



AHL-E ḤAQQ II. INITIATION RITUAL

AHL-E ḤAQQ

ii. INITIATION RITUAL AMONG THE AHL-E ḤAQQ OR YĀRESĀN

The initiation ritual is one of the most important institutions in the tradition of Ahl-e Ḥaqq. It is performed by all its eleven branches, or *kāndans*, and is supported by a religious legend, according to which even God himself went through this ritual. Although all the rituals among the branches are structurally similar, there exist some minor differences in their performances, recitation of the prayers as well as the mentioning of the names of religious personalities. For example, after the epoch of Solṭān Ṣohāk, each branch has its own particular theophanies, whose names will be mentioned only by the concerned branch, not by others. The following is a detailed version of the ritual performed by the Ātaš Bagi branch. The terms used by this institution are: *jawz-e sar šekānen* (lit.: breaking a nutmeg [as a symbol] of the head) and sometimes *sar sepārdan* (lit.: offering or surrendering one's own head) in Kurdish.

Any initiation ceremony is performed within a periodical religious meeting called *jam*. Thus, a *jam* can be performed without an initiation ceremony but not vice versa. Similarly, all the conditions applying to the *jam* are automatically applied to an initiation ritual. The minimum number of



participants to form a *jam* is seven, all of whom should have covered their heads and bound their waists with cloth or belts. In the beginning all participants go through the “hand kissing ceremony” and sit in a circle. Each person, upon entering the room, moves from left to right, bows to every one already seated. They then hold each others’ right hand in such a way as to be able to kiss the back of the other’s hand simultaneously. The *kādem* “servant” (or *kāki* in Gurān) of the *jam* and his assistant go through this ceremony as well, but they stand on the threshold in a position called *golbāng*. (This position and the term that it is called by are also used by some Sufi orders, but not by other ten branches of the Yāresān). Then the *kādem* brings in water for the participants to wash their hands, after which they touch their faces with both hands and say: “The first and the last is the Yār “The Beloved, The Friend” (i.e., God). Now a sacrificial offering is performed (see Hamzeh’ee, sec. 6.2.3.a.), which involves the cooking of the sacrificial offering (normally a rooster) and distributing it among those present. Once the sacrificial ceremony is over, the individual in charge of the *jam* (*sayyed-e sar-jam*) declares the end of the *jam* ceremony, and, after a pause, the initiation ceremony begins.

Types of membership. The Yāresān distinguish two different types of membership: Members born in a family that had already belonged to the community are called *čekida* (issued), and the outsiders who wish to join the community, who are referred to as *časbida* (joined). A child born into the community is usually initiated within forty days after the birth. If the family is not in a position to initiate their newborn child within this period, it can do it at the time when the necessary conditions are provided. The *časbidas* have been mostly those who for many years have been followers of the Kāksār Sufi order, which asks its followers to go through these rituals after having completed certain stages of their mystical trainings.

The majority of the initiation rituals concern the children born into the community, in which case, the child is represented by an adult member of the family, called *wakil* (custodian). If the initiate is an adult male, he should himself be present; an adult female, however, is represented by a proxy, as no women are allowed to enter a *jam*, whether as an initiate or as a participant.

Prerequisites for membership in the community. To be regarded as a full member of the Yāresān community, each male or female member should theoretically fulfill the following requirements: He/She must have a *pādešāh* “king” (i.e., God or His earthly manifestation), a *pir* “spiritual leaser,” and a *dalil* “guide.” In other words, in case of the initiation of a potential *časbida*, the



subject should know into which branch he is going to be initiated. If the *pādešāh* is not apparent, which is the case at present, then he should exist in the consciousness of the follower; the *pir* should be from one “sayyed” families of the Yāresān branches; the *dalil* should be chosen by one of the *kāndāns* involved that are believed to be descendants of a group of angels called seventy-two *pirs*.

The applicant or his/her family shall provide the following for the initiation ritual: a nutmeg (*jawz*) symbolizing the head of the initiate offered to the King (i.e., God), who is represented by the *pir*; a piece of new unwashed white cloth, not less than one square meter; one offering (*niāz*) of any sort, but a piece of a kind of sugar candy or rock candy called *šāk-e nabāt* is preferred; a sacrificial item (*kedmat*), which is mostly a rooster and ghee in addition to some rice; a certain amount of money called *sarāna*, as an honorarium for the priest, which some have defined as an amount equal in value to two *metqāls* (about 10 grams) of pure silver (Elāhi, p. 56); a coin called *hoveyza* on which the nutmeg is placed and cut into pieces; a sharp knife for cutting the nutmeg; and a copper tray on which the above items are arranged.

Initiation ceremony. The initiate or his/her proxy stands beside the *kādem*, who asks the *jam* for permission, saying: “The first and the last is the Yār” and brings the copper tray or spreads a tablecloth before the “sayyed” and puts all the above-mentioned items on it. The *dalil*, sitting beside the *pir*, selects one of the participants as his representative, who may be the *kādem* (for *Gurān* region cf. Alqāši, p. 36). The *pir* ties the white cloth around the neck of the initiate or his/her proxy. The *kādem* holds the knife in the hand and the *pir* recites the knife prayer (*do‘ā-ye čāqu*), then the *pir*, or the *sayyed*, as his representative (*masnad nešin*), asks the permission of the *jam* and takes the knife and says: “As the representative of the *pir*, I am breaking the nutmeg of the head of...(name of the initiate) son or daughter of so and so (name of the initiate’s father).” He cuts the nutmeg into pieces and the representative (*kalifa*) of the *dalil* distributes them among all of the participants reciting: “The first and the last is the Yār.” The *dalil* (or *kalifa*) holds onto the skirt or the shirt of the *kādem* with his left hand, and the initiate or his/her proxy holds onto that of the representative of the *dalil* with his left hand while having the white cloth around his neck. In this position, all three or four (in case the *kādem* has an assistant) go round the congregation, kneeling down before each participant and perform the ritual of hand kissing ceremony with their right hands, while holding onto each other’s skirt (or shirt) with their left hands.



Then the “permission prayer” is said while they still hold onto each other’s skirt. After this prayer, in which seven forbidden words should be avoided, the representative of the *kalifa* removes the white cloth from the neck of the initiate or his/her proxy and presents it to the *pir* and the *dalil* and immediately declares the end of his duty as a “temporary *dalil*,” which will be accepted by the *dalil* himself. The money (*pul-e ḥaqq*), which has been brought by the initiate, will be given to the *pir*, and the white cloth will be kept by the *dalil*.

Prayers. Due to the social structure and geographical distribution of this community, which is divided into eleven branches, there are variations not only in the performance of their rituals but also in the prayers they recite. There are some other communities in the same region like the Alewis of Turkey and the Yezidis of Iraq, which are indirectly connected to the Yāresān. There are some similarities among their social organizations, but, in general, the social organization of the Yāresān seems to be particular to them alone. The initiation ritual and institution are significant factors in the cohesion of such a dispersed and secretive community. The existing differences in the prayers are only in their wordings, whereas functionally and structurally they are similar (for examples of such prayers see Hamzeh'ee, pp. 201-2 and section 6.2.3).

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