife. On August 14th, 2007, 4 simultaneous suicide attacks specifically targeted the Yezidis took place in Qahtaniya and Jazeera. They claimed 800 lives which makes it the deadliest terrorist attack since 9/11. It is forbidden for a Yezidi to enter a mosque.



The Yezidi fakirs are meant to survive from begging but they often work for the temple. Believers say that the fakirs have inherited supernatural powers. They carry a flask of sacred water to bless people, and they can even initiate a seeker into spiritual life through transference of spiritual power.



Every night, the fakirs light 365 candles in Lalesh. Fakir represents “the impoverished”.



Kissing the candles is a sign of piety for the Yezidis.



A cave houses a sacred spring in the temple of Lalesh. The Yezidis spray each other with water and bring some to their families so that they can be protected by their God as well.



Family from Kanya Spi that celebrates the baptism of their child.



Every Yezidi must make a pilgrimage to Lalesh at least once in their life.



The temple has many olive trees that provide oil that they use for ceremonies. They are sacred and it is forbidden to cut them down.



Many Yezidis in the diaspora, mainly from Germany where they number 40,000, visit the temple of Lalesh. The locals often come to pray on the weekend too.

Visitors love to collect a piece of earth as a souvenir. In times of peace, the atmosphere is very relaxed with children playing and people relaxing, sharing their food with foreigners.



High on a mountain around the temple of Lalesh, women tie knots, each representing a wish for fertility.



Large rocks have been placed all along the roads that lead to the temple. Yezidis kiss them as a sign of respect for planet earth.



In the temple, there are hundreds knotted scarves. Yezidi worshippers tie a knot while making a wish.



Then they untie another knot so that they wish of another believer is fulfilled and their problem resolved.



In another part of the temple, worshippers make wishes and then throw a scarf around a big rock. If the scarf stays on top of the rock, the wish will be fulfilled. If it falls on the ground, the worshipper has two more chances. It seems more like a carnival game than a religious practice!



In the basement of the temple, a long dark room includes dozens of old amphorae containing holy oil used in ceremonies. The oil in the temple is also used to feed the flame of the lamps. Fire is a symbol of spirituality.



The tomb of Sheikh Adi, the reformer of the Yezidi religion. The pilgrims walk around it three times so that the Saint can fulfill their wishes.



Baba Cawish is a high ranking priest in Lalesh. He spends his life in the heart of the sacred temple, never leaving. Yezidi's clergy cannot shave their beards.



Every Yezidi completes a right that assigns them a brother or a sister who is not from their family. A kind of guardian angel...The purpose is to find each other and help each other in the afterlife. The first who dies awaits the soul of the other.

Yezidis have five prayers they repeat daily but most Yezidis only observe only two of these, the sunrise and sunset prayers.



Female worshippers wear white and black clothing. It is not a sign of mourning.

The Yezidis believe that once they die, they are interrogated before Sheikh Adi. They are asked questions about their sexual past: have they had sexual relations with non Yezidis or a person from a different caste? Are they married? If their answers are satisfactory, the gates of paradise open for them.



Yezidis who come from Syria are recognizable due to their Arab clothing.



Baby Yezidis wear blue pearl collars to protect them against evil curses.

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