



Jewish and Druze IDF soldiers hang flags in preparation for event that runs through their territories displaying their joint partnership

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DRUZE AND JEWS

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

There are a lot of things Druze and Jews have in common. There are also a lot of things they don't.

When it comes to similarities, Druze, like Jews, have historically been loyal to the nation where they live. Wherever Jews were exiled, they learned the local language and found ways to assimilate culturally into their new society—without losing their own identity or sense of community. Jewish rebellions were largely limited to empires that would try to impose foreign religions on them. The same goes for the Druze. Though Druze haven't moved around quite as much as Jews have.

Over the thousand years of their existence, the various mountain tops where their communities were built have been ruled by a variety of foreign governments. As such the Druze have developed an approach that is both protective of their own while being cooperative with the ruling power of the day.




This means Druze in Syria will embrace their adopted country while Druze in Lebanon will be loyal members of Lebanese society and may even serve in places of authority. Likewise, Druze in Israel will often pick a career as a first responder or join the IDF to defend the nation they live in. Though in the Golan Heights, most Druze still feel closer

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to their relatives in Syria as their own villages were in Syrian territory before 1967. Eighty percent of Druze living in the Galilee area serve in the army—many in combat units. But Druze are most known for their legendary hospitality.

Especially since in this current war, Druze are a wild card can be triggered from within the multiple countries where they reside. As such we would do well to place the Druze people on our prayer radars—that the Lord will guide their steps as He can turn the hearts

of Kings to do His will. You can read more about their background in the second article of this month's *Maoz Israel Report* (The Mysterious Origin of the Druze).

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Devoted to Their Own

Since their identity is not dependent on whether they have sovereignty over the land, ultimately, Druze prefer political neutrality. At their core, however, they will not hesitate to protect their own.

A powerful example of this occurred in 2022 with the tragic story of Tiran Fero. Tiran, a high-schooler who was two days short of his 18th birthday when he and his friend were in a serious car accident while driving to an auto repair shop near the Arab town of Jenin that is controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

Tiran's friend was rushed to an Israeli hospital, but Tiran's injuries were so serious he was taken to a

Druze in Galilee show solidarity after October 7 attacks by bringing food to soldiers and offering free room and board to evacuees

nearby hospital in Jenin and put on life-support. When local Palestinian terrorists heard he was an Israeli Druze, they sent masked gunmen to kidnap him—while his father and uncle who had just arrived watched in horror. The terrorists disconnected Tiran from life support and took him to a remote location where he died. They then demanded the release of the bodies of Palestinian terrorists killed while committing various terrorist attacks against Israelis in exchange for Tiran's body.

The reaction from the Druze was swift and fierce. Within hours Druze fighters kidnapped three random Palestinians they found at a construction site. They then filmed their beaten hostages and warned if Tiran's body was not returned by the next day the Druze people would kill the hostages and enter Jenin armed to recover the body themselves. Tensions were high and Israeli authorities were in communication with Druze leaders and the Palestinian Authority. The IDF was quite content to cooperate in the background but not get directly involved as that would add the Jewish ingredient which could escalate the issue unnecessarily.

Sure enough, within 30 hours from the moment of kidnapping, Tiran's body was back with his family. A public apology was issued by the Palestinian Authority's head Imam and the beaten Palestinian construction workers were taken to be treated at an Israeli hospital.

"We are like bees," explained a young Druze to the news reporter inquiring about the Druze perspective. If you treat us well we give you honey. If you treat us poorly we will sting ferociously."

Iron Dome

This war has put that truth to the test. Since October 7th Hamas has attacked anyone they came across in southern Israel—Jews, Druze, Muslims, Christians, Bedouins, etc. All during these 10 months, Hezbollah has been firing indiscriminately across Israel's northern border. This past month alone Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets and suicide drones all across northern Israel. Sometimes hundreds in a single day.

Israel's Iron Dome is one of four defensive intelligence rocket systems, is the bane of Israel's enemies. If not for Israel's air defense system, large parts of our country would be no longer be inhabitable. That makes

Druze children mourn the loss of their friends at a makeshift memorial set up in the soccer field where they were murdered



Erez Ben Simon/Flash90

discovering and firing on the many secret locations of the Iron Dome launchers one of Hezbollah's most desirable accomplishments. Our daughter, who serves in the Airforce, is stationed near the northern border protecting those locations.

Still, the Iron Dome can only lessen the threat, not eliminate it. While the focus of this war has largely been on Gaza, since October 7th, Hezbollah has fired thousands of rockets at everything from Israeli towns and villages to highways and vineyards. Only in the complex and strange world of the Middle East, do thousands of rockets fired at a civilian population not necessarily mean automatic war.

War with Lebanon is not the same as war with Gaza. Gaza is a territory ruled by a terrorist organization. Lebanon is a sovereign country with an hostile government that somewhat keeps to itself but has a parasitical terrorist organization that operates within its borders. You can't really go to war with Hezbollah in Lebanon without going to war with Lebanon.

Saturday Soccer Play

As we said though, to Hezbollah, all Israel qualifies as the enemy. And if you aren't Jewish, well, your martyrdom for the cause is a price they are willing to have you pay.

As a rule of thumb, whether it's Hezbollah or Hamas, they like to fire extra rockets and drones at us on the Sabbath, our day for rest and family time. But while Israelis further south are more cautious about outings, the Druze up north in the Golan Heights, tend to feel disconnected from the conflict and don't usually run for shelter when they hear sirens. To them, they are clearly not Jews, and therefore pose no threat to nearby countries.

Notwithstanding, on Saturday July 28th a heavy price was exacted by Hezbollah when their missile hit a soccer field full of Druze children. Twelve kids between the ages of 10-16 were torn apart by the explosion while playing soccer. Another 39 were seriously wounded. The attack rippled through the Middle East. Thousands of Israeli Jews including Israel's top government leaders traveled through dangerous highways to mourn with the Druze over the slaughter of their children, four of whom were from the same family.

Still, the anger and pain of the Druze people had to be channeled somewhere. Some raged at Israel for failing to protect them. Others raged at Hezbollah for targeting their area. Perhaps the biggest surprise came from Druze in Syria who offered alliances from across the border to protect Israel and "viciously defend" their Druze brethren against attacks from Iran and its proxies like Hezbollah.

During seasons of pain, we all take moments to consider our understanding of life and all it entails. It is in those moments that we are most open to hear truth—if someone will speak it into our lives. Druze are truly one of the most unreached people-groups in the world and should be covered in prayer during our intercession before the Lord. We in the land of Israel who are acquainted with Druze understand that this precious peace-loving tiny community is in great need of knowing that there is a God who loves them and knows them by name. ■



THE DRUZE

By **Shira Sorko-Ram**

Imagine a world where secrets are the core of your identity, where only a chosen few truly know the mysteries of your beliefs. This is the world of the Druze, one of the most mysterious religious communities on earth. The Druze faith is so secretive that only its top spiritual leaders have ever known its deepest truths, and no one today can convert to become a Druze. No one. It's a religion that guards its inner workings fiercely, making it both fascinating and elusive.

The Hidden Origins of a Mysterious Leader

The story of the Druze begins with a man shrouded in mystery: Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad. No one knows where he was born, when he was born, or when he died. Tradition maintains he came from a Persian family and was a Shia Muslim mystic. But beyond that, his origins are as enigmatic as the religion he founded.

Hamza was a man of immense intellect, deeply versed in Islamic theology, Greek philosophy, and the religious traditions of the world—from Christianity to Buddhism, Hinduism, and beyond. He wasn't just a scholar; he was a seeker, someone who was not content with the answers provided by Islam alone. He searched for truth in all religions, taking what he believed was the best from each and weaving them into a new faith.

The Druze flag has five colors, each that represent an important prophet and ethic in their religion.

Since the Druze religion only allowed new converts for the first 25 years of its existence, today they number around 1.2 million worldwide. The largest community of 700,000 live in the mountains of Syria and around 150,000 Druze live in Israel.

In his teachings, Hamza honored a diverse group of Biblical prophets, from Adam and Noah to Moses, Jesus, and John the Baptist. Interestingly, he also concluded that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was not only a prophet but the actual ancestral father of the Druze people.

Foundational Creeds of Hamza

One of the most distinctive aspects of Druze belief is the concept of reincarnation. Hamza taught that the soul is eternal, moving through a continuous cycle of rebirth. All Druze born today are taught they are reincarnations of Druze who died. Depending on one's actions when alive, he or she will be elevated or demoted in the next life. They testify this belief offers comfort and moral guidance to the Druze, encouraging them to live ethical lives in harmony with the divine will.

The two-tiered Druze community is divided into two distinct groups: the al-Uqqal, or the Knowledgeable, and the al-Juhhal, the Ignorant. The vast majority, about 95%, fall into the latter category. These members are not permitted to view the holy texts nor do they attend religious meetings; yet nearly all Druze hold a belief in God.

However, central to Hamza's teachings is to understand the oneness of God—a God who is beyond human understanding, beyond time, space, and the human experience. Hamza grasped the greatness of God but missed the personal nature of a God who desires relationship with His creation.

A Royal Ally: The Role of Al-Hakim

But how did this secretive religion gain thousands of followers (today they number over a million worldwide)? The answer lies with a powerful ally: al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah. Al-Hakim was not just any ruler; he was the supreme leader of much of North Africa and the Levant (Israel, Lebanon and Syria), with residence in Cairo. Both a Caliph and an Imam, he was rumored to be a descendant of Muhammed while by others to have had a Christian mother. He was eccentric and controversial and ruled with absolute authority. He met Hamza, listened to his new doctrines and embraced them fully. Al-Hakim would become the twin founder of the new Druze religion.

Al-Hakim's endorsement of Hamza's teachings was crucial. On May 30, 1017 AD, Hamza officially proclaimed his new religion, and declared al-Hakim to be a divine figure—a bold departure from Islam that



Druze are famous for the traditions (and amazing recipes) they have carried on for hundreds of years

marked the start of the Druze faith. Al-Hakim's religious actions were often seen as enigmatic and contributed to his reputation as a mysterious and controversial figure. Without doubt, Al-Hakim's support lent the movement the gravity it needed to flourish.

The Fate of Ad-Darazi and Al-Hakim

Among Hamza's early followers was Muhammad bin Ismail ad-Darazi, a magnetic evangelist who brought many converts to the new faith. However, ambition got the better of ad-Darazi, leading him to claim divine status for himself—a move that Hamza did not support. Hamza excommunicated ad-Darazi, but al-Hakim is believed to have executed him to preserve the unity of the Druze movement. Ironically, despite his fall from grace, the religion became known as Druze, named after this discredited figure.

Al-Hakim's reign ended abruptly in 1021 when he mysteriously disappeared during a night ride in Cairo. His disappearance remains one of history's unsolved mysteries, adding to the aura of intrigue surrounding the Druze



Efraim Bar/Alamy

faith. To this day, the Druze await his return, believing that he will be miraculously reborn and usher in a new Golden Age at the Last Judgment.

Surviving Through the Centuries

In the early days of the Druze faith, converts were welcomed. Hamza and al-Hakim actively spread their teachings, drawing followers from diverse backgrounds. As a unique side note, while Druze are considered Arab ethnically, some genetic researches have found evidence that Druze today have more genetic similarities to Ashkenazi Jews than Arabs.

But in 1043, Baha al-Din al-Muqtana, who succeeded Hamza, declared that the Druze faith would no longer accept new converts. Baha felt he must maintain the purity and integrity of Druze doctrine. New converts were likely to bring other beliefs that could corrupt the original canon, whereas those born and raised in the faith would be faithful to its teachings. This decision sealed the Druze community's identity as a closed and secretive faith, open only to those born into it.

The Druze have faced countless challenges over the centuries, yet they have always found ways to protect their independence and unique identity. They settled in remote, mountainous areas in Lebanon, Syria, and northern Israel, where they could live somewhat isolated from the empires that ruled the region. They would be both a peaceful community and fierce warriors when threatened.

Jethro's tomb, the main pilgrimage site for the Druze religion—Horns of Hittin Nebi Shu'eib, Upper Galilee, Israel

As the Middle East underwent significant changes following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century and the establishment of Israel, the Druze adapted to the new political landscape. You can see these adaptations in their clothing. The older generation of men wear a unique baggy trousers unique to the Druze, while elderly ladies wear traditional robes similar to their Arab peers. But their young people dress similarly to Israeli youth, yet with a somewhat more modest look.

A New Challenge: Modernity and the Gospel

Today, the Druze face a different kind of challenge—one that cannot be fought with swords. Modern society, technology, and the opportunities they bring are pulling the younger generation in new directions. However, this gradual exposure to the outside world has also opened a crack in the door for some Druze to hear the Good News.

Until now, becoming a Christian was almost unheard of in the Druze community. And those who have taken that step pay a heavy price—they can never return to their own people as true Druze. This is a heavy choice to make for people who grow up with such a strong sense of belonging. But for some, the promise of a real connection with a God through His Son—who was previously unattainable, is worth the sacrifice. ■



Shalom from Jerusalem!

As you may have gathered from the articles in this report, to the Druze, being a Druze is an honor—a privilege. A priceless inheritance.

And while Druze are fiercely protective of their own, they can be **just as aggressive against someone from their community who chooses to abandon their ways.**

As we covered the tragedy that occurred this month, we reached out to our network of over 100 congregations in Israel to see if there were any Druze **who had come to the Lord whom we could help.**

One of our close friends who is a pastor responded by sharing about **members in his own congregation that came out of the Druze community.** To protect them from persecution we will avoid sharing full details, but here are some.

Joud (not his real name) and his wife and many children have **all paid dearly for the choice they made to follow Yeshua** and have experienced many difficulties. For years, Joud has worked most of his life in maintenance with a small salary, **but he made sure that every spare shekel they had was spent on his children's education.**

His kids are now grown; one is an officer in the army and another works with the police. Three of their boys have served in the military—and their youngest just finished registering for higher education studies. **This is no small feat for a family of small means.**

But just as this milestone brought them great joy, Joud was **informed this month that he was being let go from a job he has held for years** as some people with influence decided to give his job to a relative (it's a Middle East culture thing.) **Both Joud and his wife have serious health issues.** So, at 59 he must now find a new job to support his family—in a community that **opposes his belief** in the New Covenant.

Thankfully, they have a home that has been in the family for generations, but **their pastor pointed out some specific needs they have** been struggling with for many years that will only cost \$13,000 to clear up.

It is clear that **choosing to accept the message of forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God through Yeshua is one of the bravest decisions a Druze can make.** And we want to honor the brave among us.

Would you like to join us in blessing this Druze Christian family?

Joud and his family are among the few, the **first fruits** from the Druze community and we are believing for this community in Israel to grow!

Together For the Least of These,



Kobi & Shani Ferguson

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