



JIMENA

JIMENA's Jewish-Iranian Resource Guide

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J I M E N A

For over 2,700 years, Jewish communities have lived continuously in Iran, tracing their origins to the Babylonian exile when the destruction of Jerusalem scattered Jews across the ancient Near East. Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions in Iran, and long before the advent of Islam, Jews played a vital role in shaping Persian civilization.

Across centuries, Iranian Jews contributed to the rich, diverse tapestry of Persian society—as physicians, poets, merchants, and community leaders. Yet, their place in society often depended on the religious tolerance of the ruling power. During the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736), Jews faced severe restrictions: they were barred from appearing in public during rain or snow, forced to wear identifying badges, and publicly labeled as “impure” under the regime’s interpretation of Shi’a Islamic law. The Afsharid dynasty (1736–1796) brought temporary relief, only for repression to return under the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925).

The 1906 Constitutional Revolution and subsequent modernization under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) dramatically improved conditions for Iran’s religious minorities. Legal reforms curtailed the power of clerics, and thousands of Jews rose out of poverty, gained access to education, and took part in Iranian public life. Many regard this era as a “Golden Age” for Iran’s Jews.



That hope was shattered with the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The newly established Islamic Republic redefined Iran's national identity through a narrow theocratic lens, relegating Jews and other non-Muslims to second-class status. Once numbering between 80,000 and 100,000, Iran's Jewish population has since dwindled to fewer than 10,000. Today, the regime uses the existence of this small and increasingly silenced community to deny charges of antisemitism while actively promoting anti-Zionist and anti-Western propaganda.

In the aftermath of the 2025 Iran-Israel War and the alarming resurgence of anti-Jewish rhetoric, JIMENA has created a living resource guide on the Iranian Jewish experience. This guide includes lesson plans, testimonies, poetry, articles, social media content, and historical documentation to preserve and elevate the voices of Iranian Jews—past and present. It is the first in a series of educational toolkits designed to explore the histories, cultures, and contemporary realities of Jewish communities from the Middle East and North Africa.

Through this guide, we honor a community whose story continues to unfold—despite exile, erasure, and persecution—with resilience, dignity, and pride.

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[I Was an Iranian Jewish Refugee - JIMENA](#)

As part of the Summer 2023 Issue of *Distinctions*, a Mizrahi and Sephardi literary journal, Tabby Refael shares her experience of being an Iranian Jewish Refugee.



[Jews in Islamic Countries: Iran - Jewish Virtual Library](#)

This article by the Jewish Virtual Library gives a detailed account of Jewish history in Iran.



[Viewing Antisemitism Through the Lens of My Mizrahi Experience - JIMENA](#)

In the Summer 2023 featured article of *Distinctions*, a Mizrahi and Sephardi literary journal, Sharon Nazarian describes her experience leaving Iran during the Revolution and its interconnectedness to contemporary work to combat antisemitism.



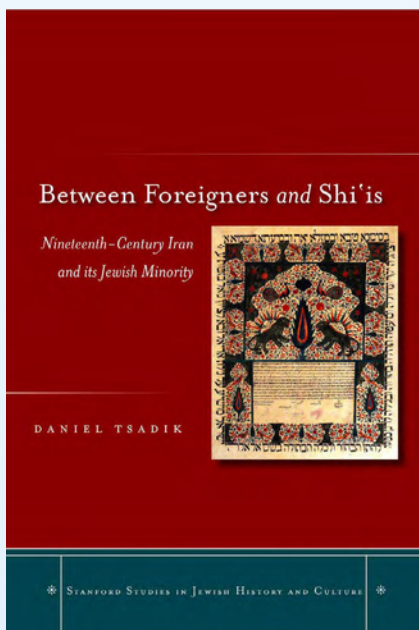
[When Is It Time to Leave? - JIMENA](#)

The featured article in the Winter 2024 Issue of *Distinctions*, a Mizrahi and Sephardi literary journal, author Elliott Benjamin describes the parallels felt between the decision to leave Iran in the wake of the 1979 Revolution and today's rising wave of antisemitism following October 7th.



[Legacy of Jews in Iran- World Jewish Congress](#)

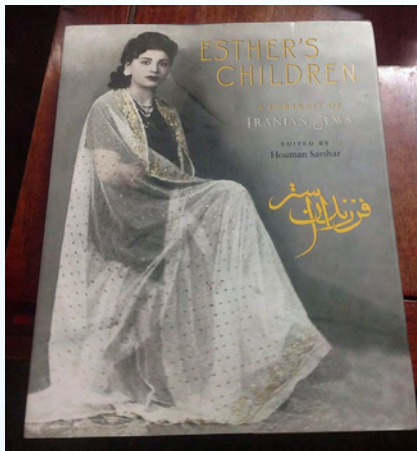
This article by the World Jewish Congress gives an account of the history of the Jews of Iran.



[Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and its Jewish Minority - Daniel Tsadik](#)

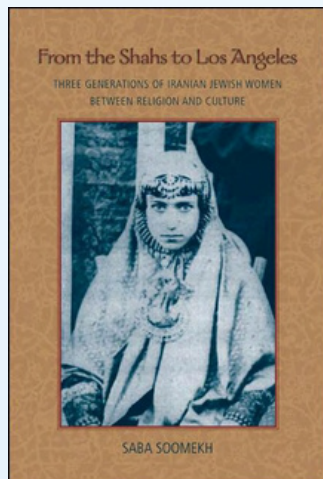
Based on archival and primary sources in Persian, Hebrew, Judeo-Persian, Arabic, and European languages, *Between Foreigners and Shi'is* examines the Jews' religious, social, and political status in nineteenth-century Iran. This book, which focuses on Nasir al-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896), is the first comprehensive scholarly attempt to weave all these threads into a single tapestry. This case study of the Jewish minority illuminates broader processes pertaining to other religious minorities and Iranian society in general, and the interaction among intervening foreigners, the Shi'i majority, and local Jews helps us understand Iranian dilemmas that have persisted well beyond the second half of the nineteenth century.

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Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews - Houman Sarshar

This magnificent volume makes available for the first time a comprehensive history of the Jews of Iran -- from their earliest documented settlement in that land in 722 B.C.E. through the end of the 20th century.



From the Shahs to Los Angeles: Three Generations of Iranian Jewish Women Between Religion and Culture - Saba Soomekh

A fascinating look at the lives, culture, and religious and ritual observance of three generations of Iranian Jewish women in the United States.

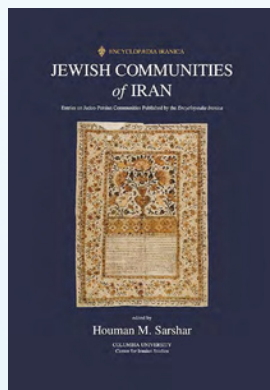


Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages - Amnon Netzer; Shaul Shaked



[Irano-Judaica VII - Amnon Netzer; Shaul Shaked](#)

Studies relating to Jewish contacts with Persian culture throughout the ages.



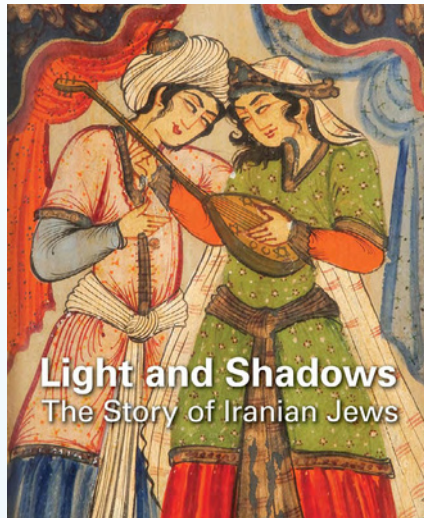
[Jewish Communities of Iran - Houman Sarshar](#)

A collection of entries from Encyclopaedia Iranica on Judeo-Persian Communities.



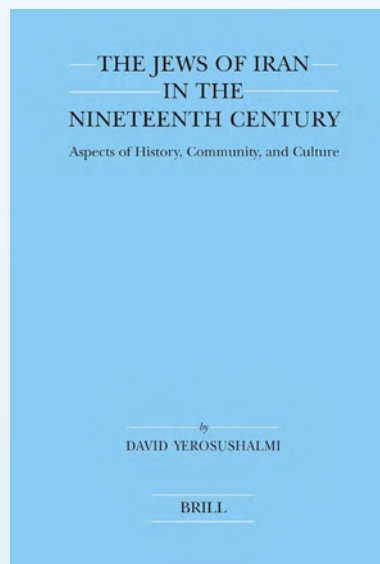
[Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith - Mehrdad Amanat](#)

For minority faith groups living in nineteenth-century Iran, religious conversion to Islam -- both voluntary and forced -- was the primary means of social integration and assimilation. However, why was it that some Persian Jews instead embraced the emergent Baha'i Faith, which was subject to harsher persecution than Judaism? Mehrdad Amanat explores the conversion experiences of Jewish families during this time, and examines the fluid, multiple religious identities that many converts adopted. The religious fluidity exemplified in the widespread voluntary conversion of Iranian Jews to Baha'ism presents an alternative to the rejectionist view of religion that regards millennia of religious experience as inherently coercive, oppressive, rigidly dogmatic and a consistently divisive social force.



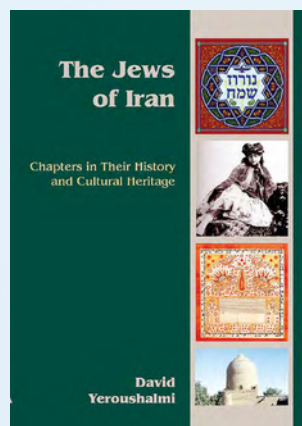
[**Light and Shadows: The Story of Iranian Jews - David Yeroushalmi**](#)

Light and Shadows highlights the 2,700-year history of Jews in Iran. It reveals centuries of oppression, fascinating cultural borrowings, and great artistic achievements. The story is told through rare archaeological artifacts, illuminated manuscripts, beautiful ritual objects and amulets, ceremonial garments, musical instruments, photographs, and more.



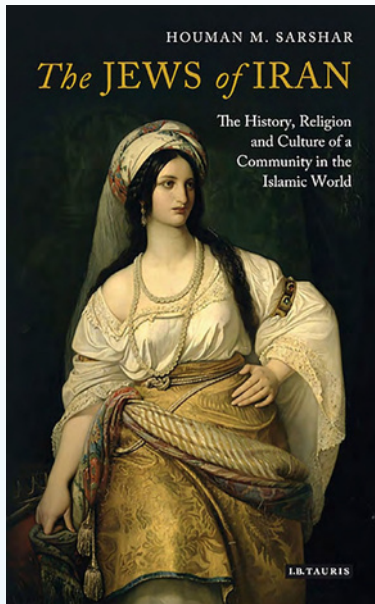
[**The Jews of Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Aspects of History, Community, and Culture - David Yeroushalmi**](#)

Dealing with some of the main aspects of general history among the Jews of nineteenth-century Iran, this book provides the reader with over 40 selected archival and published sources. Analyzed and annotated in detail, the sources shed light on the general history, community, culture, and religion among Iran's widely scattered Jewish communities.



[**The Jews of Iran: Chapters in their History and Cultural Heritage - David Yeroushalmi**](#)

The present work provides a historical overview of Jews living on Iranian soil and offers studies dealing with specific facets of their centuries old cultural heritage.



[The Jews of Iran: The History, Religion and Culture of a Community in the Islamic World - Houshan M. Sarshar](#)

The Jews of Iran offers in-depth analysis of the material and visual culture of this community. Additionally, an exploration of modern novels and accounts of Jewish-Iranian women's experiences sheds light on the social history and transformations of the Jews of Iran from the rule of Cyrus the Great (c. 600-530 BCE) to the Iranian Revolution of 1978/9 and onto the present day.



[A Persian Passover - Etan Basseri](#)

Ezra and Roza are helping to prepare for their Passover celebration. Ezra is proud to be in charge of bringing his family's flour to the synagogue to be baked into matzah in a traditional wood-burning oven. But when Ezra makes a mistake and the matzah is ruined, what will he and his sister Roza, do? Join the siblings as they experience the sights, smells, sounds, and unique traditions of a seder in Iran of the 1950s.



[A Persian Princess - Barbara Diamond Goldin, Steliyana Doneva](#)

Raya can't be in the Purim play this year--Purim will be no fun at all! But her grandmother, Maman joon, shares with Raya her sparkly scarves and Persian traditions. Together they discover how to make their American Purim uniquely Persian, delicious, and fun.

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[Curriculum Unit: "Fowler Museum at UCLA: Light and Shadows: The Story of Iranian Jews"](#)

Created by the Fowler Museum at UCLA, this comprehensive unit on Iran's oldest religious minority explores how various challenges have affected the character of Jewish life in the country.



[JIMENA's Educational Experience: Iran](#)

JIMENA compiled Jewish history, testimony, and culture of Iran's Jewish population in an easily-accessible format to better understand the Jewish experience in Iran.



[Lesson Plan: Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews, Grades 9–12](#)

JIMENA's lesson plan outlines curriculum for high school students focused on understanding antisemitism, particularly in relation to Middle Eastern-American Jews, their history, and the impact of discrimination in the United States.



[Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit - Lesson 4: Jewish Iranian Languages](#)

In collaboration with the Jewish Language Project, JIMENA's Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit takes a closer look at Jewish languages from Iran and how they became endangered.

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[AJC Forgotten Exodus podcast featuring Chef Einat Admony and Houman Sarshar](#)

This podcast is a conversation with Einat Admony, a chef, cookbook author, comedian, and social media star who grew up in Bnei Brak, Israel who has parents from Iran and Yemen. She talks about Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Iran and memories of spices and perfumes that inspire her dishes.



[AJC's Forgotten Exodus Podcast featuring Saba Soomekh and Roya Hakakian.](#)

Author, journalist, and poet Roya Hakakian shares her personal story of growing up Jewish in Iran during the reign of the Shah and then Ayatollah Khomeini, which she wrote about in her memoir *Journey From the Land of No*. She is joined by Dr. Saba Soomekh, a professor of world religions and Middle Eastern history.



[Sapir Conversations featuring Roya Hakakian and Mehdi Yahyanejad](#)

SAPIR Institute Director Chanan Weissman moderated a conversation between SAPIR contributors and prominent Iranian-American activists – Roya Hakakian, an acclaimed writer and author, Mehdi Yahyanejad, a tech entrepreneur who founded methods to bypass censorship in Iran.



[The Nightingale of Iran featuring Danielle and Galeet Dardashti](#)

In the 1950s, a religious Jew – Younes Dardashti – became a national celebrity, singing at the Shah's palace and on the radio. In the 1960s, his son Farid became a teen idol on TV. They were beloved by Iranian Muslims. But at the height of their fame, they left the country. Why did their family leave Iran? Now, in a documentary podcast series, the sisters reveal painful secrets unspoken for generations.

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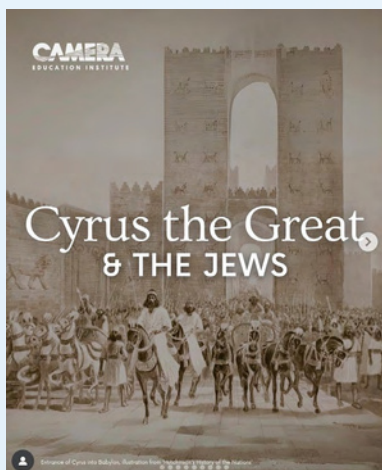
[Eress Ha-Qedoosha](#)

This poem, part of the art exhibit in JIMENA's *Distinctions'* Second Edition, written by 19th century Iranian Jewish poet Yaghoub Rashti explores themes of redemption, holiness, and the divine.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA + AJC: History of the Jews of Iran](#)

This collaborative post between JIMENA and the American Jewish Committee describes the history of the Jews in Iran.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA + CAMERA: Cyrus the Great and the Jews](#)

This collaborative post between JIMENA and CAMERA on Campus describes the ancient relationship between the famous Persian king Cyrus the Great and his treatment of Jews.

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[Instagram Post - JIMENA + Matthew Nouriel:](#)

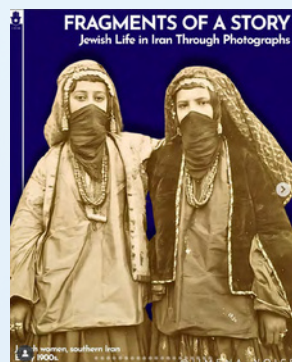
[Nowruz/Purim, 2024](#)

Learn about the connection between Nowruz, Persian New Year, and Purim, a Jewish holiday which happened in Persia.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Persian Purim Post](#)

This Instagram post describes the Jewish holiday of Purim and its connection to Iran.

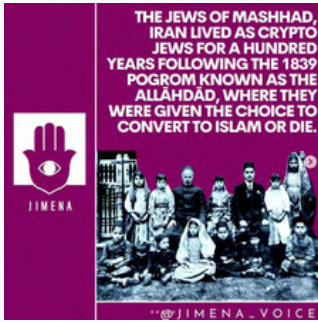


[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Fragments of a Story:](#)

[Jewish Life in Iran Through Photographs](#)

This Instagram post shares historical photos of the Jews of Iran.

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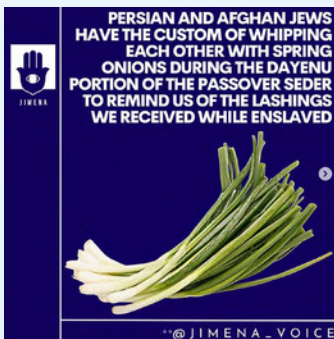
[Instagram Post - JIMENA: History of the Jews of Mashhad](#)

Learn more about the history of the Jews of Mashhad, Iran.



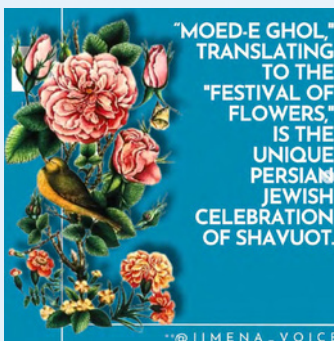
[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Jews Under the Islamic Republic](#)

This Instagram post describes the treatment of Jews under the Islamic Republic in Iran.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Persian Passover Traditions](#)

Learn about Persian Passover Traditions in this Instagram Post.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Persian Shavuot/Moed-e-Gol](#)

Learn about the Persian Jewish customs for Shavuot, also known as Moed-e Gol.

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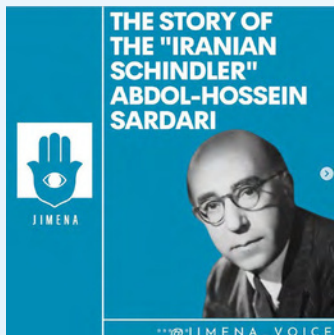
[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Recipe for Gondi](#)

Learn how to make a traditional Iranian-Jewish dish called Gondi in this Instagram post.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: The Case of Arvin Ghahremani](#)

JIMENA's Instagram post about the case of Arvin Ghahremani, the young Iranian Jewish man executed for murder in 2024. The post highlights the legal inequalities in the Islamic Republic for non-Muslims. Following his execution, JIMENA created a post in collaboration with Matthew Nouriel.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: The Story of the "Iranian Schindler"](#)

This Instagram post describes an important figure in the Jewish history of Iran, Abdol-Hossien Sardari.



[Instagram Post - JIMENA: Nowruz and its Connection with Iranian Jews](#)

This Instagram post shares the ancient connection between Nowruz, Persian New Year, and Iran's Jews.

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[Instagram Post - Matthew Nouriel: Jews in a Post-Revolution Iran](#)

Director of Community Engagement, Matthew Nouriel, shares their family's experience of living and escaping the Islamic Republic Regime.



[Instagram Post - Matthew Nouriel: Why Do So many Iranians Stand with Israel?](#)

In this Instagram post, Director of Community Engagement Matthew Nouriel describes reasons why so many Iranians stand with Israel.



[Instagram Post - The Mizrahi History](#)

Rabbi Hakakian, an Iranian-Jewish individual singing the song "Be Jahan Khoram Az Anam."



[JIMENA's Instagram Account](#)

JIMENA's Instagram Account posts daily and weekly updates about current events, preserving cultural and religious heritage, and routinely collaborates with other Jewish nonprofits.

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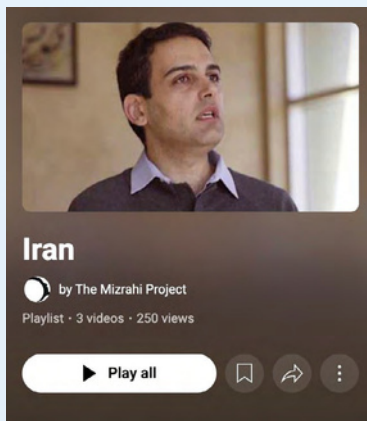
[Vimeo - JIMENA Oral History Project: Abraham Berookhim Testimony](#)

Abraham Berookhim shares his story of how a luxury hotel owner survived and escaped Tehran following the Iranian Islamic Revolution.



[Vimeo - JIMENA Oral History Project: Angella Nazarian's Testimony](#)

As a part of JIMENA's Oral History Project, Angella Nazarian describes her experience as an Iranian Jew.



[YouTube - The Mizrahi Project: Iran Playlist](#)

This series of three short videos provide an insight into Iranian Jewish life pre-Revolution and the diaspora community's relationship to Israel.

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[Before the Revolution: The untold story of the Israeli paradise in Iran](#)

A documentary thriller describing the last days of the Israeli community in Tehran, on the eve of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The director, whose family was in Tehran at the time, uses rare archive materials to illustrate how thousands of Israelis, who enjoyed unusual affinity with the Shah's regime, wake up one morning to find their paradise vanished.



[From Babylonia to Beverly Hills](#)

Iranian Jewish families talk about their past in Iran in Tanaz Eshaghian's 2003 documentary. The film touches on the increasingly hostile circumstances in Iran during and following the Islamic Revolution for the Jewish community, which forced them to flee their own country in order to secure a better future for their children.



[Vimeo - JIMENA: A Special Conversation with Dr. Sharon Nazarian](#)

In this interview between JIMENA's Director of Community Foundation and Dr. Sharon Nazarian, an Iranian-Jewish activist a discussion on contemporary political issues touches on antisemitism, free speech, and how Dr. Nazarian's experience and advocacy colors her view on these topics.

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[Vimeo - JIMENA: The Iranian Jewish Experience, a Conversation with Tabby Refael](#)

Tabby Refael, a columnist for the Jewish Journal, describes her background, upbringing, and offers a virtual tour of Jewish Iran.



[YouTube - Harif: The Secret Jews of Mashhad](#)

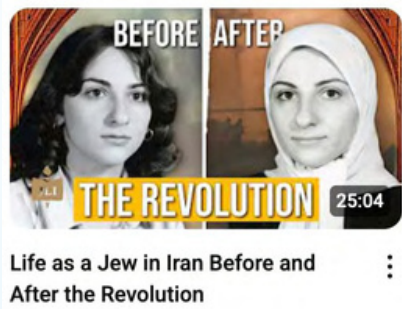
To commemorate the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from Arab Countries and Iran, the Birmingham Representative Council for Jews invited Rachel Freedman to talk about her roots in the Persian city of Mashhad. In 1839, the Jews were ordered to convert to Islam, but continued to practice Judaism in secret.



[YouTube - JIMENA: Persian Jewish Music and pre-Kabbalat Shabbat with Galeet Dardashti](#)

JIMENA hosted a virtual Kabbalat Shabbat with Galeet Dardashti, exploring the Judeo-Persian musical tradition through both recorded and live music samples. This session was part of JIMENA's Iranian Jewish Women's Series.

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[YouTube - My Jewish Learning: Life as a Jew in Iran Before and After the Revolution](#)

My Jewish Learning describes the life of Jews before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.



[YouTube - Project Mosaics: The Jews of Tehran, Iran](#)

Roya Hakakian on immigration & Jewish peoplehood



[YouTube - Unpacked: Who are the Jews of Iran?](#)

In a country often seen as hostile to Jews, Iran's Jewish community remains one of the oldest in the Middle East. Nearly 10,000 Jews continue to practice their faith, operating synagogues, kosher restaurants, and schools, even under the watchful eye of the regime.

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[YouTube - Unpacked: Why did an Iranian Muslim save Jews in the Holocaust?](#)

This unpacked Youtube Video describes how Sardari brilliantly leveraged his connections with Nazi officers to deceive them. This bold strategy allowed him to issue hundreds of Iranian passports to Jewish refugees, enabling them to escape persecution and certain death.



[YouTube - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Abdolhossein Sardari: An Iranian Hero of the Holocaust](#)

Abdolhossein Sardari, an Iranian diplomat living in Paris, issued many passports to Iranian and non-Iranian Jews during the Holocaust in the hopes of protecting them from Nazi persecution. A collaboration between Iran Wire and the US Holocaust Museum, this film is about Iran's legacy and the Holocaust.



[YouTube - World Jewish Congress: The Iranian Revolution and its impact on Iran's Jews](#)

This short video describes the Jewish experience of Iran's Islamic Revolution.