The Druze

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1 Introduction

The Druze—one of the most misunderstood and understudied sects of Islam—is found today mainly in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. The Druze—a term that is considered a misnomer for the sect and is rejected by many members of the faith (Abi Khuzam 1995: 48, 276; Zahr al-Din 1994: 34)—have a distinct set of beliefs and practices, and their manuscripts (wisdom books) are a collection of epistles and correspondences among eleventh century Muslim scholars and theologians whom they call luminaries. The influence of the Qurʾān, as well as Greek, Persian, and Indian philosophies and theologies are apparent in Druze manuscripts and beliefs. This chapter provides an overview of the sect's ethnic origins, history, religious tenets, scriptures, and rituals, as well as the Druze's theological and philosophical views about the absolute and life after death.

2 Ethnic Origins

Historians have debated the ethnic origins of the Druze. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. AH 310/923 CE)—a prominent and influential Muslim historian—tells us that an Arab tribe by the name of Taym Allāh travelled from Arabia into the valley of the Euphrates (Hitti 1928: 21) before migrating into Wadi al-Taym in Lebanon, where ‘the call’ to the Druze faith emerged. Philip K. Hitti explains that most of the Druze Arab tribes trace their origin to southern Arabia, and not to the Hijaz tribes, which migrated to the Levant during the Muslim conquests, suggesting that the ancestors of the Druze migrated from Arabia prior to Islam (Hitti 1928: 21–22). As such more modern scholars like Anis Obeid writes: “ethnically, the Druze are Arabs ... [who] migrated mostly from southern Arabia at different times in history” (Obeid 2006: 9). Mahmud Shaltut describes the Druze as “Muslims, *muwahhidūn* (monotheists), and *muʾminūn* (believers),” whose roots go back to the twelve Arab tribes that arrived in Mount Lebanon during the reign of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–158 AH/754–775 CE) to help ward off Byzantine infiltrators at the

northern frontiers of the Islamic empire (Zahr al-Din 1994: 75, 78, 91–109). When the Druze community was first formed in the eleventh century, these Arab tribes accepted the call to the new faith (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 11). The center of the propagation of the Druze faith occurred in Wādī al-Taym, at the foot of Mount Hermon, a region that is said to be one of the most Arab regions in Syria (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 12).

3 Historical Background

The emergence of the Druze faith occurred in 408 or 409 AH/1017 or 1018 CE during the reign of the sixth Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimid ruler al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh (r. 386–411 AH/996–1021 CE) who sent missionaries from Cairo to what is today Lebanon to spread the preaching of a fresh call to monotheism (*al-daʿwa al-tawḥīdiyya*) (Halabi 2015: 16). Al-Ḥākim was fifteen-years old when he inherited the Fāṭimid Caliphate that stretched over a vast geographical area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea including Damascus, Mecca, and Yemen. His reign, which lasted for twenty-five years, witnessed internal political and religious turmoil in addition to external threats from the ʿAbbāsids in East (Baghdad), the Umayyads in the West (the Andalus), and the Byzantines in the north (Abi Khuzam 1995: 34–35). Despite all the upheavals that marred the Fāṭimid Caliphate, al-Ḥākim continued on the path of his Fāṭimid ancestors promoting free thinking in philosophy and the sciences. Among his greatest achievements was the establishment of an institution of higher learning called *Dār al-Ḥikma* (House of Wisdom) in 395 AH/1005 CE. Students who attended this institution were able to study philosophy, science, Islamic religious thoughts, languages, and literatures (*al-daʿwa al-Fāṭimiyya al-tawḥīdiyya*) (Abu Salih 1981: 53). At the same time when philosophy and the sciences were flourishing in the Fāṭimid Caliphate, tenth-century Cairo also witnessed the rise of a variety of religious schools and movements, among them was the Ḥākimite Call (*al-daʿwa al-Ḥākimiyya*), also called the Monotheist Call (*daʿwat al-tawḥīd*) leading up to what is known today as the Druze.

The main theological principles of *daʿwat al-tawḥīd* was 1. the attempt to reconcile the differences between the competing Islamic schools of thought by emphasising on the importance of both the esoteric and exoteric interpretations of the Qurʾān and 2. the belief that al-Ḥākim was the ʿAwaited *Imām* who comes in the end time to spread justice and prepare people for the Day of Reckoning (Abi Khuzam 1995: 39–43). The new call to monotheism originated in tenth-century Cairo, where the anticipation of the coming of a new era was running high. In this era, according to Druze scholar Sami Nasib Makarim,

truth was to be revealed and the knowledge of the unity of God was to be disclosed to those who had been preparing themselves for this moment since the beginning of man ... Since the beginning of humanity man had been striving for the moment when true knowledge was to be divulged, free from all superficial, material, anthropomorphic, and ritualistic implications, and free from all allegorical, symbolic, cabalistic and superfluous interpretations.

MAKARIM 1974: 15

On 30 May 1017, al-Ḥākīm announced the beginning of the new era calling upon the people to do “away with corruption of delusion and conformity ... to be free to express themselves, and to be liberated so that they might have the courage to distinguish between truth and falsehood” (Makarim 1974: 16–17). Reaching such a state is “compliance with God’s will, the real law of nature that governs the universe” (Makarim 1974: 16–17), which is monotheism; the acknowledgement of the singularity of God (*tawḥīd*).

The beginning or foundation of the Druze faith, according to Abbas Halabi, can be attributed to three figures who took on preaching the *daʿwa*, the new call to monotheism: a Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī preacher named al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥaydara al-Farḡhānī al-Akhram, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī, and Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī al-Darazī (also known as Nashtakīn al-Darazī) (Halabi 2015: 16).¹ Al-Akhram organised the first movement and preached the divinity of al-Ḥākīm in 1017 at the encouragement of al-Darazi (Abi Khuzam 1995: 48). Two months into preaching the *daʿwa*, al-Akhram was assassinated and replaced by Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī who took “over the guidance of the movement and bestowed on the *Tawḥīd* Call (*daʿwat al-tawḥīd*) its final divine theological status” (Halabi 2015: 16). The assassination of al-Akhram was perhaps a response from preachers of the *daʿwa* in Cairo who rejected the divinity of al-Ḥākīm and who wanted to put an end to this erroneous teaching before it becomes weaved in the theology of the new *daʿwa*.

In 1017, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī was proclaimed an *imām*, started teaching God’s unity, and called upon the people to accept the divine *daʿwa*. Ḥamza summoned all the missionaries in Cairo, supplied them with his knowledge, and gave them instructions to guide them in their missionary works. These missionaries were assigned destinations to spread the new Call to *tawḥīd*. Among

1 Samy S. Swayd tells us that the Druze religious establishment revolves around the figures of al-Ḥākīm bi Amr Allāh, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī, and Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-Samūqī, “all of whom left little information about themselves or the motivation behind their social and religious activism.” See Swayd (1998: 19).

these missionaries was al-Darazī who was jealous of Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī’s appointment by al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh (Zahr al-Din 1994: 27) and believed that he, rather than Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī, should be appointed *imām*. Al-Darazī, accepting Ḥamza’s *imāmate* reluctantly, started propagating the new *da‘wa* resorting to “unscrupulous methods, such as intimidation, threats, and other coercive means” to induce people to join his following (Makarim 1974: 19; Zahr al-Din 1994: 29). He pursued this method of preaching in the hope that he wins al-Ḥākim’s favor and eventually the *imāmate* (Makarim 1974: 19). Al-Darazī was successful in this endeavor as he was able to win many followers although many people disapproved of the way he converted individuals to the new Call.

Sami Nasib Makarim tells us that the people who disapproved of the way al-Darazī conducted his missionary work refused to join the Call and, believing that al-Darazī represented the whole movement, called those who joined him ‘the Druze’ (*al-Durūz*). On the other hand, the people who joined the Call under the leadership of Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī were known as the *Muwaḥidūn*, or Unists (Makarim 1974: 19–20). Problematically, al-Darazī’s own followers declared this man a heretic, thus many Druze today despise being named after him. As both Samy Swayd and Sami Nasib Makarim emphasise, the character of al-Darazī in the Druze teachings and scriptures reveal him to be “the first [Druze] apostate ... the deviate ... and the great heretic” (Swayd 2006: xxxii; Makarim 1974: 19). Among the deviations committed by al-Darazī, according to Marshall G.S. Hodgson, are his teachings that “exalted ‘Alī over Muḥammad—*imāmate* over prophecy—and identified ‘Alī (and therefore all the *imāms*, including al-Ḥākim) with the demiurge” (Hodgson 1962: 8).

According to Swayd, the term ‘Druze’ does not occur in Druze manuscripts and is rejected by “all learned members of the community” (Swayd 2006: xxxii). Yet, while most Druze agree that the name is a misnomer, there have been little to no efforts by Druze leaders to officially change or remove the label. It is common, however, and highly preferable by Druze leaders and scholars to refer to the sect as *al-Muslimūn al-muwaḥidūn* (Muslim Unists), *al-muwaḥidūn al-Durūz* (Druze Unists), *ahl al-tawḥīd* (People of monotheism), and *maslak al-tawḥīd* (the Tawḥīd Path).²

In a 1962 article, Hodgson provides a different account on al-Darazī and his relationship to the Druze origin. He tells us that Syrian Druze tradition “recalls

2 See, for example, Salih Zahr al-Din, *Tārīkh al-Muslimīn al-Muwaḥidīn ‘al-Durūz’*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Markaz al-‘Arabi lil Abhath wa al-Tawthiq, 1994); Anwar Fu‘ad Abi Khuzam, *Islām al-Muwaḥidīn* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Yamama, 1995); Yusuf Salim al-Dubaisi, *Ahl al-Tawḥīd ‘al-Durūz’*, vol. 2 (n.c: n.p., 1992); and Sami Nasib Makarim, *adwā‘ ala Maslak al-Tawḥīd ‘al-Durziyya’* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Sadir, 1966).

other men as their chief converters.” He further adds that Ḥamza’s letters “reduce the likelihood that al-Darazī preached personally in Syria, or at least he was the leading spirit locally there” (Hodgson 1962: 6). Indeed Druze sages consider Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī as the sole founder of the *Muwaḥhidūn* or Druze faith. The new Call to *tawḥīd* came to an end in 436 AH/1043 CE after Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī announced “the closing of the gate” (*iglāq bāb al-da‘wa*) to new converts (Zahr al-Din 1994: 35), which has continued to be in effect until today.

4 Society, Culture, and Politics

For centuries, the Druze have lived among Christians (largely in Lebanon), Sunni and Shiite Muslims (in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan), and Jews (in Israel). It is important to mention that Druze scholars need to take into consideration nowadays that the Druze are no longer confined to the Middle East, nor are mere immigrants in their host countries. In fact, many Druze who are born and raised in Europe and the Americas consider themselves native of these societies with little or no attachment to the Middle East. Today, the Druze number approximately one million worldwide and their largest communities are in the Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) in addition to scattered communities in Latin America, North America, Australia, and West Africa (Swayd 2006: xxxiii; Miles 2019: 22). Due to their contribution to the Druze faith and to the societies they live in, the Druze of the diaspora expect and deserve to be acknowledged, rather than marginalised, in any serious work on the sect.

The structure of the Druze society is dualistic. Within the Druze community there are two types of dualism: 1. communal (religious) and 2. familial (political). The communal consists of the initiated and the uninitiated (Swayd 2006: xxxiii). The initiated, known as the *‘uqqāl*, or ‘the enlightened’, are considered sages and keepers of the religious tradition. Druze theosophy figures into the daily lives of this group as the initiated must follow strict dress, dietary, behavioral, and lifestyle codes. For instance, the *‘uqqāl* must dress modestly and strictly adhere to a traditional dress code, speak in low voices, refrain from the use of profanity, and avoid smoking, drinking alcohol, and other practices deemed undesirable (Khuri 2004: 13–14). They are also required to attend the weekly scriptural readings on Thursday nights. From the earliest days of the faith, the *‘uqqāl* included women in its ranks (Betts 1988: 16). The uninitiated, who are considered the ‘ignorant’, or *juhhāl*, meaning secular and ignorant of their own faith, “protected the secrecy and sanctity of their religion through their loyalty to one another” (Betts 1988: 16). The secrecy of Druze theology, Robert Brenton Betts writes, “has served to reinforce communal

separateness" (Betts 1988: 17). Although the *jūhhāl* are not permitted access to "knowledge of the mysterious secrecies" of the holy books, they are required to follow a strict code of moral and ethical behavior (Betts 1988: 17). The secrecy of the tradition compelled the Druze to adhere to an exclusivist theology. For example, since the closing of the *da'wa* in 434 AH/1043 CE, "no longer could one be admitted into the faith" (Miles 2019: 22). Also, missionary activity, open public performance of rituals, open worship, and marriage outside of the community are all prohibited (Betts 1988: 17; Khuri 2004: 26). The familial division is rather political in which the Druze are historically aligned with one of the two most politically influential families: the Junblat-Arslan division. According to Swayd, "[m]any Druze believe that familial dualism is a constructive stimulus for the lasting health of the community, providing access to more opportunities and resources than would otherwise be available" (Swayd 2006: xxxvii).

Despite their minority status, the Druze have played a key role in the modern history and politics of their respective countries. For instance, in 1925, the Syrian Druze led a revolt against French presence in the region and the leader of the revolution, Sultan Basha al-Atrash (d. 1982), "came to be lionised not just as a Druze hero but as a champion of Syrian nationalism writ large" (Miles 2019: 29). Betts writes that the Druze "were to be increasingly accepted as participants in the fight for independence from European domination, and as a result they were steadily drawn out of the cocoon of their self-imposed isolation into ever-increasing contact with the highly politicised society around them" (Betts 1988: 89).

Since Syria's independence in 1947, the Druze have been prominent supporters of Syrian governments and regimes regardless of ideological backgrounds (Miles 2019: 33). Although they pursued a neutral position in the ongoing civil war in Syria, many Druze supported the uprisings (Miles 2019: 37) and, at the same time, were attacked on theological grounds by Islamic extremists like ISIS and al-Nusra Front who consider the Druze 'heretics' and 'infidels' for having abandoned orthodox Islam (Miles 2019: 36–37).

In Lebanon, under the leadership of two important families, the Junblat and the Arslan, the Druze "led the fight for independence in Lebanon" (Fallah 2002: 28). During the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), Druze leader Kamal Junblat (d. 1977) formed an alliance among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Lebanese Muslims, and leftist groups in the fight against the Western-supported Christian-Maronite forces (Miles 2019: 330). In Israel, the Druze live as a marginalised minority but military service is mandatory for (male) members of the faith. This has been the Jewish State policy—initiated at the request of the Druze leaders—since 1956 (Miles 2019: 32).

5 Scriptures

The Druze scriptures, referred to as *Kutub al-Ḥikma*, or Books of Wisdom, are six in number and consist of one hundred and eleven separate pieces or epistles and communications. These epistles are assigned to various ministers, among them is Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī. Anis Obeid tells us that Ḥamza wrote around thirty epistles during the first three years of the *da‘wa* (Obeid 2006: 96). Some of these epistles, according to David R. W. Bryer, are not “specifically Druze,” but they are included because they are connected to al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh (Bryer 2005: 30). Among the writers of Druze epistles, Muhammad Kamil Husayn suggests, is the great Ismā‘īlī scholar Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Kirmānī (d. 411 AH/1021 CE) (Husayn 1962: 93).³ The Druze scholar Kais M. Firro considers al-Kirmānī’s writings among the “early non-Druze sources [that] were predominantly hostile” to the *da‘wa* (Firro 1992: 13).

It is unclear who collected the one hundred and eleven epistles, edited their texts, compiled them in order, and divided them into volumes. It is also unclear when this compilation occurred. Some scholars suggest that a Druze theologian by the name of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Tanūkhī was the founder of the Druze canon. For example, Obeid tells us that the epistles remained in the custody of trusted leaders and notables and passed from one generation to the next until they were compiled in the six books more than four centuries later through the efforts of al-Tanūkhī (Obeid 2006: 97). Other scholars have suggested Bahā’ al-Dīn (one of the *da‘wa* propagators), a figure generally accepted by the Druze community, as the founder of the Druze canon (Bryer 2005: 34). While Obeid tells us that the compilation occurred four centuries after the advent of the Druze faith (Obeid 2006: 97), other scholars have suggested an earlier date (Bryer 2005: 35).

The content of the Druze scriptures is difficult to decipher or understand due to its esoteric nature. The privilege of understanding its meaning is reserved only to those who are “acquainted with Arabic esoteric terminology and with the way esoteric beliefs were written” (Makarim 1974: 4). The Italian traveler Giovanni Mariti (d. 1806) writes:

3 Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī takes the credit for refuting the divinity of al-Ḥākim. He was summoned to Cairo by al-Ḥākim and was asked to refute the heresies and innovations that were propagated along with the new *da‘wa*. Al-Kirmānī refutes al-Akhram’s claim of al-Ḥākim’s divinity in an epistle titled *al-Risālah al-wā‘iẓa*, where he writes that al-Akhram was the leader of the movement that propagated the divinity of al-Ḥākim. See, for example, Abi Khuzam (1995: 53–54).

Even if their books can come into our hand, we can only understand the rules and general precepts of this religion, all the more so as the religious figures have an exclusive control of the religious matters, communicating amongst themselves only some points and keeping the more special mysteries secret, even to the rest of the Druze people, thus also inducing doubt and ambiguity in the souls of the curious.

MARITI 1787: 17; qtd in BRANCA 2000: 96

The Druze usually read their scriptures on Thursday night of each week and members are invited to attend the readings. It is also a common practice that the sages ask certain members to leave the room in the middle of the readings, indicating that the next reading is of higher level and is intended only for those who are acquainted with the esoteric meaning of the text. The one hundred and eleven epistles can be found today in libraries around the world, including the British Museum, Cambridge, Manchester, Moscow, Munich, St Petersburg, Paris, Turin, Uppsala, Berlin, Vienna, the Bodleian Library, and the Vatican (Branca 2000: 108).

6 Theosophy

The Druze have a distinct set of beliefs and practices, and the influence of the Qurʾān as well as Greek and Indian philosophy is apparent in the Druze scriptures and faith.⁴ The Druze is an esoteric faith that “differs in many respects from traditional Islam” (Makarim 1974: 4). It is a “gnostic faith based on a philosophical background” (Makarim 1974: 4). The conceivers of the Druze faith were theologians who had studied in the Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī schools of *dār al-ḥikma* and *dār al-ʿilm* (the House of Wisdom and the House of Science), where religion, medicine, logic, mathematics, philosophy, history, and languages were taught. Kais M. Firro tells us that although Druze doctrines can be traced back to Ismāʿīlism, the new *daʿwa* was “to place the Druze order outside the orthodox Ismāʿīlī creed” (Firro 1992: 10). For example, the radical change

4 The Druze today follow the same beliefs and doctrines that were developed in the fifth century AH/eleventh century CE. Sami Nasib Makarim, *Maslak al-Tawḥīd* (Beirut, Lebanon: N.p., 1980), 30.

the Druze teachings introduced was the abolition of the hereditary system of the *imāmate* and the replacement of the Ismā'īlī messianic idea by "the final triumph of Unitarianism [unity of God; *al-tawḥīd*], in which a last cycle of divine manifestations would occur before a Last Judgment" (Firro 1992: 10). The Druze teachings call for the strict, uncompromising oneness of God and the Druze concept of creation "followed Neoplatonic philosophy in its Ismā'īlī interpretation and terminology" (Firro 1992: 11). Based on these philosophies, the Druze explain their worldview of the absolute, good and evil, and life after death.

God in the Druze doctrine is not above or beyond existence, God is existence itself. He⁵ cannot be separate from or outside it since it represents time and space, and if it is outside God, then it exists parallel to God. This notion of the separation between God and the existence is not accepted in the Druze doctrine because it represents a plurality: God and the universe. Plurality is "only possible within space and time. How then can God be one when there is something outside Him?" (Makarim 1974: 41). Ḥamza ibn 'Alī tells us: "[God] does not occupy a definite place, for He would be limited to it ... There is no place where He is not, or else His power would be deficient. He is neither first, for this would imply a notion related to a last, nor is He the end, for this would make Him have a beginning" (Makarim 1974: 41).

Evil, according to Druze teachings, "does not lie in matter"; rather, it lies in the heart of those who deflect from their real purpose, which is the union with 'the One'. Selfishness and one's own ego separate the human from his real purpose, away from his "true nature" and from the "unity of the universal idea of man." Evil is a "product of metaphysical egotism" where one separates from the unity of being. Good or love, on the other hand, is the feeling of union with the One Who compromises all being (Makarim 1974: 50).

The Druze follow five main articles of faith. The first article of faith is *tawḥīd*, hence their name *muwaḥhidūn* (monotheists). Druze scholars translate the term *tawḥīd* to mean "unity," "unicity," "unification," or "unism" (Swayd 1998: 33). The second article of faith is veneration (*taqdīs*). The Druze venerate all the previous prophets and believe that each preached the word of God but in different times. The Druze also believe in five luminaries (*ḥudūd*) who are spiritual in origin. The third article of faith is the belief in reincarnation, the transmigration of the soul. Unlike in some Hindu traditions where the belief in the transmigration of the soul from humans to nonhumans is prevalent, the

5 The Druze reference to God in masculine term is only a function of language and does not relate to theology.

Druze believe in the transmigration of the soul from humans to humans only. The fourth article of faith is the belief in the process of initiation, in which a person must be of strict moral character in order to be initiated and to earn a place among those who are permitted to participate in reading and interpreting the scripture and perform certain rituals. The fifth article of faith is erudition (*ta'arruf*), which means that the initiate must be able to read and understand the scriptures (Swayd 1998: 33–36).

There is a consensus among Druze scholars that Druze practices and behavior are, to some extent, identical to those found in Šūfism, and that the latter presents similarities to the Druze faith. The Druze implementation of Šūfī practices and behavior has led Druze and non-Druze scholars to identify the sect as an intrinsic aspect of Islamic orthodoxy. If we take Šūfism and the Druze faith in their historical manifestation, we find that Druze and Šūfī roots and methodologies are derived from the esoteric (*bāṭin*) dimension of Islam. Throughout their historical developments, Šūfī movements and the Druze followed the esoteric path of Islam, a practice that led to a profound relationship between the Druze and the Šūfis as well as other Islamic esoteric sects.

The Druze teachings stress the implementation of the Islamic pillars not in their literal implications or allegorical interpretation but in their real meaning. Ḥamza ibn 'Alī developed these pillars from their literal implications to their real meanings “to relieve the true believer from their ritualistic constraint and from their literal and inner implications, not from their real significance,” and only those who adhered to *tawḥīd* are able (or must strive) to realise their true significance (Makarim 1974: 90–91). Makarim tells us that the Druze scriptures give the pillars a meaning other than their literal and allegorical connotations because the Druze faith “developed in its approach both Islam and *īmān* ... into the larger concept of *tawḥīd*, [that is], the knowledge of God's unity” (Makarim 1974: 91).

While each of the Islamic pillars is given either an exoteric or esoteric meaning by various sects and movements in Islam, Swayd writes, Druze sources speak of a third level of interpretation, that of “the esoteric of the esoteric” (Swayd 1998: 37). The true significance of the pillars, according to Druze teachings, goes beyond both the exoteric and esoteric. For example, the Druze fulfill the ritual act of performing the prayer (*ṣalāt*) by being truthful. Truthfulness, or speaking the truth (*ṣidq al-lisān*), is the first Druze act of worship. The pillar of almsgiving (*zakāt*) is fulfilled in the performance of the second Druze act of worship referred to as brotherliness, the protection of brothers (*ḥifẓ al-ikhwān*). The third Druze act of worship is that of abandoning the worship of idols (*tark 'ibādat al-awthān*). Idols or *awthān* does not mean literally deities

or gods, but it refers to sin or evil. Thus, this act commands the believers to be vigilant at all times against committing evil. This act of worship corresponds with the Islamic pillar of fasting (*ṣawm*) (Swayd 1998: 37–38).

The fourth act of worship in the Druze faith is *al-bar'ah min al-abālisah wa al-ṭuḡhyān*, or fleeing from devils and oppression. Here, the believer is commanded to flee from one's evil nature, to defeat oppression wherever it is encountered. Evil in the forms of oppression "must be fought vehemently in order to purify the self" (Swayd 1998: 39). This act of worship corresponds with the Islamic pillar of *hajj*, or pilgrimage. The Druze fifth act of worship is declaring the unity of God (*tawḥīd al-Bārī*). This act of worship corresponds with the first pillar in Islam, the *shahāda*. It reflects the literal meaning of *tawḥīd*: "There is no god but Allāh, and Muḥammad is His messenger" (Swayd 1998: 39–40).

The Druze teachings stress the importance of two additional acts of worship to be undertaken by the believers. They are contentment (*al-riḍā*) and submission (*al-taslīm*). *Al-riḍā*, as the sixth act of worship, corresponds with the Islamic duty to fight in God's cause, or *jihād*. For the Druze, the duty to fight or perform the *jihād* is not understood literally but it is the struggle to know God's Oneness. In other words, for the Druze, "the meaning of *jihād* is purely spiritual and reflects a vertical relation between the believer and God" (Swayd 1998: 40). The seventh and last act of worship in the Druze faith is the act of submission (*taslīm*) to the One God. Also, according to Ḥamza ibn 'Alī, submission "entails holding fast to one's contentment" by proclaiming submission to the Code of Faith in the following three phrases: 1. "surrender his soul, his body, his possessions, his children and everything he owns;" 2. "contentment with God's deeds and submission to Him are indeed the end of both learning and teaching;" and 3. "obedience is the true worshiping of God" (Swayd 1998: 40–41).

Ḥamza ibn 'Alī teaches that man's ultimate happiness can be achieved if he is "in conformity in his reason, soul, words and actions with God's Will." Ḥamza ibn 'Alī calls this divine will the "all-inclusive 'aql that contains the whole of creation." God's Will, or *al-'aql*, is the cause of all cosmic principles and the source of all material beings (Makarim 1974: 51). It is the source of all existing being and also their purpose. Ḥamza ibn 'Alī teaches that *al-'aql* is the matter (*hayūlā*) of all things, "perfect, in substance and potentiality, and complete in actuality and form" (Makarim 1974: 44).

In a Druze manuscript entitled *al-Sharī'a al-Rūḥāniyya fī 'ulūm al-laṭīf wa al-Basīṭ wa al-Kathīf* (henceforth *al-Sharī'a*), the author dedicates a whole chapter to *al-'aql* (*al-Sharī'a al-Rūḥāniyya*: 20–137), and discusses the relationship between *al-'aql* and the passionate soul (*al-naḥs*). The author states that *al-'aql* is superior to *al-naḥs* and, therefore, guides it. In *al-Sharī'a*, the term

al-ʿaql appears 111 times in a range of 117 pages. It is also preceded by the word *Mawlānā* (Our Master), or *Mawlānā al-ʿaql* (Our Master the Intellect). The author writes: “Oh passionate soul, be cautious of the contaminated world around you and turn to the assistance of ... your Master *al-ʿaql* ... You should know that everything you observe and experience is eternal in the world of your Master *al-ʿaql*” (*al-Sharīʿa al-Rūḥāniyya*: 25).

The author adds that the abode of *al-ʿaql* is a place of wealth, peace, pride, and happiness. The opposite to the abode of *al-ʿaql* is the natural world (*ʿālam al-ṭabīʿa*), which is a place of poverty, misery, insecurity, and chaos. *Al-naḥs*, after observing both abodes, can choose to join either one. *Al-naḥs*, however, cannot exist in both abodes simultaneously because man cannot be rich and poor, happy and miserable, secure and fearful at the same time (*al-Sharīʿa al-Rūḥāniyya*: 43). *Al-ʿaql*, therefore, guides and teaches *al-naḥs* to feel the oneness of God (*waḥdat Allāh*). By doing so, *al-naḥs* enters paradise (*al-janna*), the abode of *al-ʿaql*, and delivers itself from ignorance. The ultimate goal of *al-naḥs* is to reach the eternal happiness. This happiness, being *al-ʿaql*, is “the cognisance of divine knowledge itself” (Makarim 1974: 84).

According to *Al-Sharīʿa*, the position of *al-ʿaql* to *al-naḥs* can be compared to that of the sun and the moon. As long as the sun sends its rays, the moon keeps glowing. But, when the earth comes in between them, the earth’s shadow eclipses the moon and causes darkness. Similarly, *al-ʿaql* sends its light to *al-naḥs*. Only the corruption of *al-naḥs* may prevent *al-ʿaql*’s light from reaching *al-naḥs*. Moreover, *al-ʿaql* is the reflection of its perfection. If *al-naḥs* loses this reflection, it will lose its essence, and once *al-naḥs* loses its essence, it ceases to exist (*al-Sharīʿa al-Rūḥāniyya*: 45–55). Moreover, the author of *Al-Sharīʿa* writes:

Oh *naḥs*, when it becomes clear to you that light comes from *al-ʿaql* and darkness from the body, then you should not mourn your separation from your body. The latter can do nothing but distracts you from reaching the permanent truth [revelation or *Kalimat Allāh*]. You should rather regret your separation from *al-ʿaql*, because you would lose its abundant benefits and its assistance to you in reaching your needs.

al-Sharīʿa al-Rūḥāniyya: 65

Thus, the more *al-naḥs* seeks the assistance of *al-ʿaql*, the more it nears the truth, and the more it detaches itself from *al-ʿaql*, the more it loses guidance and power.

It is important to mention that in the classical Ṣūfī doctrine, *al-naḥs* occupies a lower state, and it is the cause of blameworthy actions, sins, and base

qualities. The Šūfis have referred to their struggle with *al-naḥs* as “the greater Holy War” (Schimmel 1975: 112), following Muḥammad’s statement to followers after returning from battle. The Qur’ānic expression “*al-naḥs al-ammāra bil sū’*,” or “the soul that commands evil” (Qur’ān 12:53), has prompted Šūfis and Druze to blame *al-naḥs* for evil doings. However, the Druze, like any other groups who highlight the *naḥs* verses in the Qur’ān, believe that *al-naḥs* can purify itself and become *muṭma’inna* (Qur’ān 89:27) “at peace,” if it assists itself with the guidance of *al-‘aql*. Thus, for the Druze, *al-‘aql* surrounds, guides, and manages all things with the assistance of the divine power. It is also a sparkling light and the eternal world. *Al-‘aql*, which is the source of every action, exists in every age and epoch. It is man’s guide to the pure doctrine of Unitarianism (*tawḥīd*). Ismā‘īl ibn Muḥammad, the second Druze luminary, says of *al-‘aql*:

From His pure Light and by His divine Omnipotence, God originated the *‘aql* without any means nor any exemplary form. He made it contain all things at once. Within it He bound all creatures and made it the source of all things which He had originated. He confirmed it with His godly power and divine influx, and thus He safeguarded it from any imperfection. He made it present in all ages and times and made it the cause of all things. God originated a sparkling light that guides us. He made it a source from which real knowledge issued, and by which spiritual forms develop. It is the all-inclusive *‘aql*, and the first being that precedes all beings. It is the beginning and the end: from it all things come forth, and to it all things go back.

MAKARIM 1974: 44–45

Thus, the excerpts mentioned above tell us how perfect and central *al-‘aql* is in the Druze faith. However, there is another side to *al-‘aql*: the imperfect one. Unlike the Mu‘tazilites who believed that *al-‘aql* is an all-time perfection, the Druze assert that *al-‘aql*, at one point in time, had become deflected from what it had been created for, deviating from its original course. By its very nature, *al-‘aql* is in constant union with God. This perfect oneness of God made *al-‘aql* realise its own perfection. Taking joy and pride of itself, *al-‘aql* abandoned the love of the whole to the love of its own self. This deviation rendered *al-‘aql* weak and remote from God (Makarim 1974: 45). To prevent *al-‘aql* from looking inward at itself, God created disobedience, darkness, arrogance, and ignorance, all from *al-‘aql*’s obedience, light, humbleness, and wisdom. At that point, *al-‘aql* admitted to its shortcomings and weaknesses, and asked God to create an entity to assist it in regaining its perfection (Makarim 1974: 46–47).

Al-ʿaql is so important in the Druze doctrine that the Druze sages have made it the intermediary in their daily religious discourses and prayers. For the Druze, *al-ʿaql* is a perfect entity that occupies a supreme status, namely, the *imām*. The Druze give *al-ʿaql* a hundred names but only a few are known and mentioned regularly among Druze sages and scholars. Some of these names are: the Muḥammadan Truth (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), the Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kullī*), the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the Will or Volition (*al-irāda*), and the embodiment of the divine will (*al-irāda al-ilāhiyya*). According to the Druze doctrine, *al-ʿaql* can be given all the perfect attributes and descriptions except one: the divine description (Abi Khuzam 1995: 119). From its essence all things come to life, and all things end with it. It is very likely that the Druze adopted this notion of *al-ʿaql* as a primary source for all things from Ismāʿīlī thought (Al-Kirmanī 1967: 167).

7 The Doctrine of Reincarnation

The Druze are strong believers in the doctrine of reincarnation (*naskh al-arwāḥ*). For the Druze, this doctrine is rooted in the Qurʾān (al-Atrash 1974: 187–188; al-Basha 1982: 205; Taliʿ 1980: 44) and is not a deviation from Islamic teachings. For instance, the Druze scholar Anwar Abi Khuzam argues that any belief based on Qurʾānic hermeneutics, despite the disagreement about its interpretation among the various Islamic sects, remains within the circle of Islam (Abi Khuzam 1995: 296). Therefore, the Druze believe that their belief in the doctrine of reincarnation does not make them less Islamic but it distinguishes them from other Islamic sects and schools.

Abi Khuzam tells us that the Druze belief in reincarnation has a psychological dimension. This belief stems from the human rejection to the idea of death and separation from this world. Reincarnation provides a theoretical solution that guarantees a permanent return to life with the possibility of better living conditions. However, the main reason for the belief in reincarnation in the Druze faith is tied to religious doctrines that are metaphysical in nature. The study of metaphysics was a prime subject among Muslim philosophers and theologians who dealt with the issue of Divine Justice. For the Druze, the belief in reincarnation allows Divine Justice to take its course as it provides the human soul with the chance to experience life more than once (Abi Khuzam 1995: 297).

The doctrine of reincarnation in the Druze faith may have emerged out of theological debates on the issue of God's justice. For example, some theologians,

like the Muʿtazilites, believed that God is bound to be just, while others—chief among them is Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111)—argued the opposite (Abi Khuzam 1995: 298). The issue that prompted the debate was an allegory put up by al-Ghazālī as to whether it is just for God to assess the faith (*īmān*) of a Muslim who died in infancy and another who passed away after living a long life. The conclusion based on the allegory is that the degree of *īmān* in the old person is higher since he worked all his life on increasing it while the child had a lesser degree of *īmān* since his life was short. The question posed: What is the guilt of the child if God had already decreed that he should die in infancy thus denying him an equal chance to increase his *īmān*? According to Abi Khuzam, Druze sages believe that the doctrine of reincarnation provides a solution to this problem since the passing through many lives gives human beings equal opportunities to increase their *īmān* (Abi Khuzam 1995: 298–299). Abdallah E. Najjar writes that the doctrine of reincarnation

makes ultimate, human accounting before man's Creator fair, rational and just ... The one life conception is obviously inequitable, for human beings are not offered equal opportunities in one life so they can grow, consider and perform ... One life with its evident handicaps in time and fortune does not offer a suitable criterion of judgment and evaluation. How are the babies and the immature in years to be judged without any score in merits or demerits or sufficient knowledge and understanding?

NAJJAR 1973: 94

It is worth mentioning that Druze sages do not see in reincarnation an escape from God's judgment. Instead, they assert that on the Last Day, every soul will be held accountable. This belief in the Last Day and the accountability of the soul keeps the Druze within the realm of Islam, according to Abi Khuzam, and distinguishes them from other believers in reincarnation, such as in Hindu traditions where the soul faces a different destination. The Druze are against the belief that the human soul upon death may migrate to nonhuman form—animal, plant, or rock. Najjar tells us that the Druze believe “categorically in the passage upon death of the soul from the dead human body to a newborn human baby and to nothing else” (Najjar 1973: 88). The Druze belief that reincarnation “occurs among all humans at all places and times,” but only a minority remembers previous lives (Bennett 2006: 87). In a study on the belief of reincarnation in the Druze faith, Anne Bennett finds that the Druze reincarnation is a social phenomenon that enhances sect unity and identity despite the fact that it is “not uniformly accepted” among the Druze. Bennett writes, “there is ... no blanket agreement among Druze regarding reincarnation. There

are many who are skeptics about the phenomenon and dismiss it outright" (Bennett 2006: 87). Druze sages emphasise that the belief in the Last Day and the accountability of the soul is at the core of the Druze beliefs, and whoever denies them is not from the people of monotheism (*laysa min ahl al-tawḥīd*) (Abi Khuzam 1995: 299–300).

8 Sages and Shrines

Of the most important Druze practices is the veneration of sages. The sages are the 'mystics' of the Druze society, and they are at a higher state than their Druze brethren. They are known as the *'uqqāl* (wise, sages) and are distinguished by their dress, appearance, and way of life. According to Druze tradition, the sage is a person who not only reaches a degree of spiritual knowledge, but he is the one upon whom God has sent upon enlightenment to relieve him from ignorance. Their role is social rather than political. For instance, the community turns to them for guidance, reconciliation, and blessing. Although the sages live the mystic life, they live among people in villages and rarely lead a life in isolation (Abu Muslih 2002: 28).

The Druze sages detach themselves from all worldly desires, meditate most of the time, some practice celibacy, and dedicate their lives to worshipping God. They are constantly reading the scripture and strictly follow its teachings and guidance. Their mystic life does not prevent them from working in jobs such as farming, tailoring, and hand copying the scripture. If they happen to have more money than they need for themselves, they donate it to charities. In the sage, the people see and feel the presence of divine power. These are the signs of a person becoming special or sacred (Abu Muslih 2002: 28).

The Druze sages are considered special people to their community and to others as well. They are so sacred and special to the extent that Druze and, in some cases, non-Druze visit them for guidance, blessing, or simply out of curiosity. After their death, the community buries the sage in his house and turns the latter into a shrine. In the shrine, a tomb is erected over the sage's body and writings are carved on the tomb. Traditionally, the writings are verses from the Qur'ān and statements praising the buried sage. All the tombs are similar in size and shape. A picture of the sage may be hanged on the wall, and Persian rugs are scattered all over the shrine. Thus, the sage's house becomes a sacred place, where people visit regularly to pray at, touch, and kiss the tomb, light candles, drink or wash from what they consider sacred water and oil, and donate money to maintain the shrine or to be distributed among Druze orphans. Before leaving the shrine, the visitors carry with them a piece of

cloth, believing that it would protect them against evil or would bring good luck charms.

The Druze visit the various shrines regularly and all year round. There are more than seventy-seven shrines, which are found in nearly every locale where the Druze live. Shrines are erected for male and female sages as well. For instance, there are a number of shrines for woman sages, and they are as popular and important as those for male sages. It is also common for the Druze to visit shrines of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious figures (Abi Khuzam 1995: 285). There is no special month or time for visitation. At any day of the year, the typical visitors at the shrine range from engaged or newly married couple, to those who just had a new baby, to people starting their own businesses. They all come asking for the sage's blessing. The belief is that the soul of the sage is still around and can hear their prayers and wishes. The visits may be as short as a few minutes, or they may last for days, if there are rooms to accommodate for overnight visitors. In recent times, the shrines have been turned into recreational areas for visitors. It has become very popular today that families bring their food and barbecues and, after visiting the tomb and paying their respect to the sage's soul, these families spend the whole day in the surrounding area of the shrine where they slaughter sheep, eat, play cards, backgammon, or volleyball, and dance, sing, and take naps.

The most recent sage to pass away was Shaykh Abū Ḥasan 'Ārif (d. 2004) from the Shuf Mountain, southeast of the Lebanese capital Beirut. He had a state funeral that was attended by dignitaries from all religious sects and dominations in Lebanon, in addition to politicians and government officials. His funeral was broadcast on satellite television stations all over the Arab world. Thus, the sacredness of this sage was acknowledged and respected by Druze and non-Druze alike all over the region. After his death, his house was turned into the most recent shrine with a tomb in a room that is skillfully and sacredly built. The dead sage lies under ground, but the tradition lives on.⁶

9 Conclusion

Since its inception in the eleventh century, there have been attempts to portray the Druze sect in a negative light. In the formative years of the Druze *da'wa*, some Ismā'īlī scholars, like al-Kirmānī, were hostile to the new movement (Firro 1992: 13). In modern times, some scholars, travelers, and Orientalists

6 For further discussion of Druze shrines and sages, see, for example, Abu Muslih (2002); Firro (2005); Makarim (1990).

have suggested that the Druze are descendants of a French Comte de Dreux, who disappeared in the mountains of Lebanon in the thirteenth century (Betts 1988: 25; Hitti 1928: 15). Others have advanced the claims that the ethnic origin of the Druze is not Arab but Persian (Hitti 1928: 18–23). Some speculated that the Druze represented remnants of a lost Jewish tribe (Obeid 2006: 10).

As this chapter has demonstrated, the ethnic origins of the Druze can be traced to Arab tribes, according to prominent historians like al-Tabari. Their Arab origin is obvious today in the dialect spoken by the Druze, which “is one of the purest of the Arab dialects” (Obeid 2006: 10). The teachings of the Druze faith are rooted in Islam as the Druze are staunch believers in the oneness of God, in the authenticity of the Qur’ān as the word of God, and in Muḥammad as God’s messenger. Arguably, the sect’s esoteric interpretation of the Islamic doctrines drives the Druze to be more radical in applying the Islamic pillars. Their belief in reincarnation, whether they take this doctrine literally or metaphorically, provides them with the tools to argue for God’s justice. For Druze sages, the Druze is a philosophical school within the realm of Islam, not a separate religion.

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