

## Country-Religious Relations: Building Power in the Path of Paradox

Research Article

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**Abstract.** This study aims to describe the relationship between the state and religion due to polarization and identity politics during Joko Widodo's leadership in Indonesia. The data in this study were collected through media coverage of political events related to religion from 2014 to 2019. The media that became the data source were the online news portals Kompas.com, Tempo.com, and Detik.com. The three online news portals were chosen based on their existence being verified and on a national scale. Data were analysed in four stages; data management, data memoing, description-classification-data interpretation, and data visualization. This study finds that the relationship between the state and religion has entered a paradoxical relationship phase, which is indicated by various contradictory policies. This paradox was deliberately built by President Joko Widodo as a way and strategy to build a fantasy of power.

**Keywords:** state and state relations; contradiction and paradox

### Introduction

The relationship between the state and religion in the Joko Widodo administration is trapped in a paradoxical relationship. The paradoxical relationship between the state and religion during the Joko Widodo administration is illustrated by the government's ambiguous attitude in making various policies. First, the enactment of Law No. 18/2019 on Pesantren /Islamic Boarding School ([Menteri Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia, 2019](#)), the establishment of National Santri (student at traditional Muslim school) Day through Presidential Decree No. 22/2015 ([Akuntano, 2015](#)), the provision of Santri Job Training Centres ([Kemendikbud, 2019](#)), the establishment of religious moderation programs in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) ([Kementerian Agama, 2019](#)). Second, the ratification of Perppu No. 2/2017 into the Ormas Law ([Tempo.co.id, 2017](#); [Wardani, 2017](#)), revocation of HTI's status and legal entity based on the Decree of the Minister of Law and Human Rights, No. AHU-30.AH.01.01: AHU-30.AH.01.08, 2017 ([Movanita, 2017](#)), integration of religious moderation in the RPJMN 2020-2024 as a strategy to eradicate radical Islam.

The two forms of the policy above show that the Joko Widodo government is ambiguous in treating religious reality. In the first policy, there is an impression that the Joko Widodo government through various policies such as Law No. 8 of 2019 concerning Pesantren; the Determination of Santri Day; and the provision of the Pesantren Work Training Centre above is very accommodating to traditional Islamic groups such as Nahdhatul Ulama (NU). While in other areas, the government shows the antagonistic face of the state towards Islamic groups that are considered radical such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Forum Pembela Islam (FPI).

**Article info:**

<https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v7i2.4983>

The relationship between the state and religion is very dynamic and tends to move along with political dynamics. During the New Order period, for example, political dynamics gave birth to antagonistic and accommodative relations between the state and religion (Effendy, 2011). The rebellions of NII, DI/TII, Kahar Muzakkar, and Daud Beureueh (Putra, 2008) were the reasons for the New Order's quasi-repressive attitude towards Islamic political power in Indonesia (Efendi, 2003). The New Order's repressive attitude towards Islam can be seen in the policy of political party fusion through Law No. 3 of 1975 and Law No. 3 of 1985 on the Determination of Pancasila as the Single Principle (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010) and PP No.052/C/Kep.D.82 of 1982, on the Prohibition of Wearing Jilbab in Public Schools (Darajat, 2019, p. 86).

The weakening of Suharto's power in the final third of his reign, marked by the division of ABRI (Indonesian Army) as Red ABRI versus Green ABRI and divisions within political parties supporting Soeharto (Hendra et al., 2013) encouraged the Soeharto government to design strategies to maintain its power. Accommodating Islam, which had been deliberately marginalized, became Suharto's strategic choice in securing his power. There are two forms of accommodative attitudes of the Soeharto government, namely structural accommodation and legislative accommodation (Taufikurrahman & Hidayat, 2019).

Structural accommodation was seen with the inclusion of Islamic thinkers into the New Order government bureaucracy. Meanwhile, legislative accommodation can be seen from the emergence of the National Education Law, the Religious Courts Law, the abolition of the policy of prohibiting wearing headscarves in schools, the establishment of Bazis (No. 4/July 1968) and Baitul Mal, an Islamic waqf agency (No. 5/October 1968). The abolition of the Social Philanthropic Donation with Prizes (SDSB) (Effendy, 2011). Both forms of relations between state and religion during the New Order; antagonistic and accommodative above are forms for strategies of Soeharto in maintaining his power (Effendy, 2011).

On the Post-reform that the relationship between the state and religion has experienced ups and downs (Shalihin, Firdaus, & Ashadi, 2020). If during the New Order era the state seemed to be very dominant over religion, but in the reform era, religion showed its dominance over the state. This can be seen from the violence (Shalihin, Firdaus, & Andri, 2020) in Ambon and Poso, and the destruction of nightclubs by FPI. As many as 200 incidents of violations of freedom of religion occurred in 2009 (Hasani, 2009) and 244 in 2011 (R et al., 2012) Minority groups such as Ahmadiyah (114 events) and Christians (54 events) were targeted for violations of freedom of religion and belief (Halili, 2006).

So far, there are five trends in the study of the relationship between the state and religion in Indonesia, first related to political issues (Chaidar & Sahrasad, 2013; Fata, 2018; Fernandes, 2019; Gunawan, 2017; Saputro, 2018; Shalihin, 2016; Sholikin, 2018; Zaprul Khan, 2014). Second, issues around human rights (Hadi, 2018), third, political ideology (Dahlan, 2014; Gunawan, 2017; C. Supriadi, 2015; Zaprul Khan, 2014) history (Alkaf, 2011; Darajat, 2019; Firdaus, 2014). Fourth, political thought (Abdillah, 2013; Abdullah, 2014; Kamsi, 2013; Kasmu et al., 2015; Nasaruddin, 2009; Ridwan, 2018),

and fifth identity politics ([Ghozali, 2020](#); [Herdiansah, 2017](#); [Pamungkas et al., 2020](#); [Paralihan, 2019](#); [Salahudin et al., 2020](#); [Supriadi, 2017](#)).

This study aims to look at the paradoxical relationship between the state and religion in Joko Widodo's government. This article answers the question of what the relationship between the state and religion in Joko Widodo's government looks like. This discussion will look at the paradoxical relationship between the state and religion in Joko Widodo's government, by discussing government policies under the leadership of Joko Widodo that intersect with religion. This discussion rests on the assumption that the paradoxical relations between state and religion that occurred during Joko Widodo's administration are the implications of Joko Widodo as a president who is full of contradictions ([Peterson, 2021](#)).

Ben Bland mentions in his book 'Man of Contradictions Joko Widodo and the Struggle to Remake Indonesia' (2020) that Joko Widodo is a leader full of contradictions. Joko Widodo, as president, tends to issue policies and attitudes that are ambiguous, and contradict each other. This is illustrated by his pluralism and pro-minority campaigns, however, he also joined and praised the 212 Action that demanded Ahok (Chinese and Christian) be imprisoned for blasphemy. In 2017 Joko Widodo said that religion and politics should be separated ([Krisiandi, 2017](#)) but in 2018 he said that state and religion should go hand in hand. ([VOA Indonesia, 2018](#)) On the eve of his 2019 presidential candidacy, Jokowi abandoned his initial choice of Mahfud MD for vice president in favour of Ma'ruf Amin, the cleric who triggered Ahok's "death" ([Peterson, 2021, p. 15](#)).

## Method

This research is based on information available on online news portals. The news in question is news that presents information about policies and events that have a wedge that brings together the state and the state. Therefore, the data is obtained through online portal-based media such as [kompas.com](#), [tempo.com](#), and [detik.com](#). In addition to online news, articles and books specifically related to the facts of the relationship between the state and religion during the leadership of Joko Widodo (2014-2019) were also used as data sources.

The choice of online news as a data source is based on several reasons. First, today, scientific and technological innovations have succeeded in inventing the internet network, which has made information production and dissemination activities easier. Secondly, the presence of internet technology, coupled with advances in digital technology, has made any information about government policies and events accessible to anyone and anywhere, at the time of the event. Third, online news portals are very effective in acting as a medium for channelling information.

In addition to using the Miles and Huberman approach ([Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)) of data reduction, presentation of empirical material, and conclusion drawing, data analysis was also complemented by [Creswell's \(2015\)](#) approach of data management, data memoing, data description-classification-interpretation and data visualization ([Shalihin et al., 2021](#)).

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Relationship between State and Religion; Old Order, New Order, and Reformation

The relationship between the state and religion has been intertwined long before the reign of Joko Widodo. In the Indonesian context, this relationship can be seen in three periods: the Old Order, the New Order, and the Reformation. First, the relationship between the state and religion during the Old Order can be seen in the debate over determining the basis of the state. With the implementation of the multiparty system during the Soekarno era (1945-1967) which aimed to unite Muslims in Indonesia, many parties emerged that represented Islam (Bruinessen, 2013; Assyaukanie, 2011) the Indonesian Islamic Syndicate Party (PSII), the Tarbiyah Islamiyah Movement (Perti), the Indonesian Islamic Tarekat Party (PTII) and Nahdhatul Ummat (NU) which both participated in the 1955 elections. This general election resulted in the formation of the constituent assembly (Iskandar, 2003).

In the Constituent Assembly (1956), one of the issues that arose was the determination of the basis of the state, namely between Islam and Pancasila. Although not for the first time, the debate on determining the basis of the state in the constituent assembly experienced a long dynamic that ended with the birth of two major factions, namely Islamic Nationalists and Secular Nationalists (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010). Represented by Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, KH Ahmad Sanusi, Khar Muzakkir, and KH Wahid Hasyim, the Islamic Nationalist faction wanted Islam to be the sole principle of the state. This desire was based on the view that Muslims had fought to bring Indonesia to independence and expel the colonizers. The Secular Nationalist faction was represented by Dr. Radjiman, Soekarno, and Moh. Hatta, GR. Soepomo, M. Yamin who wanted Pancasila to be the foundation of the Indonesian state. The will of this faction was based on the argument that non-Muslims also contributed to the resistance against the colonizers in Indonesia (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010).

On July 5, 1959, the Soekarno government issued a Decree on the establishment of the state foundation. At that time the Islamist Nationalist group accepted defeat by the Secular Nationalist group. The idea of a state based on Islam "lost", while the idea of a state based on Pancasila "won". This victory was explicitly conveyed by K.H. Ahmad Siddiq, who stated that the Indonesian National State based on Pancasila was the final form for Muslims.

(Efendi, 2003). This decree is also known as a presidential decree dissolving the Constituent Assembly, or a return to the 1945 Constitution as the state constitution, establishing the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) and the Provisional Supreme Advisory Council (DPAS). (Jainuddin, 2019). After the issuance of the Presidential Decree (Soekarno), it marked the beginning of a new era of Indonesian politics called Guided Democracy. Soekarno became the absolute ruler, which made it difficult for several Islamic parties to take part and even chose to become opponents of the government at the time. (Jainuddin, 2019). Meanwhile, Islamic parties such as NU preferred to be more accommodating towards Soekarno's Guided Democracy. This alignment was taken seriously by Soekarno, by dissolving parties that

did not support Guided Democracy, one of which was Masyumi, and providing rewards and strategic positions for NU at the government level (Bruinessen, 2013).

Secondly, if during the Old Order the relationship between the state and religion was accommodating at the beginning of the government, and repressive at the end of the government, then in the New Order there were significant differences in relations. During the reign of the New Order (1967-1998) all regulations of the life of the Indonesian nation/society were put back to the purity of the implementation of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. (Putra, 2008). The state is more accommodating to Pancasila, so ideas and ideas about religion (Islam) are conveyed with great care. (Efendi, 2003). The principle of Islam is forbidden because it contradicts the state ideology (Pancasila) which is seeded in the principles of all political parties and the principles of social organizations. (Denny J, 2006). In totality, the inculcation of the single principle ideology was done both through legalistic means and the education system. The program known as "P4 Socialization" (Education, Appreciation, and Experience of Pancasila) was sponsored by the state to be implemented in all levels of society in understanding the official ideology of the state. (Hikam, 2015).

In response to the political situation of the government's prohibition and disfavor towards Islam during the New Order, many Muslims turned to the world of Sufism, forming religious groups (such as the Indonesian Council of Islamic Preaching) and many were even disinterested in Indonesian politics. (Bruinessen, 2013). Problems related to Muslims in Indonesia were resolved by Soeharto by establishing the Indonesian Muslim Council/MUI (Putra, 2008). All the main streams of Indonesian Islam were represented in it, including some former Masyumi activists, namely KH Hasan Basri, who had become the head of the MUI. The establishment of MUI during Soeharto's era only aimed to extend the government's program at that time. This can be seen from the work program of MUI itself. Explicitly there were three work programs of MUI at that time; first, strengthening religious life, which was understood in line with Pancasila as the foundation of national resilience; second, the participation of religious scholars in development efforts; and third, the maintenance of harmonious relations with other religions (Bruinessen, 2013).

In the late 1980s, Soeharto's political policy changed from Islam Phobia to Islam Accommodation (Gaffar, 1993). In addition to many Muslims entering ABRI/Indonesia army (Bruinessen, 2013), Soeharto's change in political orientation to accommodate Islam can be seen in several ways. First, several policies that had been detrimental to Islam began to be abandoned, such as the abolition of the ban on Muslim dress for several high school students and the revocation of the fasting month holiday; second, the existence of a bill on religious education such as "between the educator and students must have the same religion; third, it is not allowed to mention SARA issues in the media; fourth, the Soeharto government itself gave a guarantee that the government would not enforce the new Jakarta Charter, the discussion of the bill went well, and it became the Islamic Religious Courts Law; fifth, the government's attention to da'i (someone who engages in Dawah/preaching) by providing incentives and life insurance of Rp. 100,000 per month; sixth, strong support for ICMI

(Indonesian Muslim Scholars Association); seventh, a commitment to improving worship facilities through the Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila Foundation; and eighth, the recruitment of many intellectuals to the MPR representing the Islamic faction (Gaffar, 1993).

Third, during the Reformation period, the relationship between the state and religion had a different nuance from the previous two periods. After the fall of Soeharto's leadership (May 12, 1998) Indonesians, especially Muslims, gained the freedom in establishing political parties and were wide open in criticizing the government. (Assyaukanie, 2011) and civil liberties continue to improve (Testriono, 2015). No less than 200 mass organizations and political parties were established. These organizations represent many groups and factions and have many variants. They range from conservative and puritanical to liberal and secular (Assyaukanie, 2011). Islamic groups that were banned during the Soeharto era have now emerged in the form of organizations or groups and political parties that support the implementation of sharia and an Islamic state. Since then, the idea of reviving the spirit of the Jakarta Charter has emerged. The emergence of this zeal from Islamic purists has reignited the long debate between Islam and governance issues. However, the emergence of such issues is important, not only to seek the "objective" truth but also to open a space for criticism and test arguments against ideas that some Muslims consider final (Bruinessen, 2013).

Islamist ideas such as establishing the caliphate have been persistently campaigned by several Islamic activists. One of them is led by Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which has been at the forefront of fighting for a pan-Islamic state since 1998. (Assyaukanie, 2011). Likewise, the Tarbiyah Movement was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, which at the end of Soeharto's tenure, groups with Tarbiyah backgrounds established the KAMMI student organization in early 1998 and its seniors founded the PKS (Justice Party) political party. They actively participated in demonstrations during the Soeharto era in 1998 and supported H.J. Habibie. (Bruinessen, 2013). In 2000 the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI) was founded and openly supported Islamic jihad (in Maluku) and the struggle to establish an Islamic state or sharia with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir as its leader (Bruinessen, 2013).

## 2. The Relationship between State and Religion; The Joko Widodo Era

The paradox of the relationship between state and religion in the administration of President Joko Widodo can be seen through several government policies, especially those that intersect with Islam. Among the policies of Joko Widodo's government that are highlighted in this study are, first, Presidential Decree Number 25 of 2015 concerning the establishment of Santri Day. This policy has drawn a lot of polemics (CNN Indonesia, 2020), especially from mainstream religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU. Muhammadiyah firmly rejects the policy, because, for Muhammadiyah, the establishment of the National Santri Day will create social barriers, weaken national integration, and revive religious sentiments. (Maharani, 2015). Meanwhile, NU happily accepted and thanked President Joko Widodo for establishing National Santri Day (Putra, 2015).

The establishment of the National Santri Day was apart from the fulfilment of Joko Widodo's political promise in the 2014 presidential election which promised 1 Muharram as Santri Day. (Khairany, 2014), also overlaps with NU's interests. Based on suggestions and input from NU (DetikNews, 2014) Santri Day is set on October 22. NU's choice of October 22 is based on the Declaration of Jihad Resolution calling for the soul, santri, and ulama (Muslim scholar) to remain loyal, and sacrifice to defend Indonesia, which was initiated by Hasyim Asy'ari who served as Rais Akbar of the Nadhlatul Ulama Executive Board (Koesno, 2020).

Second, the policy of establishing the Pesantren and Religious Education Bill into Law Number 18 of 2019 and the ratification of Perppu Number 2 of 2017 into Law Number 16 of 2017. These two policies not only contain controversy but also reap polemics among diverse organizations. NU, MUI, and Ma'ruf Amin, the Vice President-elect, want the Pesantren and Religious Education Bill to be passed immediately, while rejection arises from Muhammadiyah, Al Wasliyah, Perti, and Persis (PinterPolitik, 2019).

There are several things related to the pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) Bill that generate pros and cons. Among other things, the title of the bill, the definition of pesantren, the position of the Pesantren Bill in the national education system, the academic text of the bill, and the scope of the Pesantren Bill have not accommodated the development of pesantren. (Roji, 2019). While in the view of the pro group as conveyed by Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, Minister of Religious Affairs, the law does not intervene in pesantren, but rather maintains pesantren as educational institutions, preaching institutions, and strengthening institutions (Azis, 2019).

Related to the ratification of Perppu No. 2/2017 into Law No. 16/2017 replacing Law No. 17/2013 on Mass Organizations, it also reaps polemic. Broadly speaking, the pros and cons of Law No. 16/2017 rest on the argument of maintaining the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia from the threat of extreme, radical and terrorist groups for the pro group. Meanwhile, the cons argue that this policy discriminates against Islamic mass organizations and deprives them of their democratic rights. (Rosyidin, 2017). The pro-policy stance is represented by NU and Muhammadiyah. (Mursid, 2017) while the religious groups that were rejected were FPI and HTI (Sarwanto, 2017).

Third, after the demonstration of the Islamic Defence Action (FPI), President Joko Widodo issued Perpu (Regulation) Number 2 of 2017 on Mass Organizations (Ormas). This Perpu was issued on the grounds of an emergency, where Law Number 17 of 2013 was inadequate to answer the problems and dynamics of radical organizations. Perpu Number 2 of 2017 then became the legal basis for the revocation of the legal entity of HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights.

NU is at the forefront of supporting the government's policy to dissolve HTI because the Islamic imperial ideology (Khilafah) carried by HTI is very troubling to the people of Indonesia (Rochmat, 2017). To Muhammadiyah, the dissolution of HTI must be following the flow of the rule of law (Republika.co.id, 2017) and Muhammadiyah sees the dissolution of HTI as violating the constitution, and in no way reflecting the rule of law. (Sabandar, 2017).

Fourth, in addition to the state policies mentioned above, there is a different attitude and treatment of the Joko Widodo government towards various events that intersect with religious issues such as the Islamic Defence Action event and the criminalization of ulama. In the case of blasphemy by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), for example, the government's position is considered to be in favour of Ahok.

The masses of Aksi Bela Islam demanded that the state punish Ahok for blaspheming Islam and hurting the feelings of Muslims. (Wardah, 2016). However, not a few responses emerged regarding the action ranging from appeals to follow from the GNPF-MUI, FPI, and FUI groups, to appeals not to follow the action Ketum MUI and Raisul `Am PBNU, Muhammadiyah Youth (Damarjati, 2018). The government also suspects that the Islamic Defence Action (Aksi Bela Islam) is an attempt to overthrow the legitimate government (Pratama & Akbar, 2016). On the other hand, the President and Vice President attended the Islamic Defence Action. (Kresna, 2016) and even praised the action (Aco, 2017).

In addition to Aksi Bela Islam, the arrest of Rizieq Shihab, Muhammad Al Khaththah, Alfian Tanjung, and Bachtiar Nasir (CNN Indonesia, 2019) who stumbled upon legal cases (pornography, treason, hate speech, and money laundering) were considered by certain Islamic groups as an effort to criminalize the Ulama (Muslim scholar). GNPF MUI and FPI condemned the arrests made by the police against these clerics. (Peterson, 2021) even threatened to stage a demonstration (Ayyubi, 2019). PBNU, Said Aqi Siradj stated that there was no criminalization of ulama because the ulama were NU and Muhammadiyah (Novitasari, 2017) KH. Ma`ruf Amin views the arrest of figures considered by GNPF MUI and FPI as scholars, not as an act of criminalization but rather as law enforcement. (Carina, 2018). In line with Ma`ruf Amin's response, President Joko Widodo also said that the arrests of these figures were a form of law enforcement (Saputra, 2018).

### 3. Building Power on a Paradoxical Path

The paradox of the relationship between state and religion under the leadership of President Joko Widodo intersects with the increasingly thickening polarization of Islam, traditional, moderate, and fundamentalist or radical. Policies or events that have occurred during President Joko Widodo's administration show vis-à-vis, traditional groups with fundamentalist or radical groups. The strengthening of polarization and identity politics since the 2014 presidential election has put the Joko Widodo government in a very problematic position and made one of the moderate religious groups a force to support its power. In this context, it can be understood that Joko Widodo is very accommodating to the interests of moderate Islamic groups and antagonistic to fundamentalist groups.

Zeng Wei Jian said President Joko Widodo is a weak figure, and with his weakness, he has become strong (PinterPolitik, 2018). In the Indonesian political scene, Joko Widodo is an outsider, and is neither a military man, nor a political party leader, nor does he belong to a political party. Even Megawati Soekarno Putri, leader of the PDI-Perjuangan (Democratic Party), called President Joko Widodo a party official. (Fauzi, 2015).



Realizing that he is an outsider, and a compiler who does not have a strong political base, Joko Widodo is certainly trying his best to gain and maintain his power. One of them is by appearing contradictory and paradoxical. Bland (2020) called Joko Widodo a contradictory leader with various paradoxical policies. Pederzini & David (2018) mentioned that a paradoxical attitude can save a leader from his weakness. In this context, it can be understood that President Joko Widodo's paradoxical attitude is his strength, which can build a fantasy that he is a powerful leader, and is able to maintain his leadership and power, and win the 2019 presidential election again.

President Joko Widodo's paradoxical stance of building a fantasy of 'he is a powerful leader', to maintain his power, further emphasizes the contestation of the interests of Islamic groups. Before the reformation, NU and Muhammadiyah were two Islamic organizations that fought each other to maintain dominance and influence socially and politically. But after the reformation, the emergence of KISDI, MMI, HTI, FPI, LJ, and JI became a threat to the dominance of NU and Muhammadiyah. This became one of the factors contributing to the entrapment of Islam and the state in a paradoxical relationship.

The trapping of state and religion in a paradoxical relationship is evidence of the obsolescence of the existing concept of state and religion relations. An integralist, secularistic, and symbiotic mutualism paradigm of state and religion relations or antagonistic and accommodating relations between Islam and the state as Effendy (2011), is inadequate to describe the relationship between state and religion. The reason is that the concept of state and religion relations only sees the relationship that occurs between the state and religion, as a relationship between two entities. However, these concepts forget that religion is no longer an intact entity, but a divided entity, caused by the contact between politics and religion.

The intersection of politics and Islam has led to the birth of theological schools of thought (Muatain, 2009). In the modern context, in Indonesia, the encounter between politics and Islam has given birth to traditional, modern, and fundamentalist groups. (Salahudin et al., 2020). These three groups have different understandings of the relationship between the state and religion. The traditional group tries to combine the teachings of Islam with local culture. The moderate group is more open to the modern world, which seeks to modernize Islam. While the fundamentalist group approaches Islam in a formalistic way, where Islam must be applied in a comprehensive (kafah) manner, both in spiritual life (worship) and in religious life.

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