

Title of the podcast series: Life, death, and afterlife in Israel's society

Title of the podcast episode: Sufi Muslims in Israel and How They Live

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Submitted to Prof. Rami Zeedan

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Introduction

1. General introduction: 57 Seconds

- Hello, listeners, and welcome to the episode! Thank you for tuning in!
- This episode is going to focus on the Sufi Muslims of Israel. They might be a small population of a small nation, but they are an important and interesting social group!
- Today's episode of this podcast series was produced in the fall of 2023 as part of the First Year Seminar titled: Life, death, and Afterlife in Israel's Society, with Prof. Zeedan at the University of Kansas.
- I'm your host, Sadie Lange! I'm a student in said seminar, and I'm very interested in world culture! I didn't know much about Israel's history or society before, and now I feel that I have a much deeper understanding! I think being raised in a small town (mine having a population of around 2000 people) can do an injustice to one's understanding of different cultures, so I wanted to broaden my horizons with this class. I've very much enjoyed it so far!

2. Music /sound effects: 5 seconds

3. Topic introduction- introduce the structure of the podcast episode: 54 seconds

- This episode is about beliefs and practices regarding death and the afterlife among the Sufi Muslims in Israel.
- Understanding this group is important since it helps us understand the multicultural society in Israel. The information here is based on a survey of the existing literature about the topic. I will be posting my sources online. More details will be included at the end of this episode.
- In our episode today, we will talk about three major items:
 - 1) Life of the Sufi Muslims in Israel,
 - 2) Practices and beliefs regarding death among the Sufi Muslims in Israel, and
 - 3) the beliefs regarding the afterlife among the Sufi Muslims in Israel.
- You may have heard of whirling dervishes. This is a Sufi practice! Sufi Muslims believe that, through the practice of whirling, they can reach a balanced state of being. This practice has been found to have physical and mental health benefits!

4. Music /sound effects: 5 seconds

Central Section: 7 minutes 22 seconds**5. Item 1: Life of the Sufi Muslims in Israel- 3 minutes 20 seconds**

- 1) Let's start with the first topic: the life of the Sufi Muslims in Israel.

Today, most Sufi Muslims live in Egypt, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. Because Sufism can fall under multiple categories of Muslim faith, there is no exact count for how many practitioners there are in the world. According to Mubaraz Ahmed of The Tony Blair Institute, *“Sufism is often erroneously referred to as a sector as a fringe minority. However, Sufi thought and practice extend beyond the Sunni-Shia sectarian divide, across socio-economic boundaries, geographies, and languages.”*

As far as the origins of the word go, Ahmed states that “While there are other suggested origins of the term Sufi, the word is largely believed to stem from the Arabic word *suf*, which refers to the wool that was traditionally worn by mystics and ascetics.”

Itzhak Weismann states that because of a ban on Sufi practices in Turkey, Sufism experienced a decline in the twentieth century. Now, however, Sufism is once again on the rise.

- 2) Roughly 18.1% of Israel's population is Muslim, and it is unknown how many are practitioners of Sufism.
- 3) Sufi practices have a long history in Israel. According to Weismann, *“The differences go back to Ottoman Palestine, in which the Sufi brotherhoods were less organized and of a more limited social*

significance.” The article details the history of each group of Sufi Muslims in Israel and explains how and why they exist today—largely thanks to distinct leaders and willingness to accept change.

- 4) Because Sufism can be practiced in most forms of Islam, Sufism is unique in very subtle ways. Ahmed explains that Sufism follows the belief that closeness to God can be achieved in life and is not something to only strive for in the form of eventual death.

Sufism follows the belief in loving God without fear of punishment in hell or the motive of getting to heaven or paradise.

- 5) Ahmed explains that Sufis practice many aspects of the traditional Islamic faith, such as prayers and fasting, the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, the visitation of and performance of rituals at shrines and graves, meditation, and abstinence.

Sufi Muslims also practice dhikr, which is a “*constant, meditative embrace of God,*” according to Ahmed.

According to *Merrimack Valley Havurah*, Jewish groups throughout history in Egypt, Andalusia, Damascus, Yemen, Palestine, and Persia have all been influenced by Sufi beliefs and have adopted some of the practices. This can be seen in some of these areas still today.

Sufism is famous for its practice of whirling in an attempt to achieve a closeness to God via a moving, meditative state. You can read a clinical study of the feelings generated by whirling and its physical and mental health benefits from Keren Herel, Johanna Czamanski-Cohen, and Nataly Turjeman in their article *The Spiritual Experience of Sufi*

Whirling Dervishes: Rising Above the Separation and Duality of This World.

6. Music /sound effects: 5 seconds

7. Item 2: Practices and beliefs regarding death among the Sufi Muslims in Israel - 3 minutes 12 seconds

Naturally following life, we can explore our next topic of death and its related practices in Sufi faith.

Death in Sufi culture is seen as an eventual and inescapable part of life. If a person follows Sufism, they will, according to sufi-tavern.com, “*try to die to the attraction of living as well as to open up to the attraction of life.*” Essentially, Sufi practitioners believe they should enjoy life while they have the opportunity but not indulge in pleasure to the point that it consumes them and takes their focus away from their faith.

Sufi funerals are intended to take place as soon as possible after a person’s death. the-wayfarer.com states that “*Burial rituals should ... include: bathing the dead body, except in extraordinary circumstances; enshrouding dead body in a white cotton or linen cloth; funeral prayer; burial of the dead body in a grave; and positioning the deceased so that the head is faced towards the Qibla.*” The Qibla is the sacred Mosque in Mecca. I’m more familiar with protestant Christian burial practices, in which the deceased person if they have chosen to be buried, is buried facing east-west to align with the sunrise. Interestingly, both religions have a specific direction to bury the deceased.

During the burial, mourners will say a specific prayer called the Salat al-Janazah, which asks for the forgiveness of Allah for the deceased. In North African and Middle Eastern Sufism, generally, only the men recite the Salat al-Janazah.

After a person's death, in Orthodoxy, there is a 3-day mourning period for loved ones, in which mourners increase devotion, remain modest, and accept condolences. Widows, however, are expected to observe a mourning period of four months and ten days.

8. Music /sound effects: 5 seconds

9. Item 3: Beliefs regarding the afterlife among the Sufi Muslims in Israel – 40 seconds

In this item, you will introduce your audience to the beliefs regarding the afterlife among your social group. Please consider the following:

Death in Sufism is regarded with a unique belief involving the afterlife.

According to sufi-tavern.com, “*Death to the Sufis is not a frightful leap in the dark, but it is the last voyage, leading them to [Allah].*” To Sufis, life is to be appreciated but not held onto, as being with Allah is the ultimate goal. Sufi Muslims believe that Allah is with them while they are alive, and they will be with Allah when they die.

Because of the Sufi emphasis on the soul and states of being, Navid Zaidi of sufiways.com states that “*Heaven and Hell are not places. They are states, or conditions of the soul’s existence, in the life after death.*” *If Sufi Muslims have lived a good life and done good deeds, their soul will experience good things with Allah in the afterlife, thereby being “in heaven.”* Meanwhile, Hell is “*...a person’s belated realization of wrongdoing. It is a painful realization of one’s failure as a person that arises within one’s own consciousness, not imposed by an external agency.*”

To some extent, Sufism affects practices surrounding death, although most are common throughout Islamic practices. Since Sufism believes that the soul's state after death is based on how a person lives their life, it makes sense that the funeral prayer is a prayer of forgiveness for the deceased.

Beliefs that one's good deeds will determine how the afterlife is spent causes many Sufis to practice kindness, attempting to love Allah fully and to the best of their ability. Sufism includes different methods to achieve a closer relationship to God, such as the previously mentioned whirling, which sets them apart from other sects of the Islamic faith.

10.Music /sound effects: 5 seconds

Wrap up and closing remarks: 1 minute

11. Outro: Summarize theme, topics, and segments with conclusion- 33 seconds

Overall, Sufism is an interesting perspective on Islam. It incorporates much more time spent giving love to Allah, and has some unique practices, but is still very similar to other Islamic practices. Sufi Muslims have specific and somewhat simple traditions surrounding death. This group has an interesting view of the afterlife, which rejects the idea of Heaven or Hell being real places.

12. My sources for this episode are posted online, so look at the webpage where you are listening to the episode, and you should be able to find them easily!

Music (5 seconds)

Thank listeners: 18 seconds

13. Thank you so much for tuning into this episode! I hope you enjoyed learning about Sufism in Israel just as much as I did. Consider checking out some of the other episodes of Life, Death and Afterlife in Israel's Society, which were created by my classmates and professor!

14. Closing music /sound effects: repeat intro music: 5 seconds

Secondary sources

- Harel, K., Czamanski-Cohen, J., & Turjeman, N. (2021). The spiritual experience of Sufi whirling Dervishes: Rising above the separation and duality of this world. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 75, 101831.
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Primary Sources

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- "Janazah (Funeral Rites)." The Wayfarer, 9 March 2019, http://www.the-wayfarer.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75&Itemid=29. Accessed 23 October 2023.
- "Sufis about Death – The Sufi Tavern." The Sufi Tavern, 20 March 2018, <https://sufi-tavern.com/sufi-doctrine/sufis-about-death/>. Accessed 23 October 2023.
- Zaidi, Navid. "Salvation, Heaven, and Hell: The Qur'anic Viewpoint." Sufi Ways, 3 June 2013, <https://sufiways.com/2013/06/03/salvation-heaven-and-hell-the-quranic-viewpoint/comment-page-1/>. Accessed 23 October 2023.
- "The Jewish Sufi connection – Merrimack Valley Havurah." Merrimack Valley Havurah, 29 September 2023, <https://merrimackvalleyhavurah.wordpress.com/2023/09/29/the-jewish-sufi-connection/>. Accessed 16 December 2023.