

Dr. Mamo's Contribution in English

Summary of the Yezidian Religion

The Yezidian religion is considered one of the most ancient belief systems in the Middle East, with roots that may extend to Mithraism (ca. 2000 BCE). Although it is not formally recognized among the world religions alongside Christianity or Islam, Yezidism extends beyond a mere philosophy of life. It addresses fundamental questions concerning the meaning of existence, as well as concepts of dualism and monotheism. Unlike Zoroastrianism, Yezidism does not adhere to a strict doctrine of duality. Instead, it teaches that the dualities observed in nature are reflected in the human spirit and in patterns of behavior.

Distinct from universal religions, Yezidism does not claim universal authority or seek converts. Since the emergence of the major world religions, particularly Islam in Kurdistan, the Yezidis have endured persistent persecution while striving to preserve their beliefs, rituals, and religious identity. Misrepresentations of Yezidism by Islamic and Christian traditions frequently contradict the self-understanding and theological exposition articulated by Yezidis themselves.

Historically, Yezidism has been regarded as the original religion of the Kurdish people. Shared features between Yezidis and Kurdish Muslims—such as language, ceremonies, rituals, and folklore—underscore this cultural affinity. Unlike Islam, however, Yezidism is not a proselytizing religion; membership is inherited exclusively, as one must be born to Yezidi parents.

Today, the majority of Yezidis—approximately 600,000—reside in Iraqi Kurdistan, while an additional 400,000 live in diaspora communities. Central religious practices include a three-day fast followed by a celebratory feast, alongside a profound reverence for elements of the natural world. Yezidi ethical teachings emphasize environmental stewardship, such as protecting springs and forests, as well as respect for human dignity. A fundamental belief is that only God grants and takes life, making the act of murder strictly forb

Jemal Nebez and His Foundation

I first became acquainted with Professor Jemal Nebez in the early 1980s, shortly after my migration to Germany. He welcomed me with warmth and initiated discussions on Yezidi culture. Professor Nebez was an exceptional thinker whose intellectual strengths encompassed observation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and problem-solving. As a global intellectual, he was distinguished by his open-mindedness, strong analytical capacity, creativity, and innovation. His ability to synthesize information from diverse sources and articulate well-reasoned conclusions was central to his work. He was not only a scholar but also an agent of social transformation, a role reflected in his influential publications.

In my own work as a certified interpreter, I frequently drew upon Nebez's book *The Unified Kurdish Language* (ژمانی یەک کرتوی کوردی) while teaching students from the Middle East. On one

occasion, during a discussion break, I shared with him that while Kurdish political parties were campaigning for official recognition of Kurdish language and culture, Yezidis had safeguarded their religious texts and traditions in Kurdish for millennia. All of our prayers and liturgies are in Kurdish, and our cultural identity is deeply intertwined with that of the broader Kurdish community. Professor Nebez was deeply moved by this remark and affirmed his profound admiration for the Yezidis. His legacy remains a source of pride, and I extend my gratitude to the colleagues who continue his mission through the Nebez Foundation.

Khanna Omarkhali

Professor Khanna Omarkhali has been honored with the 2025 Jemal Nebez Award in recognition of her outstanding contributions to Kurdish studies. Through her work, she has preserved and documented Yezidi religious texts, thereby enriching Kurdish literature and cultural heritage. Her scholarship has significantly advanced the study of Kurdish religion, language, and intellectual traditions.

From the outset of her career, Professor Omarkhali has been marked by determination and a strong sense of purpose. She demonstrates an exceptional work ethic, motivated by continuous learning and intellectual growth. Beyond her scholarly achievements, she has inspired others through her dedication and vision. For these reasons, the Nebez Foundation has fittingly recognized her with this distinguished award.

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