

de Volkskrant

Former minister Johan Witteveen remained
a visionary until his death,
eager to give his unsalted opinion



As finance minister, Johan Witteveen introduced the VAT and then became director of the IMF.

But as a prominent Sufi, he was also convinced that in addition to the material world there is a spiritual world in which much deeper happiness can be found.

He would have liked to wait a little while before he died, because he wasn't sure what it would look like in the afterlife, he told Tuesday in *De Volkskrant's* ' [The Sentence of Life](#) '. He even had a cruise to Iceland in June in the agenda.

But one day after the publication of the interview, Johan Witteveen (97), formerly Minister of Finance for the VVD and director of the IMF, died unexpectedly. "There are many economists, but there is only one Witteveen," said economist Jan Pen about him. Witteveen was an outspoken keynesian and an advocate of government stimulation. In his autobiography *The Magic of Harmony* , published in 2012, he called himself a 'social-liberal'.

< But Witteveen was not blinded by money. "People need to be aware that in addition to a material world there is also a spiritual world in which there is much deeper happiness," he said in an interview with this newspaper in 2010. He was a prominent member of the Sufi movement, a school of life or mystical movement focused on connecting Eastern and Western religions. He regularly led the ceremonies that were held in the temple in Katwijk. He also had tragedy in his life. His son Willem and wife and daughter died in the attack on flight MH17. At the age of 50, he lost another son due to pneumonia.

Witteveen himself was the son of Rotterdam urban planner Willem Witteveen, who founded the Witteveen + Bos architectural firm, and Anne-Marie Wibaut, a daughter of Amsterdam councilor Floor Wibaut. His parents were already captivated by Sufism, and at the age of 18 Johan Witteveen was also introduced. He studied at the then Economic College in Rotterdam, where after obtaining his doctoral degree he first became a lecturer and later a professor and rector-magnificus. He also contributed to the construction of the new Central Planning Office.

In 1958 he became a member of the Senate for the VVD. He became Minister of Finance in the Marijnen cabinet for the first time in 1963, and two years later fell on broadcasting policy. Between 1967 and 1971 he was again Minister of Finance in the De Jong cabinet. In September 1964, he raised the alarm about the government deficit due to rising wages and social security spending, which was called "the Gat van Witteveen." In his second period, he introduced VAT, among other things. But he was a visionary who knew back then that monetary union would not work. On February 9, 1965, he told the Lower House that Member States with a common currency gave each other a blank check. "A single currency can only be the final piece of full European integration."

In 1973, he became director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), one of the most prestigious positions in the financial world, now held by Christine Lagarde. A year later, he was confronted with the enormous consequences of the oil crisis, causing several countries to run into serious problems with the balance of payments. In 2013, he called the cuts by the Rutte cabinet a 'collective psychosis'. Until his death he continued to be involved with many things. He often received journalists in his study in Wassenaar, where he treated them to his unsalted opinions ("Capitalism has become a growth machine that drags people into earning and consuming money"). He also corresponded with Chancellor Angela Merkel, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and French President Emmanuel Macron.AD .