
**RITUAL PRACTICES AROUND THE TOMB OF RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI –
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH*****Dr. Mohammad Mosa Foqara**

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Abstract

In this article, I have tried to provide an idea of the ritual practices around the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai - an anthropological approach, and my goal was not to provide an anthropological analysis between the levels of cultural construction through the study of shrines, i.e. the religious, social, political and even economic levels. Rather, presenting an ethnographic description of the ritual practices of the beliefs, customs and traditions practiced by the Jewish visitors to the shrine of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. It must be noted that to this day there are many, many people who still participate in the rituals and beliefs during their visit to the shrine of the righteous man Bar Yochai. I say that there is still room for extensive research on the subject of ritual practices around shrines and visits, such as the tomb of Rabi Meir "Baal Hanis", the tomb of Rachel, the Prophet Samuel, Abu Hasira and other shrines that are numerous in Palestine / the land of Israel, as this land is sacred to the three religions. Judeo-Christian and Muslims, and all these studies require close scientific cooperation between different research institutions and different academic disciplines.

Keywords: Rituals, Wali, Righteous People, Shrine, Social anthropology

INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on ritual practices around the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai - an anthropological approach. Palestine / the Land of Israel possesses a large number of shrines of the saints and the righteous people. It was the birthplace of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This article will shed light on one of the most famous tombs of the righteous among the Jews, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. In this article, we will talk about theoretical concepts in social and anthropological sciences, such as religious sociology, symbolic and cultural anthropology, and social and religious anthropology in order to understand the phenomenon of visiting the shrines of the righteous people. During this article, the subject will be presented from an anthropological point of view, and this requires the beginning of an understanding of necessary anthropological terms such as shrine, ritual, mystical (ha Hasidim), and then we begin to talk about the shrine of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Throughout the ages, man has expressed his religious inclination, through an intellectual, ideological and symbolic formation process, linked to his sanctities, so that the nature of trends and feelings, whether intellectual or emotional, give him the character of holiness: the sacred in particular, and this sacred may be a stone, a tree, a fire, or a human being.¹ Sociologists and anthropologists have been interested in the sacred, in its relationship to religion and rituals, as a social basis for building social ties, and as an important element in the formation and preservation of identity. Religious anthropology took off in its study of the sacred in primitive societies.

It studied the sacred through its study of the religious person, as a carrier of the religious belief that guides his behavior and life. Spencer and Taylor believe that the oldest religion in existence is the belief in and worship of souls, the primitive man believed that the souls of the dead continue after death, and have an impact on the lives of the living and therefore are the reason for the happiness or misery of the living for that "man should seek their satisfaction and asked for their help and to get rid of their anger and wrath, and to avoid that, he seeks to offer them sacrifices and hold parties for them".² In the Palaeolithic era, man used to bury his dead in caves and caverns, and with the development of human life and the emergence of religions and belief in the souls of the dead, and their impact on the lives of the living and the achievement of their happiness or misery, graves appeared in their various forms of square, rectangular, circular and other forms. Temples were erected on them and they became sacred places in the form of artistic architecture, with a sacred religious character, and their function varies according to the different beliefs associated with myths and perceptions about the personality of the human being buried in them. In this article about the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, to which people, whether Jews or Arabs, were attached, and gave him a high status of respect, they made vows to him and swore faith at his shrine, recited prayers, held prayers, rituals, and celebrations (we will talk about rituals in the next chapter). This righteous man who dedicated himself to God's service and worship and devotion (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) had many (Karamat). Karama is the motive and motivation to visit the owner of Karama, venerate him, respect him, believe in him, and go to his shrine (the shrine is the grave of the righteous man, and it is the place that connects believers and (Wali), as we cannot imagine a

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¹ Mohammad El-Gohary, *Folklore, Study of Popular Beliefs*, Dar Al-Marefa Al-Jami'iyya, Volume 2, Alexandria, 1981, p. 12.

²Youssef Shalhat towards a new theory in the sociology of religion, analysis: Khalil Ahmed, Dar Al-Farabi, Beirut, 2003, p. 60.

shrine without a righteous man or vice versa.³ This connection appears more on the part of visitors through the rituals practiced around the shrine, as the shrines differ in terms of construction and location according to the position occupied by the righteous man. The rituals that take place at the tomb of the righteous man are only a type of social behavior that has a symbolic character, which is reflected in religious rituals and practices and sometimes expressed in the context of social customs and traditions.⁴ Rituals differ from one society to another according to different religions, beliefs and cultures. The culture of the Jewish community around shrines differs from other religions (despite the similarity between Jews and Muslims, but there is a difference and nature that distinguishes each society). The culture of each society determines the rituals of this society, and then the culture becomes a place to highlight behavior and practice of the power of belief, which the ritual (worship) imposes on its practitioners.⁵

The goal of ritualistic practices is to strengthen, enhancing, and preserving beliefs and their past, as they strive to establish a social phenomenon or a historical event. Rituals as defined by social anthropologists: "It is a group of repeated behavioral movements, agreed upon by the members of the community, and it is of different types and forms that fit the purpose that prompted the social actor or group to do it."⁶ There are anthropologists who saw that rituals (worships) are not a type of event, but rather a declaration that expresses the types of social events and behaviors due to its prominent feature.⁷ The scientist M. Douglas says: "Rituals take the place of religion in most of the anthropological literature as long as the meaning is the symbolic actions associated with sacred objects and beings."⁸ The ritual is involved in social life according to the circumstances that call for it, and aims to perform the task of coming up with a result through the manipulation of some practices to attract minds and make them believe in it. Some anthropologists believe that the ritual is an emotional state accompanying the myth, which may call for behaviors that restore the human soul to a state of balance, such as dancing, chanting, singing, circling around the shrine, listening to music, shaving the head, dancing, and others.

The objectives behind writing this article

The importance of this article on ritual practices around the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar - an anthropological approach is to add qualitative data to scientific research. Which is concerned with studying what is sacred, rituals and practices, and this approach is also concerned with strengthening the social structure of the Jews around the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. This article aims to cover the various functions that are derived from this phenomenon in its social, political and psychological dimensions. The rituals practiced by the visitors to the shrine is a way to embody the sanctity of the righteous man who owns the shrine, not only at the level of the people, but on the ground, to confirm belonging and preserve identity.

³Glenn Bowman, popular Palestine practice around holy places and those who oppose them an historical introduction, religion compass volume 7, issue 3, pp69-78.

⁴Yosef firhat , Islamic philosophy and its media , the east for printing , T 1, 1986, page 51

⁵Islem, derson , rituals , www.anthropos .com

⁶Peter Jan Margry and Christina Sanchez Carretero, memorizing traumatic death guest editorial , Vol 23,2007,pp 15-32.

⁷- Christian Giordano and Andrea Boscoboinik , society ; a key conception anthropology , university of Fribourg , 2018, pp -78-88 .

⁸Abdallah, Alkheregie , page 102-103

Therefore, these rituals are considered a bridge of communication between what is stored in the collective memory and the popular imagination on the one hand, and the lived reality on the other hand. Finally, the article aims to review theoretical concepts in social sciences, cultural, social and religious anthropology. The purpose of the theoretical briefing is to understand the continuity of the phenomenon of visiting the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

The importance of the article

Behind what was written in this article, "Ritual practices around the shrine of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai", lies the importance of practicing rituals in the spiritual and social life of the individual and society. Behind this article, rituals reflect necessary motives that strengthen the sense of sociability, humanity, and a sense of collective identity. This reflects the values and culture of society on the one hand, and it is an inevitable turning point. There is also another importance that this article highlights, which is the consolidation of social hierarchy between all groups of society, poor and rich, male and female, the old young man around visiting the tomb of the Wali, as this breaks the social differences and supports the strengthening of the unity of the group. Additionally, the importance of the article lies in understanding and clarifying the relationship of man to the sacred through practices and rituals that translate this relationship.

Raby Shimon Bar Yochai's Tomb

After we recognized the terms and significant things in special anthropological science in practicing rituals around the tombs wherefore , in this chapter , the discussion will be presented in details about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's character and the practical rituals which the Jews used to do about the Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's tomb and I will touch as well to my field study through the visits that I made concerning the tomb from filming and distributing questionnaires and analyzing it in details. If we sought for a place and time and how to perform the ritual (Ebadde) we will find out that religions specialized temples and places for practicing the prayers as to time, the religions determined sometimes, days, months, holy seasons which consider that its best than the others for practicing worshipping actions.⁹ We see that the best way to visit Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's tomb is the day (lag Baomer," 33rd [day] of the Omer"). Shimon Bar Yochai is the best known Rabbi in the period among the years 135 – 175 BC that he has several important claims in the second testament after the old testament (TELMOOD) these important claims reflect his majestic character in the history of Israeli people (sons of Israel). Bar Yochai had fled from romans and settled in a cave for 13 years. However, he devoted this period for studying the Judaism secrets in accordance to traditions of Israelis rulers and had wrote his mystical thoughts in the book (Zohar) which means the" brilliance". Yochai had kept many Karamat¹⁰ and that helped the people by his respect thus, they restricted to his beliefs and became his Hassids but when he passed away, he

⁹Mohammed Ahmad Bayoomi , social religious science ,Community-9 Knowledge house, Egypt 1999.t p63 p312 p11.

¹⁰Karama and in the plural Karamat: which is a phenomenon beyond nature and is considered a sign of divine intervention, such as the supernatural ability to travel great distances in the blink of an eye to walk on the sea, precede natural phenomena in time, turn cheap metal into precious metal and so on. , Ramat Gan - Givatayim, 1971, p. 96, 'Abd al-Rahman., Al-Sharqawi al-Ard, Cairo, 1970, p. 240, Reyndd, Nikolson, the mystics of Islam, London, 1963, pp120-147

was buried in Meron (Meron is a village near Saffad) yet his tomb becomes an important shrine for Jews that thousands and millions of pilgrims visit his tomb each year.

Ritual practices within frame of pilgrimage to the tomb of the just in Judaism

In the past, it was customary to go to the tombs of the righteous (tzaddik) on the day of the Tzaddik's death. The prevailing belief is that on the day of his departure, the Tzaddik is surely in his place, it is customary to go up to the tombs of the righteous in the beginning or the middle of the month.¹¹ As part of the ritual of the tomb of the Tzaddik Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, visitors used to perform various ritual practices, such as praying, writing piyyutim, songs, prostrating on the tomb, lighting candles, laying stones, hanging cloths on trees planted near the tomb, there are customs related to nature - and others that express the person being part of the society in which he lives. In addition, there are customs related to maintaining contact with the Tzaddik by giving and taking: leaving something personal near the grave to remind the Tzaddik of his ascension and requests, and taking something from the tomb or its surroundings, to continue to cling to the Tzaddik even after the Aliyah event. There are customs that are performed individually at the visitor to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai and there are customs that are performed in public. Below I would like to briefly review some of the ritual practices associated with the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

Prayer: The main act that the ascendant does to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is the prayer, the pilgrims to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai usually hold a general and personal prayer near the tomb, touches it and kisses it. It is also customary to go around the tomb seven times, saying a prayer and then prostrating on it and asking for the request. Many of the pilgrims to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai are willing to travel great distances to visit Tomb.¹² It is worth noting that in the last two decades a complete separation was instituted during prayer at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai between women and men.¹³

Piyyutim: As part of the ceremonies and rituals performed at the tomb of Shimon Bar-Yochai, he sang special songs and thanksgiving in honor of the Tzaddik Shimon Bar-Yochai. We see the praise written for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai are very good and positive things.¹⁴

Rejoicing: The common popular belief is that the Tzaddik Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is an exemplary figure and can communicate with God for the one who ascends to his grave, therefore the revelation brings the believer closer to the Tzaddik mental closeness.

Request Notes: It is customary to refer to God a note with a written request, or just the name of the visitor and his family.

¹¹Galis, J., *The Guide to Carta-Tomb of the Righteous in the Land of Israel: Processes, Virtues, Prayers*, Carta Publishing, 2005.

¹²Shtahl, A., *the pilgrimage to shrines in Israel and among the nations*. In: Schiller, A. (Ed.). *Religion and Worship and Muslim Shrines in the Land of Israel*, Ariel, 117-118, 1996, pp. 21-24.

¹³Gonen, R., *Prayer and Charity, Fire and Water: Customs at the Tomb of the Tzaddik*. In: Gannan, R., (ed.), *To the Tombs of the Tzaddiks*, Jerusalem, 1998: The Israel Museum.

¹⁴Galis, J., *Guide to the Tombs of the Righteous in the Land of Israel*, Jerusalem, 2008, pp. 112-113.

The note is placed near the tomb or in one of the stone openings of the tomb and this is very common at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Laying of water and food: A common custom made at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is placing water, food or candies near the tomb,¹⁵ using water for blessing, for example during illness or giving water on behalf of one of the relatives who cannot reach Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Lighting a candle: This custom takes place near Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai on the evening of Lag B'Omer. Lighting a candle on this tzaddik's grave symbolizes the soul. By lightening the candle as if leaving the soul with the righteous.

Charity: This is the second mitzvah in its importance after prayer and next to the tombstone of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai has a fund for charity and some of the charity money is used to repair the tomb, oil the light and buy important fragments for the tomb.

Halaka: At Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai it is customary to perform a haircut ceremony, for three-year-old children, a ceremony known by its Arabic name "Halaka" or "Afsheran" in Yiddish. cutting first haircut is one of the most powerful rituals, separation from the hair of the head, symbolizes the separation of the child from his asexual childlike identity and he receives the status of a distinctly "masculine" identity.¹⁶

RESULTS

1. Visiting the graves of the righteous is a spiritual act and a religious belief.
2. Most people who visit the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai visit it out of a need.

Recommendations/suggestions

Opening educational religious institutions to teach the history of visiting the graves of the righteous.

Incorporate the topic of visiting graves into the educational curricula in schools.

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¹⁵Kahana, Shaz, *The Stories of the Ascents to the Tombs of the Righteous and the Elderly Sites in the Land of Israel*, Yeda-Am, 1986, 22: 36-49.

¹⁶Zimmer, Y., *World as a custom: Chapters in the history of customs, their laws and incarnations*, Zalman Shazar Center for the History of Israel, 1996, pp. 65-69.

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