

Ritual Practices Within the Frame of Pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Just in Judaism

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Abstract

The article explores the associated beliefs and rituals, Shrines are the graves of righteous saints among the Jews. The practices and rituals performed by visitors to the graves of the righteous among the Jews were analyzed and discussed, and these actions were discussed extensively so that the reader would forget to understand the nature of these rituals and actions that take place at the grave of the righteous according to the point of view, religion, justice and traditions of the Jewish religion. It must be noted that to this day, there are still many people who still perform and in similar practices participate. Relationships existing between different population groups.

Keywords: Judaism, Graves of the Righteous, Customs and Traditions.

Introduction

There exists a distance between God and his believers within the frame of institutionalized religion, in which rites and rituals are organized in a set order. They don't meet the expectations of the ordinary believer who seeks the proximity of God in a direct way, in order to give him His abounding blessings and fulfill his daily desires. In other words, many believers search for more spontaneous ways to refer to God without passing through different mediating agents that can lessen the power of the spiritual experience. Many people, whose religiosity is based on simplicity and

innocence, come to the tombs to pour their hearts there and ask for what is important to them in all domains, like maintenance, health, mating or kids, and so on.

In the past, they used to visit the tombs of the just on the anniversary day of the death of the Just. The common belief is that on the day of his departure, the Just exists for sure in his place, in other words the Just comes down from the upper world in which he exists to the earthly world, shedding on it from his spirit and merits, and this is a good time to communicate with him and ask him to do the mediating act for fulfilling the requests. Another time in which people traditionally visit the tombs of the Just is the first day of the month or the middle day of the month (15th of a month), while the moon is full, and in repentance days: the month of Elul, ten days of repentance between Rosh-Hashana and Yom-Kipur, in 9 of Ab (תשעה באב), in Lag Ba`omer (33rd day of the Counting of the Omer), which turned to be a general merrymaking (Hilula) day¹, the intermediate days between the first and last days of Passover and in Succoth (the Tabernacles Feast). It is also acceptable to visit the tombs of the Just also in times of crisis or distress, like in times of drought², or the opposite – when there is a good reason to thank for something. There are also people who visit the tombs of the Just in different times for a special request such as health, maintenance or a vow. In the days of the Shabbat, during holidays it is not acceptable to visit the tomb of the Just because the Just must be left to rest with their friends in Paradise.

In general, the visit to the tomb of the Just is done collectively, especially to distant tombs, located on hilltops, in distant villages and caves. In the feasts held near the tombs they used to tell a lot of things praising the Just: patients who were healed, infertile redeemed, miserable saved, and so on. These stories (part of them true and

¹Galis, Y. 2005, Madrikh Karta – Kivreh Zadikim Berez Yisrael: Tahlikhim, Segolot, Tfilot, Tfilot. Karta publication
²Sefrai Z. 1987, “Kivreh Zadikim Vemikomot Kdoshim Bamasoret Hayehudit”, in: Shilar A. (editor), Sefer Zeev Vilanee, Jerusalem, p. 304.

some fake) are meant to strengthen the myths associated with the Just and enlarge the group of believers going there.

Within the frame of the rituals performed at the tomb of the Just there are different ritual practices, such as telling a prayer, writing poetry, performing songs and thanksgivings, and stretching over the tomb, lighting candles, immersing in the waters near the tomb, laying stones, hanging cloths on trees near the tomb, writing notes between the tomb stones. The celebrators who arrive in groups usually arrange merrymaking.

As a part of the Just ritual, there are customs related to the need to keep in touch with the Just by giving and taking: leaving something personal near the tomb in order to remind the Just of the visitor and his request, and taking something from the tomb or its surrounding, in order to continue and hold on to the Just also after the event of visiting. There are customs performed privately, others are performed in public. Many customs are common to all of the tombs, while others are special to a particular tomb.³

Objectives of the Article

This article aims to shed light on the social and religious dimensions, and other actions that take place at the shrine of the righteous man among the Jews. As well as the factors that motivate visiting shrines and venerating them. The article also aims to identify the actions and rituals undertaken by the visitor to the shrine and their impact on continuing to visit the shrine of the saint among the Jews.

Essay objectives require an understanding of some basic terms in the essay Beliefs regarding shrines about Jews and in the Jewish religion, in order to understand their motivations.

³Rayner, A. 1984, Aliyah Ve-Aliyah laregel Le'erez Yisrael, 1099-1517. Hibur Leshem Kabalat To'a Doctor, Jerusalem, the Hebrew University.

The Importance of the Topic

The article addresses one of the important topics related to visiting the graves of the righteous in the Jewish community. An anthropological approach is crucial in understanding Hajj practices: beliefs and rituals. This article is an attempt to contribute to social and anthropological studies of religion by discussing important matters areas and topics of social reality: “The society that does not work to understand it the actions and behaviors of its citizens and issues of bias around their actions is essential “Identity Society” (Rashik, Shamharoush 2010: 7). Therefore, it is important to understand and clarifying the human relationship with the sanctities (the shrines and their patrons). Through practices and rituals that translate this relationship.

In the following section, I will review the ritual practices related to visiting the tombs:

1- Prayers– in all religions, the main act that the pilgrim does in the holy place is the prayer, and the same applies for the tombs of the Just. The pilgrims are accustomed to say general and personal prayers near the tomb, then touch it and kiss it. They are also accustomed to go around the tomb seven times, while saying a prayer and then they stretch over it and make a request. Traditional Jews attribute big significance to the prayer near the tombs of the Just, and many of them are ready to travel long distances to go around them.⁴ In the last two decades, a total separation was initiated inside the tomb, and prayers are held separately for men and women.⁵

⁴Shatal, A. 1996, Ha-Aiyah Laregel Le-Kevreh Kdoshim Be-Yisrael Uba’amim. In: Shiler, A., (editor). Dat Vepolhan Vekevreh Kdoshim Muslimim Berez Yisrael, Ariel 117-118, pp. 14-21.

⁵Gonen, R. 1998, Tfilah Ve-Zedaka, Esh Ve-Mayim: Menhagim Leyad Kever Hazadik. In, Gone, R. (editor), E’l Kivreh Zadikim. Jerusalem: Musium of Israel.

The ritual of the Just follows a similar structure. First, pilgrims say a short prayer they are accustomed to say in all cemeteries when they see the tombs. For certain tombs we can find a prayer version which is directed to communicating with the specific Just buried there. In praying and stretching over the tomb, it is common to read psalms chapters over the tombs of the Just. The reading of psalms is considered as communication of the person who says them with his own soul, and it opens his heart. Others usually read all the book of Psalms, some read the psalms hymns of that day, there are hymns related to a specific distress of the praying person (in many psalm books, it is indicated above each hymn to what problem it is a merit). People asking on behalf of a specific person usually read from hymn 119, the verses that constitute the name of a man. The Hasids (followers) of Breslau typically read ten hymns of Psalms, called the general remedy (Tikhun Haklali), that its reading is a merit for all remedies (Psalms 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150).

In addition to the hymns of Psalms, usually there are different prayer books in the tombs of the Just composed in different periods on different subjects. In a book titled “Shaareh Dimah” (Gates of a Tear) there are a cluster of prayers and requests on matters acceptable to pray for at the tombs of the Just, and a general long prayer. An example for a prayer at the tombs of the Just is found in the following text: “His Hasids will rejoice with respect. They will establish on their graves. Peace on you upon your graves may your soul and the soul of your friends and the soul of your pupils packaged with the package of life with God under the chair of respect. Blessed are the Just, blessed are the straight and innocent Hasids, blessed are the workers of Torah, the heroes of the power of the land institutional. God the merciful bless His name will hasten your dread and will accelerate your standing, and I will win to see your glowing faces as the glow of the horizon and here I came to stretch upon the tombs of the Just buried here, and asking and beg my founder and creator the king of kings God Almighty, to remember these Just.

Their immaculacy and rightness will stand by me and will protect me and save me also from the evil nature lurking me always to empty me from the Torah work of God as appropriate.”⁶ We can count a number of religious practices related to the tombs of the Just in the Jewish tradition:

2- Parades of the Scroll of the Torah– in some tombs it is habitual to bring to the place a Scroll of the Torah from a nearby synagogue in a ceremony parade of celebrants. Such parades take place for many years in Miron and Tiberias, and lately it was introduced in Nitivot.

3- Poems– sometimes in the frame of the ceremonies and rituals, poetry, songs and special thanksgivings are written in honor of the Just. An example of a poem that was written in honor of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai: “Bar-Yochai your blessing is anointed. Joy oil from your friends, Bar-Yochai sanctity anointment oil. Anointed from the sanctity. Carrying the blossom of sanctity segregation. Put on glory on your head. Bar-Yochai a good seat you reside. A day you flee when you escaped. On a cliff layout you stood. There you acquired your splendor and majesty. Bar-Yochai acacia trees stand and learn. Marvel light the glowing light they glow with your teaching: Bar-Yochai and to the field of apples. You rose to pick in it from distance. Secret of Torah flowers will be done for you”.⁷

4- Merrymaking (Hilula)– the acceptable popular belief is that the Just is able to communicate with God for the sake of the tomb visitor; according to this, participating in merrymaking brings the believer closer to the Just physically and spiritually, and in this way, he will get relief from all his troubles and sufferings. Merrymaking is a celebration or a commandment feast that Hasids and Mekubalim usually perform on the anniversary day of the Just’s death, because the spirit of that

⁶Galis, Y. 2008, Madrikh Kivreh Zadikim Be’erez Yisrael, Jerusalem, p. 580.

⁷Galis, Y. 2008, Madrikh Kivreh Zadikim Be’erez Yisrael, Jerusalem, pp. 112-113.

same Just is joyful “as a bride in her wedding ceremony (Huppah) when she comes to get protection under the shadow of the sitting above”.

5-Taking a vow– in the frame of pilgrimage the practice of taking a vow is common, that is a special request, due to a personal or national distress, a request to heal sick children, for a successful marriage, or a request for fertile abdomen. A vow means a commitment taken of self by free will, in front of God, to make a certain act, or to abstain from doing a certain thing, usually in a situation of making a request. The vow is a sort of making a deal with God, in which in reward for fulfilling a request, the person will take on him/her-self a certain commitment. Very rarely taking a vow is in the frame of pilgrimage to the tomb of the Just and making a feast for the poor. There are those who bring candy, food and drink to the grave area and distribute to the people who are there – both in time of taking the vow and when the request is fulfilled. Taking a vow and the joy of fulfilling the request in public contain sharing and including many others in the act, and the fact of turning it to be a community event empowers and strengthens it. Turner(2005) suggests that virtual ceremonies are moments of “institutionalized communities” in which the distance of the individual from “the sanctity” disappears and “the sanctity” is experienced in an unmediated manner.⁸ While the experience in these rituals is gained through a certain violation of the normative system, in the ceremony the participants identify with the normative system to the degree of losing their autonomy, in the ceremony in favor of an “automatic” performance of pre-dictated symbolic-ceremonial actions.

6- Requesting with notes– an accepted custom in the frame of visiting the tomb of the Just is to refer to God in a note with a written request, or leave only the name of the visitor and his family members. The Just are required to be full of integrity and to pass the request to God, or to mention in front of Him the applicant who requested.

⁸ Turner, Victor 2005: “A’liyot Laregel Ketahlikhim Hevratyiyim”, in: A’liyot Laregel: Yehudim, Nozrim, Muslimim, Ora Limor & E-Hanan Ryner, editors, Yad Ben-Zvi, the Open University, Raananna, pp. 19-64.

7-Water practices– the tombs of the Jewish Just are not necessarily indicated near water sources. Nevertheless, some people attribute to the waters near the tombs healing merits, e.g., the well in the Tomb of Rachel, the wife of Rabbi Aqiva. Female pilgrims to Miron in Lag Ba`omer sometimes collect drops of water from the walls of the tomb and smear them on their eyes and body – a merit for recovery.⁹ A special custom related to water is the “enriching” of simple tap water with the energies found in the tomb of the Just, according to the principle of communicable magic – the sanctity is transferred by touch. In the defined area of the tomb of Baba Sali in Nitivot the public can acquire bottles of enriched water. A similar action is done with oil, such as in the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai in Miron and the tomb of Rabbi Meir Miracle-Worker (רבי מאיר בעל הנס) in Tiberias. Smearing the absorbed oil with the energies of the Just on painful body parts secures relief and remedy for body pains.

8- Leaving objects– the custom of leaving something personal in the surrounding of the tomb means staying in touch with the place after leaving, and the Just will remember the person who made a request and will make efforts to fulfill his request.

Some people leave at the gravestone – or tie on the lattice of the window or on the door of the tomb room – handkerchief, hankie or any piece of cloth. It is accepted also to tear the cloth – a magical act of empowering the request to the Just, so he will “tear” the illness or the distress for which they asked for salvation – and tie it to a nearby tree.

9- Leaving behind water and food– one of the common customs in the past was to leave on the tomb water, food or candies.¹⁰ They used water for blessing, for instance in times of sickness. For relatives and kids who couldn't participate in pilgrimage,

⁹Cahana. M,1986: Siporeh Ha`aliyot Likevreh Hazadikim Vele`atarim Hakdoshim Be`erez Yisrael. Yeda-Am, 22: pp. 36-49.

¹⁰Hirshberg. 1956: Me`erez Mavo Hashemesh.pp.7-8.

they used to bring foods and candies, and in this way shower on them the blessing of the Just. This gives expression to the concept that sanctity is passed onto man also through contact or food.

10-Lighting a candle– the fire, an element arousing ecstasy, has a central role in ceremonies of people from different religions.¹¹ This custom take place in all tombs of the Just, and the most known fire lighting is the one occurring on the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Miron in Lag Ba`omer evening. Lighting a candle on the tomb of the Just symbolizes the soul. By lighting a candle, it is as if “leaving behind the soul” with the Just. In the past they used to light cloths immersed in oil or lay candles on the gravestone of the Just or inside the tomb, but because of the danger of big fire, lighting is done outside, and today candles replace cloths.

11- Receiving a blessing– many people ask to receive a blessing in the tombs of the Just, being holy places and of special powers. In these places some give blessings on behalf of the place and others on behalf of themselves.

12- Charity (Zedakah)– giving charity is one of the Jewish commandments (Mitzvot) and comes second to prayer in importance to the degree of the known saying “charity will save from death”. Indeed, in many tombs near the gravestone or other place within the tomb there is a fund for charity. The conception is that whoever wants to get (blessings and opulence from the Just), must develop a conscience of giving. Part of the contributions is used to repair the tomb, oil for light, and to buy sanctity utensils.

13- Hair cutting (Helaqa)– in some tombs of the Just, especially in the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Miron and the tomb of Shimon the Just in Jerusalem, it is usual to perform a ceremony of hair cutting, Kabala in its origin, to three years

¹¹Gonen, R. 1998: Tfilah Vezedaka, Esh Vemayim: Minhagim Leyad Kever Hazadik. In: Gonen, R. (editor) El Kevreh Zadikim, Jerusalem: The Museum of Israel.

old children, a ceremony known in its Arabic name as “Helaqa” or “Afshaarai” in the Yiddish language. A first hair cutting for boys is one of the strongest transition ceremonies. A separation from his hair, symbolizes the separation of the boy from his “childish” sexual identity and he gets a pronounced “manly” identity.¹²⁻¹³

14- Taking souvenirs— opposite to the need to leave something behind on the tomb, stands the need to take something from there and thus to widen the boundaries of the tomb sanctity also with the return home and empower the pilgrimage experience. In order to meet this, it needs many counters for selling different souvenirs related to the Just in a symbolic way were built around the tombs. A very unique souvenir is a piece of red thread tied to the hand joint and constitutes a merit for all sorts of problems¹⁴ and the continuity of blessing also after leaving the tomb of the Just. Other popular souvenirs are the amulets (like Kimaa Hahashma) and the portraits of Rabbis and the Just.

15- Mass healing ceremonies— beside the practices accepted in the old days, some new and surprising practices were renewed in the last two decades, not based on accepted tradition, but they are naturalized within the public of pilgrims to the tombs of the Just. Two of these practices are related to healing patients.¹⁵ Thus for example, in the tomb of Dan Jacob near Eshtoal mass healing ceremonies take place from the beginning of the 90s, almost every Thursday. The main event of this ceremony is “seven makers of the treaty” – making seven rounds with the Scroll of the Torah in honor of the seven fathers of the nation, among them Dan Ben Jacob himself. Other

¹²Gonen, R. 1998: Tfilah Vezedaka, Esh Vemayim: Minhagim Leyad Kever Hazadik. In: Gonen, R. (editor), El Kevreh Zadikim, Jerusalem: The Museum of Israel.

¹³For a detailed review, c.f Zimer, Y. 1996: Olam kemenhago Noheg: Prakim Betoldot Hamenhagim, Halakhotehem VGilgolehem. The center of Zalman Shazar for the annals of Israel, pp. 65-69.

¹⁴Epstein, S. 1995. Inventing a Pilgrimage: Ritual, Love, and Politics on the Road to Amuka. Jewish Folklore and Review, 17(1-2): 25-32.

¹⁵Gonen, R. 1998: Tfilah Vezedaka, Esh Vemayim: Minhagim Leyad Kever Hazadik. In: Gonen, R. (editor), El Kevreh Zadikim, Jerusalem: the Museum of Israel.

healing ceremonies are performed also at night in the tomb of Jonathan Ben Oseal in Amoca by the Rabbi Ifergan. These ceremonies do not cancel the traditional way of seeking healing with medication. The mass ceremonies suggest other ways of healing, attracting masses of people by the hope it offers.

The Most Important Finding of the Article

Through the article, the most important recommendations were reached:

- 1- Interest in building education and awareness centers to inform people of the importance of visiting the graves of the righteous Jews.
- 2- Introducing the culture of visiting graves into the educational curricula to raise students' awareness and create a generation interested in visiting the graves of the righteous among the Jews.
- 3- Paying attention to introducing the graves of the two friends into tourist centers so that the visitor can feel comfortable learning about the importance of those graves.

Conclusion

In this article, I tried to provide an idea about the beliefs and rituals associated with the graves of the two righteous Jews among the Jews, and it is deaf to offer an analysis of the nature of the relationship between the levels of cultural structure, i.e. religious, At the social, political and even economic levels. I even gave an ethnographic presentation.

Recording the beliefs, customs and traditions practiced by Jewish visitors to their holy shrines and the actions they perform During their visit to the shrines of righteous saints. It must be noted that to this day there are still many people who still participate in these rituals. And beliefs at that time, she was keen and interested in visiting shrines due to the close relations Among various population groups within the Jewish community.

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- c.f Zimer, Y. 1996: Olam kemenhago Noheg: Prakim Betoldot Hamenhagim, Halakhotehem VGilgolehem. The center of Zalman Shazar for the annals of Israel.
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