

FINAL AUDIO DOC SCRIPT: “Yayya’s Spiritual Journey”  
Laila Said & Sadig Eltigani

Lead In:

This audio documentary is about the spiritual journey Hari Said embarked on, having been born Greek Orthodox and in an uneducated family. After moving to Cairo, and being exposed to several other religions and experiences, she started questioning her identity and now identifies as agnostic, believing in God, but following no specific religion.

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*Hari Said [HS]: “Neither Christian. I am not Muslim. I believe in God. And I believe that that is more than enough.” (00:04)*

*Fade In: Greek Music.*

Laila Said [LS]: I’m Laila, and that was my ‘yaya’, which means grandmother in Greek.

What makes her special and the star of this documentary, is that she had set out on a lifelong journey to explore the truth as she calls it; perplexed by the different faiths and religions she came across growing up. Adopted at the mere age of four by her father's brother and snatched from a childhood in a small village on the mountains of Troodos in Cyprus...

*Fade Out: Greek Music. (00:12)*

*Fade In: Nature Sound Effect. Fade Out. (00:02)*

[LS]: ... to move into half a room in busy Cairo...

*Fade In: Cairo Streets. Fade Out. (00:02)*

*[HS]: “My name is Hariklia Patsalidou Said. This was of course the first time I encountered other people than Greek. There were Italians, Maltese, Armenians, Jews. My search or my preoccupation about religion... this was very important to me.” (00:22)*

*Fade In: War Sounds. Fade Out. (00:05)*

[LS]: To put things in perspective, in 1938, the British had occupied both Cyprus and Egypt, and so a lot of Cypriots, were being relocated to major cities in Egypt. My yaya's uncle was one of them. And this is *when* and *why* my yaya ended up where she would call home for the rest of her life.

*Fade In: Arabian Music. Fade Out. (00:06)*

[LS]: My partner Sadig will tell you what this story is really about.

Sadig Eltigani [ST]: Well, having been an observant child, she had an increasingly curious approach when it came to religion. Her parents were not very helpful and wouldn't know what to do or say whenever she would ask them about religion.

*[HS]: "I was very uncomfortable when I used to go to church. We used to go every Sunday. It was very hot. There was incense and candles and I was feeling nauseatic and I would go out in the yard to breathe. And then I didn't understand very well what the priest was saying and I don't think the practitioners themselves understood anything." (00:27)*

[LS]: Dr. Yasmine El Shazly is an adjunct professor in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Egyptology at the American University in Cairo.

[ST]: She identifies that religions are generally accepted as a norm by society. While it is a controversial, society generally believes that religion comes first and therefore majorly influences one's identity.

*Yasmine El Shazly [YS]: "I think most people are happy staying where they are because usually religions don't encourage you to question. Or the way people interpret their religion is that it doesn't really encourage you to question. You're supposed to believe without really questioning because if you think of religion using the logic of our world it's not very logical." (00:20)*

*[HS]: "I will not tell you that it's easy. All these things... I never discussed with my mother and father. Not even with - maybe my closest friends." (00:10)*

*[YS]: "So it's better not to question. And some people are always questioning and changing their faith." (00:07)*

*[HS]: "This is something you don't discuss openly. Because they misunderstand you." (00:06)*

[LS]: After meeting Ahmed Said, an Egyptian Muslim, while working in Cairo and having to elope to Beirut to get married because of her parents disapproving, Hari tells us about how her husband and her later came to a religious agreement when it came to raising their children.

*[HS]: "My husband never tried to tell me Islam is better... never. He never talked about religion and I never interfered in the upbringing of our children." (00:11)*

*Sherif Said [SS]: "My mother was very interested in comparative religion. At the time when my father died, I was in high school. The last year of high school." (00:07)*

[LS]: This is Sherif Said, Hari's son.

*[SS]: And then when I entered AUC, I had to explore more and research more. I was interested in religious studies, or comparative religions. And if you ask me about my research papers, all of them are related to religions. Accidentally, my mother has done the same thing, without even having discussed it." (00:22)*

*[HS]: "So all my topics, I used to study what kind of religion this society has. This was very interesting. So all of them, I found out, it is taken. It is an inheritance. It is not that each one studied. And I am telling my friends, are you a Christian because you are sure it's the best religion, or because of your mother and father? Mother and father. It's not a choice. If somebody really studies different religions and chooses one, I admire him." (00:44)*

[ST]: Even though his interest in religious studies was extensive, the tolerance that usually comes with that was rooted rather deeply since HIS childhood. due to his relatively unique upbringing, he remained adamant to Islam.

*[SS]: "By time, I became more tolerant towards other people's ideologies and philosophies and beliefs, that it's okay, everyone could have their own beliefs... no harm. I had many, many Christian friends to the point that we grew up together and then we started forgetting who was Christian and who was Muslim. So, dealing with people as they are... personality, characters, morals.." (00:28)*

*Fade In: Oriental Music.*

[LS]: Society doesn't necessarily think that way, and usually differentiates, and more often than not discriminates, too. Social pressure as well as family criticism are two elements that would push someone towards or away from converting. Since many converts already face criticism from society, many are forced to either be completely outcasted or to accept and embrace their decisions with no shame.

[ST]: And according to the British Broadcasting Corporation, religion is an incredibly sensitive issue that usually leads to Christians and Muslims disowning and refusing to accept their own leaving their congregation. Reasons for women converting after marrying Muslim men include inheritance, the freedom to divorce, and sometimes, even to break away from their families and social circles.

*Fade Out: Oriental Music. (00:41)*

*[HS]: "It is in my nature not to change anything. I don't know... I have this instinct. I don't give away my nationality and I don't change my religion. Why should I change my religion? I believe in God okay. My husband believes in God okay. So why should I change my religion? Many of my Greek friends married Muslims. They changed. They became Muslims without knowing anything about Islam." (00:21)*

[LS]: Inspired by his mother's book on Gandhi, Sherif set out on his own journey.

*[SS]: "Right after I finished university, I just took my clothes and my backpack and went to India to explore Hinduism and to seek after truth. I found it afterwards, just in my room." (00:26)*

*[HS]: "Everybody has something to believe inside of him. It's not a guidance, actually. It's to believe, to feel protected, to feel somebody... Like your father for example, you have your father at home. You know that he'll protect you always, so God's like a big father. So I believed this... so I didn't believe that I needed religion. But the faith, yes. The faith... I believe it, I believe in god. Very much. There is a difference between religion and faith. To practice religion is a different thing from faith." (00:30)*

*Fade In: Oriental Music.*

[ST]: And this faith she talks about having attained will remain rooted in her very being, going to show that no matter what society you live in or upbringing you come from...

[LS]: That no matter what and how many people you may come across, if you remain true to yourself and your instincts... no one can tell you otherwise. you are always protected by the Divine.

*Fade Out: Oriental Music. (00:18)*

[ST]: I'm Sadig El Tigani...

[LS]: ...and I'm Laila Said...

[ST]: ...for the Audio Production course at AUC supervised by Professor Kim Fox.

Special thanks to our interviewees Mrs. Hari Said, Mr. Sherif Said and Dr. Yasmine El Shazly. As for the music, credit goes to TMSC for the traditional Greek music, and to Motion Array for the instrumental Oriental music.