

WHO ARE THE YEZIDIS?



The Yezidis – members of an ancient religious community – live predominantly in Northern Iraq and practice one of the least known religions in the Middle East, misunderstood by even their closest neighbors.

Yezidis generally speak Kurmanji, the dialect used by the vast majority of Kurds. Most Yezidis live in Northern Iraq, although many can also be found in Europe, Armenia, and Russia. The global Yezidi population has been estimated at approximately one million.

The Yezidi religious tradition shares common roots with pre-Zoroastrianism and elements also found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic Sufism. Yezidism is stringently monotheistic, like the Abrahamic religions. Yezidis believe in a single God, referred to as Khude or Ezid. The most prominent and central figure in Yezidi tradition is Tawusi Malak (Angel Peacock), created by God before the creation of the world. Tawusi Malak embodies both light and darkness. According to the Yezidi belief, everything in the universe has its opposite; the sun and the moon, day and night, etc. Yezidis also believe in the primary importance of the sun. The source of truth is the all-penetrating light (ronai or noor) contained in the heart of each man and woman, and the basis of the human soul. The lighting of oil lamps during religious holidays is a testimony to the veneration of light.

One of the most influential figures in Yezidism is Sheikh Adi, who was born in Lebanon and led Yezidi tribes in present-day Iraq in the 12th century. He is buried at Lalish temple in Northern Iraq – a sacred site for Yezidis.

Yezidis have a religious caste system. Sheikhs and Pirs both belong to the religious castes. They have specific responsibilities during religious ceremonies. Murids are those who don't belong to the religious caste. There is no hierarchy among the castes, each has different duties and responsibilities.

Because Yezidis often faced persecution, ceremonies were traditionally passed on in secret. Legends, cosmology, holy texts, and prayers were passed from generation to generation orally. Muslim and Christian neighbors often mistakenly characterized Yezidis as devil-worshippers. Because of this inaccurate and unfortunate stereotype, most common among uneducated segments of the population, Yezidis have long been a target of persecution.

Due to ISIS attacks on their homeland, most Yezidi civilians have been displaced from their homes and are now living in IDP-camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

