

Druze Identity, Religion – Tradition and Apostasy

Abstract

The total number of Druze worldwide is two millions. Most Druze live in three Mediterranean countries: Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Their main characteristic is their religion which is secret and known only to a very small group, not more than about a fifth of the population. The Druze have no nationalistic values of their own and no distinctive culture. In our age their cultural-traditional framework which characterized the Druze community over the one thousand years, is losing its grip. This is due to the more liberal, open society in Israel and to the fact that most of their young men are drafted to compulsory army service and thus exposed to external influences which weakens their attachment to the community and affects the typical hierarchy of their society. The community elders are no longer able to give satisfactory answers to the identity questions of the younger generation. This is partially due to the secrecy of their religion.

This identity crisis is apparent today. The number of youngsters who try to cover up their affiliation to the community is on the rise. There is a certain tendency to intermarry with non Druze girls although this is still a rather rare phenomenon.

The goal of our research is to analyze the Druze identity and their tendency to marry out, a symptom that had never existed before. The paper contains statistics concerning this phenomenon and analysis the social and religious aspects, while trying to predict future developments.

Keywords: *Druze Identity; Marriages; Druze Religion; Conversion; Mix Marriages*

Chapter One:

Druze Religion and Society

Lifestyle and appearance of the Druze people have been a mystery to many. Their great similarity in language, food and outward signs of their culture to their Arab-Muslim surrounding is obvious. The Qur'an is one of their holy books and they celebrate the Feast of Sacrifice (Īd al-Adḥa) just like their neighbors. They have similar practices for other lifecycle ceremonies, like circumcision of their sons, engagement, weddings etc.

The sages of the Cairo Al-Azhar University – the most important university of the Islamic world, conducted in the 1950s a research to determine the religious identity of the Druze and came to the conclusion that they do belong to the Muslim religion. Many other Muslim and non-Muslim circles continue to make similar claims today.

Contrary to this approach, others sharply oppose any recognition of the Druze as Muslims. For example, Jalāl al-Dīn al Suyyūfī (1445-1505), one of the greatest sages of Islam of all times, strongly argued that no trust should be placed in Druze who claim they are Muslims, and that their external behavior, as believers in Islam, is merely a pretense. He declared that according to the Islam, Druze should be treated as infidels of the worst type (Murtaddūn), whose property may be confiscated and who may even be subject to a sentence of death, such befitted those Muslims who renounced Islam.

Firstly, let us examine the Druze attitude towards the five fundamental commandments of Islam in practice:

Based on many years of research and close contacts with Druze, the following can be stated:

- The Druze do not perform the commandments of the Ḥajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, required by the Islamic faith.
- They do not obey the commandment of the Fast of the Ramaḍān.
- They do not obey the commandment of charity according to a predetermined system of rules as the Sharī'a instructs.
- They do not pray five times a day. In fact the concept of prayer, as it is known in other monotheistic religions, is non-existent among the Druze.
- Especially problematic is the principle of Shahāda (testimony), which is considered an essential foundation of the Islamic faith, involving belief in a single god and in Moḥammad as the last of the prophets. In fact, as we shall see, the Druze deviate sharply from the Muslim approach to these two elements. This matter will be elucidated further on.

To stress the gap between Druze and Muslim, with all regards to the practical performance of the five fundamental commandments, let us look at the 7 principals which are the foundation of the Druze faith and their family structure:

The Druze basic religious book is entitled "Kutub al-Ḥikma" or "Rasā'il al- Ḥikma" (The Book of

Wisdom, or the Epistles of Wisdom). This book is considered secret and only religious sages ('Uqqāl) are permitted to peruse its six volumes. Religious sages constitute no more than 25% of the sect. The majority of the Druze are considered "secular" (Juhhāl) and are not permitted to study religious books or participate in religious assemblies that take place on Sunday and Thursday evenings. "Kutub al- Ḥikma" is written in Arabic and publication in print is forbidden. These texts are copied by religious sages and calligraphers, to ensure that the books be carefully guarded from perusal by unauthorized persons.

The "Kutub al-Ḥikma" books define the seven foundations of faith:

- The **first** element is **restraint of speech** (Ṣidq al-Lisān), emphasizing several speech-related issues: observance of promises, recognition of an error by the erroneous party, avoiding gossip and profanity, speaking the truth, bearing pain with composure, maintaining secrets, etc.
- The **second** element is defined as "**guardianship of brothers**" (Ḥifz al-Ikhwān). According to this tenet, Druze are required to show solidarity to other sect members who experience distress when advocating a righteous issue. Druze are required to uphold the dignity of other sect members and avoid assuming a stance of conceit towards any other sect member.
- The **third** element is the **ban on idol worship** (Tark... 'ibādat al'adam wal-buhtān), including the erection of statues, bowing to statues or exhibiting any expression of adoration of "sacred" stones etc. The Druze faith, contrary to Islam and Judaism, recognizes personification, i.e. tangible manifestation of God. This is justified by the human difficulty to perceive an abstract god and therefore, God, in his infinite compassion to people, assumes human form to facilitate man's perception of God.
- The **fourth** element is defined as **disassociation from the demon and evil deeds** (Al-barā'a min al-'Abāliṣa wal-Tuḡhyān). The demon is defined as the anti-thesis of any positive deed – in the realm of faith and in the realm of morals. Any righteous deed or act of charity, hospitality, etc. keeps the devil away.
- The **fifth** element is defined by the **belief in the uniqueness of God** (Tawḥīd al-Mawla). This, in fact, is the most important of the seven religious instructions of the Druze faith and therefore warrants clarification. The Druze faith recognizes Fatimid Caliph, Al-Ḥākim bi-'Amr Allāh, who reigned in Egypt between 996 and 1021 as the embodiment of the divine spirit. This concept, defined in the Druze faith as the "Kashf" (revelation), stands in complete contradiction to the Islamic concept of monotheism. Nevertheless, the Druze insist that they alone are worthy of the term Muwaḥḥidūn (Unitarians, monotheists) because they alone were allowed to recognize the visible god.
- The **sixth** element is the **willing acceptance of the acts of God** (Al-Riḍā bi-fi'lihi Kayfa mā Kan). Everything from God must be accepted submissively and God must be blessed for all acts, even if they involve great tragedy, because God's deeds are beyond human

understanding. The extreme example appearing in "Kutub al-Hikma ", illustrates this idea: If God asks you to kill your child, you are obligated to do so without hesitation nor sense of compulsion, otherwise you will receive no reward for it. In this context, we note that Druze do not mourn their dead or obey rites of mourning.

- The **seventh** and final element is defined as **total submission to God's decrees** (Al-Taslim li-'Amrihi). At the basis of this faith lies the concept of fatalism. In other words, blind faith in an unalterable fate predetermined on all humans . In this context we note that the Druze are strong believers in reincarnation, and defilement of dead bodies is considered a negligible matter. This also explains the neglect found in Druze cemeteries or the burial customs of mass graves in many Druze villages.

Family Laws

Considerable differences exist between Druze and Muslims concerning family laws, especially with regards to women's status. In Islam, men may be simultaneously married to four women. In contrast, Druze, are strictly monogamous. Muslim law permits marriage of a female minor, whose consent is not necessary for the process. In contrast, Druze laws define the minimum age of seventeen as a condition for a young woman's marriage, and her consent in advance of the marriage is required.

There is also a great difference concerning divorce. According to Islam, a husband may divorce his wife and accept her return three times. According to the Druze law, divorce is eternally final and irrevocable. The divorced couple is required to avoid any contact, even the most trifling conversation. The most prominent difference concerns the Druze woman's ability to apply to the Druze religious courts to receive a ruling that effectively separates her from her husband. This option does not exist in Islam, which endows the husband with the exclusive right of divorce.

In addition, several unique Druze laws stand in contrast to Muslim laws. For example, Juhhāl are not permitted to assume any role in religious ceremonies, including assemblies that take place in a special place called the Khalwa (site of isolation). In this context, we note a unique phenomenon concerning woman's religious status: In contrast to Islam, Druze women take an active part in these religious assemblies and may even attain senior status in the religious hierarchy. Such a case occurred in Lebanon, two generations ago, when a woman named Sitt Nazīra served as the religious leader of the Druze in Lebanon.

Summary

In our brief review, we examined several of the important elements that distinguish the Druze in the areas of religion and family law. In both areas, an enormous difference between Muslim and Druze laws is evident, a fact that serves to highlight the question posed at the beginning of our

discussion: Even though they are not Muslims, why do the Druze frequently present themselves as such?

The answer is related to the fact that the Druze renounced Islam in the tenth century and consolidated a faith that stands in contradiction to Islam, leading to their being persecuted by Islam. In order to save themselves the Druze faith advocates taqīya (dissimulation), a practice whereby the Druze conceal their true belief and outwardly (Zāhir) accept the dominant religious faith, while inwardly (Bāṭin) they continue to be true to the unique Druze faith, the belief in al-Ḥākīm as the embodiment of god etc. This, of course, is the obvious explanation for the similarity of Druze and Muslims customs in all lifecycle ceremonies, circumcision, engagement, marriage and death, which are inherently public in their nature. In contrast, the intimate assemblies of Sunday and Thursday evenings are not similarly open to strangers and are entirely subject to the control of the Druze.

The Druze faith stresses the uniqueness of the Druze, who have gained what no other believers have been privileged to achieve: a serene view of the divinity, who assumes the image of a human being. The Druze are allocated extra-special rights – not available to non-Druze. The privilege of being counted among the members of this faith is given only to someone born to a Druze father and mother. No Druze can ever free himself of this.

"Whoever is born a Druze – will die a Druze, and any act of deceit, fraud, or estrangement toward this community cannot change this fact, because the Druze religion is immutable and incontrovertible (al-dīn al-durzī la yaqbal al-taghyīr wal-tabdīl).

However, the facts of life, i.e. the environment of the Jewish state and Muslim neighbors have led to members of the Druze community to go astray in spite of the fact that the Druze community has a decidedly negative view of those who stray. Let's view some of the statistics and developments regarding Druze who abandoned their fold, and of those who eventually returned:

Chapter Two:

Religious Conversions of Druze in Israel¹ – Period 1952-2009

Based on official data received from the Druze religious courts, during the said period we know of 145 cases of Israeli Druze who turned their back on their religion and left the Druze faith (to be called those who "strayed").² This straying took two forms: either a formal act of religious

-
1. The information for this chapter originates principally in the case files of the Druze Religious Courts and various publications (scholarly and general – as well as in interviews initiated by the author with several of the community's leaders and several of those who "went astray" themselves.
 2. The study for this chapter was carried out in the full knowledge that the basic data are relatively small. It should be remembered, however, that these statistics form the entire corpus of "straying" that occurred in this period; therefore, they definitely enable an exhaustive study of the characteristics of the phenomenon.

conversions, or setting up a family with a non-Druze spouse, which is of no lesser religious significance than conversion and at times even worse. The religions to which these Druze converted are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Religions to which Druze converted

Target Religion ³	No. of cases	%
Islam	63	43.5
Judaism	55	38
Christianity	13	9
Baha'i	2	1.5
Unknown	12	8
Total	145	100

The 145 who strayed may be classified into sub-groups of common straying characteristics:

- 32 converted in a formal religious act and became Muslims because of purely political motives⁴
- 54 converted in order to avoid religious differences in the family that they had established with a non-Druze spouse
- 59 strayed by setting up a dual-religion family, whether through a civil marriage or by living together without a formal marriage.

Of the total population of those who strayed, at least 65 (45%) are known to have returned to their original faith, either by a formal act of re-conversion or by dissolving the family framework with the non-Druze partner. These will be called "those who returned to the fold". In the later years of our survey, in fact, this return accelerated, apparently because of the intervention of Druze Religious Court judges.

3. This refers both to the new religion to which the individual chose to belong by formal act and to the religion of the non-Druze spouse, for in the latter case there is a tendency for the couple and their children to assume a non-Druze way of life and to adopt the tradition of the non-Druze partner.

4. See the section "Straying in the Direction of Islam".

Settlements of Origin and Destination of "Strayers"

Table 2 Breakdown by settlement origin of the 145 who left the fold

Region	Town	No.
The Carmel region (al-Karmil)	Dāliyat al-Karmil	11
	'Isifya	17
Western (al-Sāhil) and Lower Galilee	Jūlis	7
	Yarkā	18
	Abū Sinān	4
	Kafr Yāsīf	1
	Shefar'am (Shafā'amr)	15
The Galilee (al-Shāghūr)	Sājūr	7
	Rāma	15
	'Ayn al-'Asad	1
	Mughār	12
Upper Galilee (al-Jabal)	Bayt Jann	13
	Jathth	2
	Yānūḥ	0
	Buqay'a	3
	Kafr Sumay'	5
	Kisrā	1
	Ḥurfaysh	4
	Golan Heights (Haḍabat al-Jūlān)	Majdal Shams
Mas'ada		1
'Ayn Qinyā		1
Buq'āthā		0
Unknown		4
Total		145

A comparison of the frequency of the phenomenon in any one town in relation to the size of the Druze population in that settlement shows four striking exceptions: More than 13% of the Druze population of Israel live in the village of Dāliyat al-Karmil, but the scope of the straying phenomenon here is only 7.5% of all cases. The opposite trend marks the neighboring village of 'Isifya, which has only 7% of the Israeli Druze population, but represents 12% of the conversions from the Druze faith. A similar phenomenon is revealed in Shefar'am. This city has 5% of all Israeli Druze, but the "straying" rate here is 10%. The most striking asymmetry is found in Rāma,

where the Druze constitute 2.5% of the town, but the scope of straying stands at full 10%.⁵

This is easily explained by the fact that in Shefar'am and Rāma the Druze are a minority population and tend more to mix with the Muslim majority. (In Rāma over 50% of the population are Christian, and the rest Muslims). As of 'Isifya, it turns out that most of the converts have their origin in Syria, a fact that influences their way of life socially and religiously.

The Druze community has a decidedly negative view of those who stray. Consequently, the converts are forced to leave their home village and exile to distant non-Druze places. This is especially true when the defection involves marriage to a non-Druze partner. The preferred destinations of these converts are cities like Greater Haifa, Jerusalem and Karmiel. In some cases Muslim villages were preferred. Some converts even migrated to villages in Samaria and Judea and a few even further like emigration to Canada and the USA.

Strayers and Straying; 1977-1982

In the studies of the 145 cases of straying recorded between 1952 and 2002, the period 1977-1982 was exceptional in that it saw 40 such cases. This wave apparently was related to the debate among the Druze public at that time concerning the national and religious identity of the Druze. One manifestation of this debate was a letter sent by two Druze brothers to the Ministry of Defense on May 23, 1977, in which they defined themselves as "Palestinian Arabs ... Muslims, Druze",⁶ and therefore requested exemption from compulsory army service. The matter came up before the courts.⁷ The two brothers asked the Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, and the Haifa District Court, to instruct the Ministry of the Interior to change the Nationality Entry in their ID cards from "Druze" to "Arab". The District court, on February 15, 1979, rejected the request, stating that the two brothers had not come to court "innocently and with clean hands".⁸

"Straying" towards Judaism

55 of the 145 cases of straying (or 38%) were in favor of Judaism. There are two categories:

- (a) 32% of the cases were full religious conversions, usually followed by marriage with a Jewish female partner in a Jewish religious ceremony.

-
5. The village of Rāma is a very developed settlement and is active politically. See *ha-Mizrah he-Hadash*, 11 (1961), p. 252.
 6. In order to strengthen their argument, the appellants presented declarations of support for their position from Shaykh Farhūd Farhūd of Rāma, who for a time had served as chairman of the "Druze Initiative Committee" (see below, section "Becoming Muslim from Political Motives"); the poet Samīḥ al-Qāsim; Dr. Sulaymān Bashīr; and Aharon Cohen.
 7. High Court of Justice 436/77, Kayyūf v. Ministry of the Interior; also Case No. 318/78/3 in the Haifa District Court.
 8. The significance of the rejection of the Kayyūf brothers' appeal lay in the fact that they, along with a group of young Druze who were backing them, were disappointed in their attempt to escape IDF service. This seems to be the explanation for the wave of conversions and its drop to a "normal level" after a few years.

- (b) 68% of the cases were family frameworks created with Jewish women, either by a civil marriage ceremony or by openly living together.

32% of these relationships proved unstable. More than 40% of the families set up without religious conversion broke up. There were only two divorce cases among the Druze who had converted to Judaism. This is characteristic to divorce rates in traditional societies, also where no dual religious past is involved.

Another interesting finding was that in almost all cases of "straying to Judaism" the Druze party was forced to abandon his original residence. The couples mostly moved to a predominantly Jewish destination, e.g. Tel Aviv, Haifa, southern region of Israel, the North district or Judea-Samaria. Only three couples chose to live in an Arab-Muslim village.

"Straying" in the Direction of Islam

Islam was the target religion for 63 of the 145 cases of straying (43.5%). There are 3 categories:

- (a) 51% of the cases became Muslims because of political motives, and they were inspired by a leftist political Druze body called "The Druze Initiative Council".
- (b) 43% converted because of marriage to a Muslim spouse.
- (c) 6% set up a family with a Muslim wife without becoming Muslim or without formal marriage.

(a) Becoming Muslim for Political Reasons

Those Druze who converted to Islam due to political motives did so with the declared or implied intention to escape army service. This group is characterized by their young age – an average of 20.9 years, compared with the average age of the entire group of those who strayed i.e. 30.5 years. It is interesting to note that most of those who strayed in the direction of Islam are related in one way or another.

Another common characteristic of this particular group is that they refrained from leaving their residence, despite having converted in a formal religious act in a *Shar'ī* court. It is even more interesting that 75% of these young adults – after a period of time – appealed to the Druze Religious Court to be accepted back into their original community. Their wish to return to the fold usually coincided with the date of their discharge from the army or when they intended to marry a Druze girl. Only 6 of these people did not return to the Druze faith in spite of the fact that their motive had been political. They had either not yet married or had strayed after marriage to a Druze woman who had not converted to Islam.

We can learn a lot about the state of mind of these people who had adopted Islam from an excerpt from a verdict handed down by the Druze Religious Court in reply to an application to return to the fold:

...from personal motives, without any deep thought ... The appellant expressed

his sorrow for what he had done... said that he had not left his [Druze] faith, and that this had been a unreasonable act (ḥibr 'ala waraq), and nothing more. He had stayed a Druze in his blood, his thought and his heart... He had not gone to the mosque and had not kept any commandments of the religion he had joined (Islam)...⁹

Another young Druze clearly declared in the court his motives for becoming a Muslim:

It became clear to this court that the appellant did not at all change his place of residence ... and that the purpose of his act had been to avoid army service. However, he failed in this and was forced to serve in the IDF, and now has been discharged from the army..."¹⁰

In this group of converts with political motives were 10 residents of Yarkā. This was no coincidence since the (pro-Arab) Druze Initiative Committee conducts widespread activity in this town and serves as a source of inspiration to those defined as "political strays" and others who promote the committee's views.

The Druze Initiative Committee

The Druze Initiative Committee (*Lajnat al-Mubādara al-Durziyya*) was set up in 1972 by a group holding Arab nationalist opinions. Some of the members were Raqah (The Israeli Communist Party at that time) party activists. Chairing the committee in its early years was Shaykh Farhūd of Rama, who had been among the founders of the committee and was considered its spiritual father.

The desire of the Initiative Committee to strengthen as far as possible the affinity of the Druze to the Arab nation was manifested in protracted, bitter activity against the idea of teaching Druze pupils about their community's history as a valuable "Druze heritage", so as to strengthen their special consciousness as Druze. From time to time the committee would recruit clerics, parents' committees and other bodies to support its stand.¹¹

(b) Marriages with Muslim Spouses

The other group of those who strayed towards Islam is a group of people, including six women, who overtly converted in order to marry a Muslim. What is striking about this group is the

9. Druze Religious Court Case 64/88. It should be noted that the appellant had declared at the time of his becoming a Muslim in the Shar'ī Court in Haifa that his request to convert was being done "of his own free will and that he had taken it upon himself to be a Muslim in every sense of the word." After less than a month, however, he appealed to the Druze Religious Court to come back to his community. Similarly, see Case 175/88.

10. Case 113/89. For a similar situation, see the verdicts of Druze Religious Court Cases 156/81, 110/82, 169/82, 63/83, 64/83, 131/83, 146/83, 194/83, 191/86, 175/88, and 208/88.

11. See, for example, Ittihād, September 11, 1991.

relatively mature age of those who strayed. Like Druze who converted to marry Jewish women, the average age of this group is 30.

Another prominent characteristic is the very short time between their conversion and their marriages, and before the couples leave to settle in a non-Druze area. The settlements to which these couples moved are divided as follows:

13 couples settled in mixed towns.

2 couples moved to Muslim villages.

4 couples stayed in their village of origin.

The places of residence of the other couples are unknown.

Women who "Strayed"

One of the most striking findings arising from the statistics collected was the minimal number of straying women and the cases of Druze women marrying out. The Druze attitude toward Druze women who "marry out" is one of utter hostility. The act is not only a serious infringement on the religion; it also arouses feelings of contempt and humiliation, which the woman's family is unable or unwilling to bear.

Only six of the 145 known cases straying involved women, all of whom changed to Islam. Two of the women converted because of social-religious pressures. Three other Druze women underwent conversion because they wanted to return to their former Druze husbands, from whom they had been divorced. Since Druze law forbids taking back a divorced woman these couples had no choice but to convert.¹²

"Straying – and returning to the Fold"

A striking finding was the *return* of 65 of those who went astray (45%), some after a period of but one day – other up to a span of thirty years. As table 3 shows, 30 of these returned to the Druze community after establishing a family with non-Druze women and even producing offspring.¹³ Of particular note is the fact that two-thirds of the families that broke up were Druze-Jewish families. It should be stressed that the dissolution of a family framework in such a case meant not only dissociation from the non-Druze partner, but a declared commitment to break off all contact even with joint offspring.

12. Case 136/83. See also Cases 188/84 and 5/86.

13. The remaining cases of returning to the fold involved youth who converted to Islam for political motives, as discussed above in section "Becoming Muslim from Political Motives."

Table 3: Those who returned to the Druze community after intermarriage

Religion of Spouse	After Religious Marriage	After Civil Marriage	After living Together	Total
Muslim	7	---	1	8
Jewish	3	14	2	19
Other	1	2	1	4
Total	11	16	4	31

Offspring of strays who return to the fold

As was mentioned above, even the offspring of Druze who marry non-Druze cannot be counted among the members of this faith – neither with regular status or with a lower status. In this regard, it makes no difference whether the mixed marriage involves a male or female non-Druze.¹⁴ Attitude toward a dual-religion family and the status of the offspring has been discussed several times and in different circumstances at both levels of the Druze Religious Courts.

In 1979, the subject came up in regard to the rights of the offspring of a non-Druze woman who had been the common-law wife of a Druze killed in a road accident. She appealed to the court on her own behalf and that of her five children, to recognize her and her children as heirs of the deceased. The Qāḏī, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn Ḥalabī, rejected her request, arguing that

What transpired to the appellants (the women and her children) will serve as a lesson the every "lover" (heaven forbid) or woman, regardless of her religion, not to marry except with a proper marriage contract and in a marriage bond that is recognized religiously and officially.... Such a (non-proper) marriage can only end in tragedy and misfortune for the unfortunates, who have committed no sin.¹⁵

The court rejected the woman's and the children's request and placed the blame on the parents, including the woman, "who should have anticipated these consequences."¹⁶

The Qāḏī was also asked about the idea of a common-law wife and ruled that, according to Druze custom and law, such a relationship was tantamount to prostitution (*zina*), and that because the "fruit" of such a relationship is the result of a deed that contradicts the foundations of the Druze

14. Contrary to his assertion, Salmān Falāḥ, Toldot, pp. 110-11, contends that "the woman (non-Druze married to a Druze man) cannot become a Druze; but her children are indeed Druze. According to Druze law, the children follow the father (and not the mother). So long as the father is a Druze, his children are Druze in the eyes of Druze law." Salmān Falāḥ adds that all the children of mixed marriages with Jewish women are considered Druze according to Druze law, and Jewish according to Jewish law. The writer of this article does not agree with Falāḥ and is of the opinion, according to Druze religious law, that the offspring of a mixed marriage are not considered Druze.

15. Case 56/79.

16. Ibid.

faith and because the decisions of the Druze Religious Court are committed to the fundamentals of the Druze religion, therefore it (the court) cannot recognize the illegal fruit or results of anti-religious actions or make any decision on their behalf.¹⁷

In 1986 and 1987, the subject came up again for decision and Qāḍī Naʿīm Hinū took a similar stand. He condemned the common-law phenomenon in the sharpest terms, holding that this relationship was nothing but "the gratification of animal appetites",¹⁸

*...which blinds one's eyes and leads (the Druze male) to serious sin (kabīr), contradicting custom and the noble Druze tradition... A relationship with a woman without a legal marriage contract is considered harlotry... and this court cannot give recognition to such relations...*¹⁹

The most serious incident brought before the court dealt with a Druze man who abandoned his wife and children and lived in common-law marriage with a non-Druze woman. The affected Druze wife turned to the Druze court, which granted her request for a divorce and awarded her far-reaching material rights in regard to their joint property. In reasoning the court's verdict, the Qāḍī said, among other things:

*The husband's deed is worthy of punishment, considering the social dangers and ruin of the family unit inherent in the act: deserting children and in effect making them orphans, ruining the woman's purity ('afāf al-mar'a), her innocence, her dignity, her glory and her nobility... Protecting the family from prostitution is a basis on which the wholeness of society and home and the children's happiness is built... There is here (in the husbands' action) contempt and violation of the sanctity of marriage and family relations.*²⁰

Druze religious law makes almost no distinction between a Druze who sets up a family with a non-Druze woman by way of marriage (religious or civil) and one who sets up a family in a common-law relationship. Still, one can sense that the attitude toward a family that is not established through marriage is much more severe. The first incidence of a mixed marriage between a Druze man and a non-Druze woman and the fate of their offspring being brought before a Druze court was in 1977, when four of the offspring of this marriage requested that they be recognized as Druze.²¹ In a precedent-making decision, signed by all Qāḍīs members of the two Religious

17. Ibid.

18. Shahwa bahīmiyya...ghazīra ḥawāniyya.

19. Cases 232/86, 222/87.

20. Case 131/89. See Article 43 of the Law of the Status of the Druze Man.

21. The father of the family came from Syria in 1949 and in a civil marriage wed a woman who was not Druze; all his life, however, he educated his children to maintain their Druze religious and national heritage. It should be mentioned that the few Druze who set up a family framework with a non-Druze wife came from either Syria or Lebanon.

Appeals Counts, the request was rejected outright.²² The decision reads as follows:

1. The Druze community is known for its tolerance (*tasāmuh*) toward and love of all mankind. Its tenets call for brotherhood and cooperation with all communities and religions for the general good.
2. From the time of its establishment to the present time, the Druze community has lived for the preservation of its fundamentals, its religion, its independence, and its very existence thanks to the devotion of its sons to their values and religion.
3. Since its establishment, the Druze community has condemned and rejected any intervention on anybody's part in its internal and religious affairs. Similarly the Druze community as invalidated all mixed marriages in order to preserve the unity of the community, its religious fundamentals, and its continued existence.
4. In recent years, to our great sorrow, there has been an increase in mixed marriages between members of the Druze community and members of other communities. If, heaven forbid, this situation continues, it might bring great damage to the Druze community. Therefore, we must act to put an end to marriages of this sort, and to their increasing number, for the good of the Druze community.
5. The Druze community cannot recognize as Druze children who are born from a marriage involving a non-Druze partner. We see their fathers and mothers as those who have brought this crime upon them.²³

The anger of the Druze leadership was vented on the intelligentsia (layers, academics etc.) who had dared argue that the Druze faith was a branch of Islam, and some of whom, on the basis of that contention, had even become Muslims or had married Muslim women and produced Muslim offspring. Dr. Sulaymān Bashīr, a prominent figure in this group, viewed himself as an Arab-Muslim, even while still a Druze,²⁴ and for several years had tried to convince others of this idea.²⁵ After some ten years he decided to return to the fold, divorced his Muslim wife, and expressed deep sorrow for his past acts to the Druze Religious Court.²⁶

-
22. This resolution carried great weight because the head of the Druze Religious Court of Appeals and his associates, who also signed the verdict, also served in the role of chairman and members of the Druze Religious Council, which is the highest spiritual authority of the Druze community in Israel.
 23. Signing this decision were Shaykh Amīn Ṭarīf, spiritual had of the Druze community and head of the Druze Religious Court of Appeals; Shaykhs Aḥmad Khayr and Kamāl Mu'addī, members of the Druze Religious Court of Appeals; the Qādis Labīb Abū Rukn and Nūr al-Dīn Ḥalabī; and also Adv. Z. Kamāl, at the time director of the Druze Religious Courts. See Appeals Case 118/77.
 24. Case 408/78 of the Sharī Court in Acre.
 25. Among others, a declaration was submitted in his name on the matter of changing the "Nationality" item in the identity card (Case 318/78/3). The matter was discussed in the Haifa District Court; see notes 7 and 8 above. This declaration stated forefully that "the Druze are a Muslim religious sect of Shī'ite-Isma'īlite roots, and they are also Arabs culturally-nationally."
 26. Case 207/89. For similar cases, see Cases 60/88 and 208/88.

Policy of the Druze Leaders towards Straying

The picture that emerges from the statistics about Druze who have strayed from their religion is similar, in effect, to the general process that is occurring in this area in the Western world today: a questioning of the role of religion in a modern society.

In Western society, religious uniqueness is becoming more and more blurred. Very generally speaking, a similar process may be distinguished among the Druze. On the one hand, the data points to a very restricted rate of "straying". On the other hand, the community in Israel has been recently experiencing unfamiliar phenomena: scores of cases of full acts of religious conversion and scores more of family frameworks being formed with a non-Druze partner. It should be stressed that the cases presented here still concern a minority group comprising only 1.7% of the Israeli population, but one known for its seclusion, religious orthodoxy and spiritual immunity.

An interesting phenomenon discovered in the course of this study relates to the "target religion" of Druze conversions. On the face of it, one might think that because Jews represent the majority culture in Israel, the number of strays to Judaism would be much larger than that to Islam, a religion toward which the Druze faith bears some animosity. Nevertheless, almost half the cases of Druze conversions were to Islam. Several factors may account for this:

1. The young Druze who stray are not entirely familiar with their religion and its hostility toward Islam.
2. The "majority culture" in their eyes is the Arab-Muslim culture, for they speak its language and are familiar with it from the environment in which they live - their home, leisure, education and work – much more than with Jewish culture.
3. In contrast to Muslim society, there is a natural tendency among Jews to refrain from personal communication with Arabs (or with those who appear to be Arab), for nationalistic reasons.

Conclusion

It can be learned from the above expose that the Druze religion is very different from the Islam, although from the cultural aspect, the Druze population has many striking similarities. Most of the basic Druze religious rules are not open to the majority of the younger generation. The phenomenon of intermarriage is only one of the trends apparent from the identity crisis which is characteristic of the Druze youth. If this tendency will continue – and it appears that this is the case in the immediate and more distant future - the Druze society will soon be very different from what it has been for the last one thousand years.

bibliography

- Atashi, Z. (1955). *Druze & Jews in Israel: A shared destiny*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.
- Azzam, F. (1980). Druze identity – A problem demanding solution. In N. Dana (Ed.), *The Druze: A religious community in transition* (pp. 113-120). Jerusalem: Israel Economist.
- Ben-Dor, G. (1979). *The Druzes in Israel: A political study*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.
- Bryer, D. (1976). The origins of the Druze religion. *Der Islam*, 52, 48-84, 239-262; 53, 5-27.
- Dana, N. (2003). *The Druze in the middle east*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.
- Firro, K. (1999). *The Druzes in the Jewish state*. Leiden: Brill.
- Layish, A. (1985). Taqiyya among the Druzes. *Asian and African Studies*, 19, 245-281.