

Persian Jews

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Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)

Iranian Jews

Total population

~300,000–350,000 (est.)

Regions with significant populations

 Israel	200,000 ^[1] -250,000 ^[2]
 United States	60,000–80,000 ^[1]
 Iran	~25,000 ^[3]
 Australia	~740 ^[4]
 United Kingdom	Unknown (N/A)

Languages

Historically: [Persian languages](#), [Judeo-Persian languages](#), [Judeo-Aramaic language](#), [Judeo-Kurdish](#)

Modern: [Persian](#), [Hebrew](#), [English](#)

Religion

[Judaism](#)

Related ethnic groups

[Bukharan Jews](#), [Kurdish Jews](#), [Mountain Jews](#),
[Mizrahi Jews](#), [Persians](#), [Jews](#)

Persian Jews ([Hebrew](#): פרסים) ([Persian](#): یهودیان ایرانی), are [Jews](#) historically associated with [Iran](#), traditionally known as *Persia* in Western sources.

Jews have had a continued presence in Iran since the first [Achaemenid](#) king, [Cyrus the Great](#), freed the [Jews of Babylon from captivity](#). As such, Judaism is among the oldest religions practiced in Iran and the Biblical [Book of Esther](#) contains references to the experiences of the Jews in Persia.

Today, the three largest concentrations of Persian Jews are found in Israel, the United States, and Iran respectively.

Contents

[\[hide\]](#)

- [1 Terminology](#)
- [2 Demographics](#)
 - [2.1 Israel](#)
 - [2.2 The United States](#)
 - [2.3 Iran](#)
 - [2.4 Other communities](#)
- [3 History](#)
 - [3.1 Cyrus the Great and Jews](#)
 - [3.2 Second Temple](#)
 - [3.3 Haman and Jews](#)
 - [3.4 Parthian period](#)
 - [3.5 Sassanid period \(226–634 CE\)](#)
 - [3.6 Early Islamic period \(634–1255\)](#)
 - [3.7 Mongol rule \(1256–1318\)](#)
 - [3.8 Safavid and Qajar dynasties \(1502–1925\)](#)
 - [3.9 Pahlavi dynasty \(1925–1979\)](#)
 - [3.10 Islamic Republic \(1979–present\)](#)
- [4 Current status in Iran](#)
 - [4.1 Conditions](#)
 - [4.2 Contacts with Jews outside Iran](#)
 - [4.3 Jewish centres of Iran](#)
- [5 Jewish education in Iran](#)
 - [5.1 Jewish attractions of Iran](#)
- [6 Persian Jews outside Iran](#)
 - [6.1 Israel](#)
 - [6.2 California](#)
 - [6.3 New York](#)
- [7 Related Jewish communities](#)
 - [7.1 Uzbekistan and Tajikistan](#)
 - [7.2 Azerbaijan](#)
 - [7.3 Afghanistan](#)
 - [7.4 Pakistan](#)
 - [7.5 Kazakhstan](#)
- [8 Languages](#)
- [9 Notable Persian Jews](#)
 - [9.1 Biblical](#)
 - [9.2 Pre-modern era](#)
 - [9.3 Politics](#)
 - [9.4 Science and academia](#)
 - [9.5 Business and economics](#)
 - [9.6 Art and entertainment](#)
 - [9.7 Religion](#)
 - [9.8 Miscellaneous](#)
- [10 See also](#)
- [11 Notes](#)
- [12 References](#)
- [13 External links](#)

[\[edit\]](#) Terminology

Today the term *Iranian Jews* is mostly used to refer to Jews from the country of [Iran](#). In various scholarly and historical texts, the term is used to refer to Jews who speak various [Iranian languages](#). Iranian immigrants in

Israel (nearly all of whom are Jewish) are referred to as *Parsim* ([Hebrew](#): פרסים meaning "Persians"). In Iran, Jews and Jewish people in general are referred to by four common terms: *Kalimi*, which is considered the most proper term; *Yahudi*, which is less formal but correct; *Israel* the term by which the Jews refer to themselves; and *Jood* or *Johood*, a term having negative connotations and considered by many Jews as offensive.^{[[citation needed](#)]}

[\[edit\]](#) Demographics

The Jewish Encyclopedia estimated that in 1900 there were 35,000 Persian Jews in the world (almost all of whom lived in present-day Iran),^{[[5](#)]} although other sources estimate somewhat higher numbers for the same time. On the eve of Israel's independence in 1948, there were, by varying estimates, 100,000^{[[3](#)]}-150,000 Jews in Iran with relatively few Persian Jews residing outside the country. Today, there are an estimated 300,000–350,000 Jews of full or partial Persian ancestry living predominantly in Israel, with significant communities in the United States and Iran.

[\[edit\]](#) Israel

The largest group of Persian Jews is found in [Israel](#). As of 2007, Israel is home to just over 47,000 Iranian-born Jews and roughly 87,000 Israeli-born Jews with fathers born in Iran.^{[[6](#)]} While these numbers add up to about 135,000, when Israelis with more distant or solely maternal Iranian roots are included the total number of Persian Jews in Israel is estimated to be between 200,000^{[[1](#)]}-250,000.^{[[2](#)]}

[\[edit\]](#) The United States

The United States is home to 60,000–80,000 Iranian Jews, most of whom have settled in the [Greater Los Angeles area](#) and in [Great Neck, New York](#). Those in metropolitan Los Angeles have settled mostly in the affluent [Westside](#) cities of [Beverly Hills](#) and [Santa Monica](#) and the Los Angeles Westside neighborhoods of [Brentwood](#), [Westwood](#), and [West L.A.](#), as well as the [San Fernando Valley](#) communities of [Tarzana](#) and [Encino](#). According to the former mayor of Beverly Hills, Iranians make up at least a fifth of the resident population of Beverly Hills (the large majority of them Jewish),^{[[7](#)]} and a third of the student body at the [local high school](#).^{[[8](#)][[9](#)]} Following the 1979 [Iranian Revolution](#), tens of thousands of Persian Jews migrated from Iran, forming one of the wealthiest waves of immigrants to ever come to the United States.^{[[10](#)]}

[\[edit\]](#) Iran

Iran's Jewish population was reduced from 100,000–150,000 in 1948 to about 80,000 immediately before the [Iranian Revolution](#), due mostly to [immigration to Israel](#). While immigration to Israel had slowed in the 1970s and the Jewish population of Iran had stabilized, the majority of Iran's remaining Jews left the country in the aftermath of the overthrow of [the Shah](#). The current Jewish population of Iran is estimated by most sources to be 25,000,^{[[11](#)][[12](#)][[13](#)][[14](#)]} though estimates vary, as low as 11,000^{[[15](#)]} and as high as 40,000.^{[[16](#)]} Notable population centers include [Tehran](#), [Isfahan](#) (1,200),^{[[17](#)]} and [Shiraz](#). Historically, Jews maintained a presence in many more Iranian cities. Jews are protected in the Iranian constitution and seat is reserved for a Jew in the [Majlis](#).^{[[12](#)]} Iran hosts the largest Jewish population of any Muslim-majority country.^{[[18](#)]} After Israel, it is home to the second-largest Jewish population in the Middle East.^{[[11](#)]}

Jews in [Iran](#) are generally regarded as having been subject to less discrimination than in the [Arab world](#), however after [Ayatollah Khomeini](#)'s [Islamic Revolution](#), the [Jewish](#) people and religion have been regularly defamed by the [Mullahs](#).^{[[19](#)]}

[\[edit\]](#) Other communities

Iranian Jews also emigrated to form smaller communities in [Western Europe](#) (in particular Paris and London), and in Australia, Canada, and South America. A number of groups of Jews of Persia have split off since ancient times. They have been identified as separate communities, such as the [Bukharan Jews](#) and [Mountain Jews](#). In addition, there are a large number of people in Iran who are, or who are the direct descendants of, Jews who converted to [Islam](#) or the [Bahá'í faith](#).^[20]

[\[edit\]](#) History

Main article: [History of Jews in Iran](#)

The beginnings of Jewish history in the area of present-day Iran date back to late biblical times. The biblical books of [Isaiah](#), [Daniel](#), [Ezra](#), [Nehemiah](#), [Chronicles](#), and [Esther](#) contain references to the life and experiences of Jews in Persia. In the book of Ezra, the Persian kings are credited with permitting and enabling the Jews to return to [Jerusalem](#) and rebuild their Temple; its reconstruction was affected "according to the decree of [Cyrus](#), and [Darius](#), and [Artaxerxes](#) king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14). This great event in Jewish history took place in the late sixth century BCE, by which time there was a well-established and influential Jewish community in Persia.

Jews in ancient Persia mostly lived in their own communities. Persian Jews lived in the ancient (and until the mid-20th century still extant) communities not only of Iran, but of present-day [Azerbaijan](#), and [Uzbekistan](#).

Some of the communities have been isolated from other Jewish communities, to the extent that their classification as "Persian Jews" is a matter of [linguistic](#) or [geographical](#) convenience rather than actual historical relationship with one another. Scholars believe that during the peak of the Persian Empire, Jews may have comprised as much as 20% of the population.^[21]

According to *[Encyclopædia Britannica](#)*: "The Jews trace their heritage in Iran to the [Babylonian Exile](#) of the 6th century BC and, like the Armenians, have retained their ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity."^[22] But the [Library of Congress](#)'s country study on Iran states that "Over the centuries the Jews of Iran became physically, culturally, and linguistically indistinguishable from the non-Jewish population. The overwhelming majority of Jews speak Persian as their mother language, and a tiny minority, Kurdish."^[23]

[\[edit\]](#) Cyrus the Great and Jews





[Cyrus the Great](#) allowing Hebrew pilgrims to return to the [Land of Israel](#) and rebuild Jerusalem

According to the Bible, three times during the 6th century BCE, [Nebuchadnezzar](#) exiled the [Jews](#) (Hebrews) of the ancient [Kingdom of Judah](#) to [Babylon](#). These three separate occasions are mentioned in [Jeremiah](#) (52:28–30). The first exile was in the time of [Jehoiachin](#) in 597 BCE, when the [Temple of Jerusalem](#) was partially despoiled and a [number of the leading citizens removed](#). After eleven years (during the reign of [Zedekiah](#)), a fresh rising of the Judaeans occurred. Jerusalem was razed to the ground, and deportation ensued. Finally, five years later, Jeremiah recorded a third captivity.

After the overthrow of [Babylonia](#) by the [Persian \(Iranian\) Achaemenid Empire](#), [Cyrus the Great](#) allowed the Jews to return to their native land (537 BCE). More than forty thousand were said to have done so, (See [Jehoiakim](#); [Ezra](#); [Nehemiah](#) and [Jews](#)). Unlike the previous Assyrian and Babylonian rulers, Cyrus also allowed the Jews to practice their religion freely (See [Cyrus Cylinder](#)).

[edit] [Second Temple](#)

Main article: [Second Temple](#)

Cyrus ordered rebuilding the [Second Temple](#) in the same place as the first; however, he died before it was completed. [Darius the Great](#) came to power in the Persian empire and ordered the completion of the temple. According to the Bible, the prophets [Haggai](#) and [Zechariah](#) urged this work. The temple was ready for consecration in the spring of 515 BCE, more than twenty years after the Jews' return to Jerusalem.

[edit] [Haman and Jews](#)

According to the [Book of Esther](#), in the [Tanakh](#), [Haman](#) was an [Agagite](#) noble and [vizier](#) of the [empire](#) under Persian King [Ahasuerus](#), generally identified as [Xerxes the Great](#) (son of Darius the Great) in [6th century BCE](#).^[24] Haman and his wife Zeresh instigated a plot to kill all the Jews of ancient [Persia](#). The plot was foiled by Queen [Esther](#), Queen of [Persia](#). As a result, Esther ordered the hanging of Haman and his ten sons. The events of the Book of Esther are celebrated as the holiday of [Purim](#).

[edit] [Parthian period](#)

Jewish sources contain no mention of the [Parthian](#) influence; "Parthia" does not appear in the texts. The [Armenian](#) prince Sanatroces, of the royal house of the Arsacides, is mentioned in the "Small Chronicle" as one of the successors (*diadochoi*) of [Alexander](#). Among other Asiatic princes, the Roman rescript in favor of the Jews reached [Arsaces](#) as well (I Macc. xv. 22); it is not, however, specified which Arsaces. Not long after this, the Partho-Babylonian country was trodden by the army of a Jewish prince; the [Syrian](#) king, [Antiochus](#) Sidetes, marched, in company with Hyrcanus I., against the Parthians; and when the allied armies defeated the Parthians (129 BC) at the [Great Zab](#) (Lycus), the king ordered a halt of two days on account of the [Jewish Sabbath](#) and [Feast of Weeks](#). In 40 BC the Jewish puppet-king, [Hyrcanus](#) II., fell into the hands of the Parthians, who, according to their custom, cut off his ears in order to render him unfit for rulership. The Jews of Babylonia, it seems, had the intention of founding a high-priesthood for the exiled [Hyrcanus](#), which they would have made quite independent of the [Land of Israel](#). But the reverse was to come about: the Judeans received a Babylonian, Ananel by name, as their high priest which indicates the importance enjoyed by the Jews of Babylonia. Still in religious matters the [Babylonians](#), as indeed the whole diaspora, were in many regards dependent upon the Land of Israel. They went on pilgrimages to [Jerusalem](#) for the festivals.

The [Parthian Empire](#) was based on a loosely configured system of vassal kings. The lack of rigidly centralized rule over the empire had drawbacks, for instance, allowing the rise of a Jewish robber-state in Nehardea (see [Anilai and Asinai](#)). Yet, the tolerance of the [Arsacid](#) dynasty was as legendary as that of the first Persian dynasty,

the [Achaemenids](#). One account suggests the conversion of a small number of Parthian [vassal kings](#) of [Adiabene](#) to [Judaism](#). These instances and others show not only the tolerance of Parthian kings, but are also a testament to the extent at which the Parthians saw themselves as the heir to the preceding empire of [Cyrus the Great](#). So protective were the Parthians of the minority over whom they ruled, that an old [Jewish](#) saying tells, "When you see a Parthian charger tied up to a tomb-stone in the Land of Israel, the hour of the Messiah will be near".

The [Babylonian Jews](#) wanted to fight in common cause with their [Judean](#) brethren against [Vespasian](#); but it was not until the [Romans](#) waged war under [Trajan](#) against [Parthia](#) that they made their hatred felt; so, the revolt of the Babylonian Jews helped prevent Rome from becoming master there. [Philo](#) speaks of the numerous Jews resident in that country, a population that was likely increased by immigrants after the destruction of Jerusalem. In Jerusalem from early times, Jews had looked to the east for help. With the fall of Jerusalem, [Babylonia](#) became a kind of bulwark of Judaism. The collapse of the [Bar Kochba revolt](#) likely also added to Jewish refugees in Babylon.

In the struggles between the [Parthians](#) and the Romans, the [Jews](#) had reason to side with the Parthians, their protectors. Parthian kings elevated the princes of the Exile to a kind of nobility, called [Resh Galuta](#). Until then they had used the Jews as collectors of revenue. The Parthians may have given them recognition for services, especially by the Davidic house. Establishment of the Resh Galuta provided a central authority over the numerous [Jewish](#) subjects, who proceeded to develop their own internal affairs.

[[edit](#)] Sassanid period (226–634 CE)



[Hebrew](#) version of [Nizami](#)'s "Khosrow va Shirin".

By the early Third Century, [Persian Empire](#) influences were on the rise again. In the winter of 226 CE, [Ardashir I](#) overthrew the last Parthian king ([Artabanus IV](#)), destroyed the rule of the Arsacids, and founded the illustrious dynasty of the [Sassanids](#). While [Hellenistic](#) influence had been felt amongst the religiously tolerant [Parthians](#),^[25]^[26]^[27] the Sassanids intensified the Persian side of life, favored the [Pahlavi](#) language, and restored the old [monotheistic](#) religion of [Zoroastrianism](#) which became the official [state religion](#).^[28] This resulted in the suppression of other religions.^[29] A priestly Zoroastrian inscription from the time of King Bahram II (276–293 CE) contains a list of religions (including Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism etc.) that Sassanid rule

claimed to have "smashed". "The false doctrines of Ahriman and of the idols suffered great blows and lost credibility. The Jews (Yahud), Buddhists (Shaman), Hindus (Brahman), Nazarenes (Nasara), Christians (Kristiyan), Baptists (Makdag) and Manichaeans (Zandik) were smashed in the empire, their idols destroyed, and the habitations of the idols annihilated and turned into abodes and seats of the gods". "[30]

[Shapur I](#) (*Shvor Malka*, which is the Aramaic form of the name) was friendly to the Jews. His friendship with [Shmuel](#) gained many advantages for the [Jewish](#) community. [Shapur II](#)'s mother was Jewish^{[[citation needed](#)]}, and this gave the Jewish community relative freedom of religion and many advantages. He was also friend of a [Babylonian rabbi](#) in the [Talmud](#) named [Raba \(Talmud\)](#), Raba's friendship with Shapur II enabled him to secure a relaxation of the oppressive laws enacted against the [Jews](#) in the [Persian Empire](#). In addition, Raba sometimes referred to his top student Abaye with the term Shvur Malka meaning "Shapur [the] King" because of his bright and quick intellect.

[\[edit\]](#) Early Islamic period (634–1255)

With the [Islamic conquest of Persia](#), the government assigned Jews, along with Christians and Zoroastrians, to the status of *dhimmis*, non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic empire. Dhimmis A) were allowed to practice their religion, but were required to pay *jizya* to cover the cost of financial welfare, security and other benefits that Muslims were entitled too. (*jizya*, a [poll tax](#), and initially also *kharaj*, a land tax) in place of the *zakat*, which the Muslim population was required to pay. Like other Dhimmis, Jews were exempt from military draft. Viewed as "People of the Book", they had some status as fellow monotheists, though they were treated differently depending on the ruler at the time. On the one hand, Jews were granted significant economic and religious freedom when compared to their co-religionists in European nations during these centuries. Many served as doctors, scholars, and craftsman, and gained positions of influence in society. On the other hand, like other non-Muslims, they did not work in Sharia Law since they did not have the obvious knowledge and qualifications for it.

[\[edit\]](#) Mongol rule (1256–1318)



Statue of [Rashid-al-Din Hamadani](#), The Persian physician of Jewish origin, polymathic writer and historian, who wrote an enormous Islamic history, the *Jami al-Tawarikh*, in the Persian language during Mongol rule. He was also Grand Vizier of [Ilkhanid](#) court.

In 1255, Mongols led by [Hulagu Khan](#) invaded parts of Persia, and in 1258 they [captured Baghdad](#) putting an end to the [Abbasid](#) caliphate.^[31] In Persia and surrounding areas, the Mongols established a division of the [Mongol Empire](#) known as [Ilkhanate](#). Because in Ilkhanate all religions were considered equal, Mongol rulers abolished the inequality of dhimmis. One of the Ilkhanate rulers, [Arghun](#) Khan, even preferred Jews and Christians for the administrative positions and appointed Sa'd al-Daula, a Jew, as his [vizier](#). The appointment, however, provoked resentment from the [Muslim clergy](#), and after Arghun's death in 1291, al-Daula was murdered and Persian Jews suffered a period of violent persecutions from the Muslim populace instigated by the clergy. The [Orthodox Christian](#) historian [Bar Hebraeus](#) wrote that the violence committed against the Jews during that period "neither tongue can utter, nor the pen write down".^[32]

[Ghazan Khan](#)'s conversion to Islam in 1295 heralded for Persian Jews a pronounced turn for the worse, as they were once again relegated to the status of dhimmis. [Öljeitü](#), Ghazan Khan's successor, destroyed many synagogues and decreed that Jews had to wear a distinctive mark on their heads; Christians endured similar persecutions. Under pressure, some Jews converted to Islam. The most famous such convert was [Rashid-al-Din Hamadani](#), a physician, historian and statesman, who adopted Islam in order to advance his career at Öljeitü's court. However, in 1318 he was executed on fake charges of poisoning Öljeitü and for several days crowds had been carrying his head around his native city of [Tabriz](#), chanting "This is the head of the Jew who abused the name of God; may God's curse be upon him!" About 100 years later, [Miranshah](#) destroyed Rashid al-Din's tomb, and his remains were reburied at the Jewish cemetery.

In 1383, [Timur Lenk](#) started the military conquest of Persia. He captured [Herat](#), Khorasan and all eastern Persia to 1385 and [massacred](#) almost all inhabitants of [Neishapur](#) and other Iranian cities. When revolts broke out in Persia, he ruthlessly suppressed them, massacring the populations of whole cities. When Timur plundered Persia its artists and artisans were deported to embellish Timur's capital [Samarkand](#). Skilled Persian Jews were imported to develop the empire's textile industry.^[33]

[edit] Safavid and Qajar dynasties (1502–1925)



Synagogue in Tehran. A postcard from the [Qajar](#) (1794–1925) period.



[Hamedan](#) Jews in 1918

During the reign of the [Safavids](#) (1502–1794), they proclaimed [Shi'a Islam](#) the state religion. This led to a deterioration in their treatment of Persian Jews. Shi'ism assigns importance to the issues of ritual purity — [tahara](#). Non-Muslims, including Jews, are deemed to be ritually unclean — [najis](#). Any physical contact would require Shi'as to undertake ritual purification before doing regular prayers. Thus, Persian rulers, and the general populace, sought to limit physical contact between Muslims and Jews. Jews were excluded from public baths used by Muslims. They were forbidden to go outside during rain or snow, as an "impurity" could be washed from them upon a Muslim.^[34]

The reign of Shah [Abbas I](#) (1588–1629) was initially benign; Jews prospered throughout Persia and were encouraged to settle in [Isfahan](#), which was made a new capital. Toward the end of his rule, treatment of Jews became more harsh. Shi'a clergy (including a Jewish convert) persuaded the shah to require Jews to wear a distinctive badge on clothing and headgear. In 1656, the shah ordered the expulsion from Isfahan of all Jews because of the common belief of their "impurity". They were forced to convert to Islam. The treasury suffered from the loss of *jizya* collected from the Jews. People rumored that the converts continued to practice [Judaism](#) in secret. For whatever reason, the government in 1661 allowed Jews to take up their old religion, but still required them to wear a distinctive patch upon their clothing.^[32]

[Nadir Shah](#) (1736–1747) allowed Jews to settle in the Shi'ite holy city of [Mashhad](#). However, following his murder many Jews were massacred in Mashhad, and survivors were forcibly converted, in an event known as [Allahdad incident](#). they become known as "Jadid al-Islams" (new converts) and appeared to superficially accept the new religion, but in fact lived their lives as [Crypto-Jews](#). The community permanently left Iran in 1946 and still lives as a tightly knit community in Israel today.^[35]

The advent of a Shi'a [Qajar dynasty](#) in 1794 brought back the earlier persecutions.



A Jewish gathering celebrates the second anniversary of the [Iranian Constitutional Revolution](#) in Tehran.

[Lord Curzon](#) described 19th century regional differences in the situation of the Persian Jews: "In Isfahan, where they are said to be 3,700 and where they occupy a relatively better status than elsewhere in Persia, they are not permitted to wear *kolah* or Persian headdress, to have shops in the bazaar, to build the walls of their houses as high as a Moslem neighbour's, or to ride in the street. In Teheran and [Kashan](#) they are also to be found in large numbers and enjoying a fair position. In Shiraz they are very badly off. In Bushire they are prosperous and free from persecution."^[36]

The 19th century the colonial powers from Europe began noting numerous forced conversions and massacres, usually generated by Shi'a clergy. In 1830, the Jews of [Tabriz](#) were massacred; the same year saw a forcible conversion of the Jews of [Shiraz](#). In addition to the [Allahdad incident](#) mentioned above in 1839. European travellers reported that the Jews of Tabriz and Shiraz continued to practice Judaism in secret despite a fear of further persecutions. Famous Iranian-Jewish teachers such as Mullah Daoud Chadi continued to teach and preach Judaism, inspiring Jews throughout the nation. Jews of [Barforush](#) were forcibly converted in 1866. When

the French and British ambassadors intervened to allow them to practice their traditional religion, a mob killed 18 Jews of Barforush. ^{[37][38]} Perhaps these things happened earlier too, but went unnoticed by the historians.

In the middle of the 19th century, [J. J. Benjamin](#) wrote about the life of Persian Jews, describing conditions and beliefs that went back to the 16th century:

"...they are obliged to live in a separate part of town...; for they are considered as unclean creatures... Under the pretext of their being unclean, they are treated with the greatest severity and should they enter a street, inhabited by Mussulmans, they are pelted by the boys and mobs with stones and dirt... For the same reason, they are prohibited to go out when it rains; for it is said the rain would wash dirt off them, which would sully the feet of the Mussulmans... If a Jew is recognized as such in the streets, he is subjected to the greatest insults. The passers-by spit in his face, and sometimes beat him... unmercifully... If a Jew enters a shop for anything, he is forbidden to inspect the goods... Should his hand incautiously touch the goods, he must take them at any price the seller chooses to ask for them... Sometimes the Persians intrude into the dwellings of the Jews and take possession of whatever please them. Should the owner make the least opposition in defense of his property, he incurs the danger of atoning for it with his life... If... a Jew shows himself in the street during the three days of the Katel (Muharram)...., he is sure to be murdered."^[39]

In 1894 a representative of the [Alliance Israélite Universelle](#), a Jewish humanitarian and educational organization, wrote from [Tehran](#): "...every time that a priest wishes to emerge from obscurity and win a reputation for piety, he preaches war against the Jews".^[40]

In 1910, Muslims rumored that the Jews of Shiraz [had ritually murdered a Muslim girl](#). Muslims plundered the whole Jewish quarter. The first to start looting were soldiers sent by the local governor to defend the Jews against the enraged mob. Twelve Jews who tried to defend their property were killed, and many others were injured.^[41] Representatives of the [Alliance Israélite Universelle](#) recorded numerous instances of persecution and debasement of Persian Jews.^[42] In the late 19th – early 20th century, thousands of Persian Jews emigrated to the territory of present-day Israel within the Ottoman Empire to escape such persecution.^[43]

[edit] Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979)

The [Pahlavi dynasty](#) implemented modernizing reforms, which greatly improved the life of Jews. The influence of the Shi'a clergy was weakened, and the restrictions on Jews and other religious minorities were abolished.^[44] According to Charles Recknagel and Azam Gorgin of [Radio Free Europe](#), during the reign of Reza Shah "the political and social conditions of the Jews changed fundamentally. [Reza Shah](#) prohibited mass conversion of Jews and eliminated the concept of uncleanness of non-Muslims. He allowed incorporation of modern Hebrew into the curriculum of Jewish schools and publication of Jewish newspapers. Jews were also allowed to hold government jobs. ^[45] Reza Shah's ascent brought temporary relief to Jews. In the 1920s, Jewish schools were closed again. In the 1930s, "Reza Shah's pro-Nazi sympathies seriously threatened Iranian Jewry. There were no persecutions of the Jews, but, as with other minorities, anti-Jewish articles were published in the media. Unlike religiously motivated prejudice, anti-Jewish sentiments acquired an ethnonational character, a direct import from Germany."^[44]

The violence and disruption in Arab life associated with the founding of [Israel](#) in 1948 drove increased anti-Jewish sentiment in Iran. This continued until 1953, in part because of the weakening of the central government and strengthening of clergy in the political struggles between the shah and prime minister [Mohammad Mossadegh](#). From 1948–1953, about one-third of Iranian Jews, most of them poor, emigrated to Israel.^[46] [David Littman](#) puts the total figure of emigrants to Israel in 1948–1978 at 70,000.^[43]

After the deposition of Mossadegh in 1953, the reign of shah [Mohammad Reza Pahlavi](#) was the most prosperous era for the Jews of Iran. In the 1970s, only 1% of Iranian Jews were classified as lower class; 80% were middle

class and 10% wealthy. Although Jews accounted for only a small percentage of Iran's population, in 1979 two of the 18 members of the Iranian Academy of Sciences, 80 of the 4,000 university lecturers, and 600 of the 10,000 physicians in Iran were Jews.^[46]

Prior to the [Islamic Revolution](#) in 1979, there were 80,000 Jews in Iran, concentrated in [Tehran](#) (60,000), [Shiraz](#) (8,000), [Kermanshah](#) (4,000), [Isfahan](#) (3,000), the cities of [Khuzistan](#), as well as [Kashan](#), [Sanandaj](#), [Tabriz](#), and [Hamedan](#).

The Iranian Jewish emigration to Israel is not a recent phenomenon. Forty-one percent of Iranians living in Israel in the early 1990s immigrated there before the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948; only 15% were admitted between 1975 and 1991. They immigrated chiefly because of [religious persecution](#).^[47]

[edit] Islamic Republic (1979–present)



The [neutrality of this article](#) is [disputed](#). Please see the discussion on the [talk page](#). Please do not remove this message until the [dispute is resolved](#). *(January 2012)*

At the time of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, there were approximately 140,000–150,000 Jews living in [Iran](#), the historical center of Persian Jewry. Over 85% have since migrated to either Israel or the United States. At the time of the 1979 [Islamic Revolution](#), 80,000 still remained in Iran. From then on, Jewish emigration from Iran dramatically increased, as about 20,000 Jews left within several months after the Islamic Revolution.^[43] Some sources put the Iranian Jewish population in the mid and late 1980s as between 20,000–30,000.^[48] An estimate based on the 1986 census put the figure considerably higher for the same time, around 50,000.^[49] From the mid 1990's to the present there has been more uniformity in the figures, with most sources since then estimating roughly 25,000 Jews remain in Iran.^[50]

[Ayatollah Khomeini](#) met with the Jewish community upon his return from exile in Paris and issued a *fatwa* decreeing that the Jews were to be protected.

In the Islamic republic, Jews have become more religious. Families who had been secular in the 1970s started adhering to *kosher* dietary laws and more strictly observed rules against driving on the *Shabbat*. They stopped going to restaurants, cafes and cinemas and the [synagogue](#) became the focal point of their social lives.^[18]

Haroun Yashyaei, a film producer and former chairman of the Central Jewish Community in Iran said:^[51]

"[Khomeini](#) didn't mix up our community with [Israel](#) and [Zionism](#) – he saw us as Iranians."

Although Israeli officials and some^[who?] American Jewish communal leaders have urged Iranian Jews to leave their home country, Iranian Jews have stayed. According to the statistics compiled by [HIAS](#), 152 out of the 25,000 Jews emigrated from Iran between October 2005 and September 2006 — down from 297 during the same period the previous year and 183 the year before. Sources^[who?] said that the majority of those who have left in recent years cited economic and family reasons as their main incentive for leaving rather than political concerns.^[52]

In June 2007, though there were reports that wealthy expatriate Jews^[which?] established a fund to offer incentives to Iranian Jews to emigrate to Israel, few took them up on the offer.^[53]

[edit] Current status in Iran



Mullah Jacob's [Synagogue](#) in [Esfahan](#)

Iran's Jewish community is officially recognized as a religious minority group by the government, and, like the [Zoroastrians](#), they are allocated one seat in the [Iranian Parliament](#). [Ciamak Moresadegh](#) is the current Jewish member of the parliament, replacing [Maurice Motamed](#) in the 2008 election. In 2000, former Jewish MP [Manuchehr Eliasi](#) estimated that at that time there were still 30,000–35,000 Jews in Iran, most other sources put the figure at 25,000.^[54] The United States State Department estimated the number of Jews in Iran at 20,000–25,000 as of 2009.^[55]

Today [Tehran](#) has 11 functioning [synagogues](#), many of them with [Hebrew schools](#). It has two [kosher](#) restaurants, an old-age home and a cemetery. There is a Jewish library with 20,000 titles.^[18] Iranian Jews have their own newspaper (called "Ofogh-e-Bina") with Jewish scholars performing Judaic research at [Tehran's](#) "Central Library of Jewish Association".^[56] The "Dr. Sapir Jewish Hospital" is [Iran's](#) largest charity hospital of any religious minority community in the country;^[56] however, most of its patients and staff are Muslim.^[57]

[Chief Rabbi Yousef Hamadani Cohen](#) is the present spiritual leader for the Jewish community of Iran.^[58] In August 2000, Chief Rabbi Cohen met with Iranian President [Mohammad Khatami](#) for the first time.^[59] In 2003, Chief Rabbi Cohen and Maurice Motamed met with President Khatami at [Yusef Abad Synagogue](#) which was the first time a President of Iran had visited a synagogue since the [Islamic Revolution](#).^[60] [Haroun Yashayaei](#) is the chairman of the Jewish Committee of Tehran and leader of Iran's Jewish Community.^{[60][61]} On January 26, 2007, Yashayaei's letter to President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) concerning his Holocaust denial comments brought about worldwide media attention.^{[62][63][64]}

The Jews of Iran have been best known for certain occupations like making gold jewellery and antique dealing, textiles and carpets.

[edit] Conditions

The [Constitution of Iran](#) says that Jews are equal to Muslims. Imam Khomeini visited with members of the Jewish community and issued a decree ordering the adherents of Judaism and other revealed religions to be protected. Jews are entitled to self-administration and one member of the 290-seat Majlis is elected by only Jews. Jewish burial rites and divorce laws are accepted by Islamic courts. Tehran has over 20 synagogues. Iran has one of only four Jewish charity hospitals in the world. The hospital has received donations from top Iranian officials, including President Ahmadinejad. Kosher butcher shops are available in Iran. There are Hebrew schools and coeducation is allowed.^[65]

Jews are conscripted into the Army like all Iranian citizens. Many Iranian Jews fought during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) as drafted soldiers. About 15 were killed.^[66] It has been reported that Jews in Iran are proud of

their heritage.

Jewish citizens are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but they often are denied the multiple-exit permits normally issued to other citizens. With the exception of certain business travelers, the authorities require Jews to obtain clearance and pay additional fees before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jewish citizens and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time.

The Association of Tehrani Jews said in a statement, "We Iranian Jews condemn claims of the US State Department on Iranian religious minorities, announced that we are fully free to perform our religious duties and we feel no restriction on performing our religious rituals." [67]

In spite of the many allegations about discrimination by the US state department, the Dutch newspaper [NRC Handelsblad](#) reported that mass emigration to the USA is due to economic reasons and not to religious persecution. [68]

[\[edit\]](#) Contacts with Jews outside Iran



A Persian Jew prays in a [synagogue](#) in [Shiraz](#), Iran.

Rabbis from the Haredi sect [Neturei Karta](#), which has historically been opposed to the existence of Israel have visited Iran on several occasions. [69][70][71][72] The [Jewish Defense Organization](#), protested against one such visit by members of a Neturei Karta faction after they attended [International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust](#) in Tehran.

[Maurice Motamed](#), a former Jewish Iranian parliamentarian states that in recent years, the Iranian government has allowed Jewish Iranians to visit their family members in Israel and that the government has also allowed those Iranians living in Israel to return to Iran for a visit. [73]

Limited cultural contacts are also allowed, such as the March 2006 Jewish [folk dance](#) festival in Russia, in which a female team from Iran participated. [74][75]

Thirteen Jews have been executed in Iran since the Islamic revolution, most of them for alleged connections to Israel. Among them, one of the most prominent Jews of Iran in the 1970s, [Habib Elghanian](#) who was the head of the Iranian Jewish community was executed by a firing squad by the Islamic government shortly after the [Islamic Revolution of 1979](#) on the charge having had contact with Israel, among others. In May 1998, Jewish businessman Ruhollah Kadkhodah-Zadeh was hanged in prison without a public charge or legal proceeding, apparently for assisting Jews to emigrate. [76] In July 2007 Iran's Jewish community rejected financial emigration

incentives to leave Iran. Offers ranging from 5,000–30,000 British pounds, financed by a wealthy expatriate Jew with the support of the Israeli government, were turned down by Iran's Jewish leaders.^{[77][78]} To place the incentives in perspective, the sums offered were up to 3 times or more of the average annual income for an Iranian.^[79] However, in late 2007 at least forty Iranian Jews accepted financial incentives offered by Zionist charities for immigrating to Israel.^[80]

[edit] Jewish centres of Iran

Most Jews live in [Tehran](#), the capital. Traditionally however, [Shiraz](#), [Hamedan](#), [Isfahan](#), [Nahawand](#), [Babol](#) and some other cities of Iran were home to large populations of Jews. At present there are 25 synagogues in Iran.^[81]

[edit] Jewish education in Iran



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In 1996, there were still three schools in Teheran in which Jews were in a majority, but Jewish principals had been replaced. The school curriculum is Islamic and the [Tanakh](#) is taught in [Persian](#), rather than Hebrew. The [Ozar Hatorah](#) organization conducts Hebrew lessons on Fridays.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of or interference with the Jewish religious practice; however, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The government reportedly allows Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the government has required that several Jewish schools remain open on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Since certain kinds of work (such as writing or using electrical appliances) on the Sabbath violates Jewish law, this requirement to operate the schools has made it difficult for observant Jews both to attend school and adhere to a fundamental tenet of their religion.^[82]

[edit] Jewish attractions of Iran

Almost every city of Iran has a Jewish attraction, shrine, or historical site. Prominent among these are the [Esther](#) and Mordechai and [Habakkuk](#) shrines of [Hamedan](#), the tomb of [Daniel](#) in [Susā](#), and the "Peighambariyeh" mausoleum in [Qazvin](#). Usually Muslims go to [Daniel](#) shrine for pilgrimage.

There are also tombs of several outstanding Jewish scholars in Iran such as [Harav Ohr Shraga](#) in [Yazd](#) and [Hakham Mullah Moshe Halevi](#) (Moshe-Ha-Lavi) in [Kashan](#), which are also visited by Muslim pilgrims.



The shrine of [Habakkuk](#) in [Toyserkan](#).



•

The [Tomb of Esther and Mordechai](#) in [Hamadan](#).



•

the Shrine of [Daniel](#) in [Susa](#).



•

Peighambariyeh ("the place of the prophets"), [Qazvin](#): Here, four Jewish prophets are said to be buried. Their Arabic names are: *Salam*, *Solum*, *al-Qiya*, and *Sohuli*.

[\[edit\]](#) Persian Jews outside Iran

[\[edit\]](#) Israel

In a June 2009 [Los Angeles Times](#) blog article about Iranian-Israeli Jews showing solidarity with the Iranian protestors, said that "The Israeli community of Iranian Jews numbers about 170,000 – including the first generation of Israeli-born – and is deeply proud of its roots."^[83] The largest concentration of Persian Jews in Israel is found in the city [Holon](#).^[83] In [Israel](#), Persian Jews are classified as [Mizrahim](#). Both former [President Moshe Katsav](#) and former [Minister of Defense](#) and current [MK Shaul Mofaz](#) are of Persian Jewish origin. Katsav was born in [Yazd](#) and Mofaz was born in [Tehran](#).

[\[edit\]](#) California

According to the US Census Bureau's 2010 [American Community Survey](#), 26% of Beverly Hills' 34,000 residents are of Iranian origin.^[84] On March 21, 2007, [Jimmy Delshad](#), a Persian Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1958, became the mayor of Beverly Hills. This election made Delshad one of the highest ranking elected Iranian-American officials in the United States. He once again took the post of mayor of Beverly Hills on March 16, 2010.

Prominent Persian Jewish congregations in the Los Angeles area include Nessah Synagogue and the Eretz-Siamak Cultural Center. Persian Jews also constitute a large part of the membership at [Sinai Temple](#) in Westwood, one of the largest [Conservative](#) congregations in the United States.

[\[edit\]](#) New York

[Kings Point](#), a village constituting part of Great Neck, has the greatest percentage of Iranians in the United States (approximately 40%).^[85] Unlike the the Iranian community in Los Angeles, which contains a large number of non-Jewish Iranians, the Iranian population in and around Great Neck is almost entirely Jewish.

Several thousand of the Great Neck area's 10,000 Persian Jews trace their origins to Mashad, constituting the largest Mashadi community in the United States.^[86] The Mashadi community traces its origins to the Iranian city of [Mashad](#), where the entire Jewish community [was forced to convert to Islam in 1839](#). After practicing Judaism in secret for almost 100 years, many of the Mashadi [crypto-Jews](#) returned to overt Judaism after the rise of the secular [Pahlavi dynasty](#).^[87] The Mashadi community in Great Neck operates its own synagogues and community centers, and members typically marry within the community.^[88]

[\[edit\]](#) Related Jewish communities

Persian speaking Jews settled in a number of countries neighbouring Iran. Some communities, like Bukharan Jews, were formed when Jews left present-day Iran hundreds of years ago, while other communities were formed by more recent migrants from Iran.

[\[edit\]](#) Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

[Bukharan Jews](#) traditionally speak a dialect of Judeo-Persian and lived mainly in the former emirate of [Bukhara](#) (present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Most [Bukharan Jews](#) have immigrated to Israel or the United States since the collapse of the [Soviet Union](#).^[89]

[\[edit\]](#) Azerbaijan

The [Mountain Jews](#) of Azerbaijan split off from Persian Jews in ancient times. However, they maintained a Judeo-Persian language that shares a great deal of vocabulary and structure with [modern Persian](#). Most Azerbaijani Jews have immigrated to Israel since Azerbaijan gained independence.^[90]

[\[edit\]](#) Afghanistan

In [Afghanistan](#), most Persian-speaking Jews fled the country after the [Soviet invasion](#) in 1979.^[91] Only one Jew, [Zablon Simintov](#), remains in the capital of [Kabul](#).^[92]

[\[edit\]](#) Pakistan

The community in [Pakistan](#), due to departure to Israel, has dwindled to less than 200. Most of the [Pakistani](#) Jewish community resides in [Karachi](#).^[93]

[\[edit\]](#) **Kazakhstan**

There are estimated to be approximately four dozen Persian Jewish families living in [Kazakhstan](#) which call themselves [Lakhloukh](#) and speak [Aramaic](#). They still hold identity papers from Iran, the country their ancestors left almost 80 years ago. ^[94]

[\[edit\]](#) **Languages**

Most Persian Jews speak standard [Persian](#) (known, in Persian, as "*farsi*"), but various [Jewish languages](#) have been associated with the community over time. ^{[95][96]} They include:

- [Dzhidi](#) (Judæo-Persian)
- [Bukhori](#) (Judæo-Bukharic)
- [Judæo-Golpaygani](#)
- [Judæo-Shirazi](#)
- [Judæo-Hamedani](#)
- [Juhuri language](#) (Judæo-Tat)

In addition, Persian Jews in Israel generally speak [Hebrew](#), and Persian Jews elsewhere will tend to speak the local language (e.g. English in the United States) with sprinkles of [Persian](#) and Hebrew.

[\[edit\]](#) **Notable Persian Jews**



[Rita Kleinstein](#), an Israeli pop-star, of Persian descent

[\[edit\]](#) **Biblical**

- [Daniel](#)
- [Esther](#)
- [Habakkuk](#)
- [Mordechai](#)
- [Ezra](#)
- [Nehemiah](#)
- [Haggai](#)

[\[edit\]](#) **Pre-modern era**

- [Benjamin Nahawandi](#) – [Karaites](#) scholar of the early [Middle Ages](#)

- [Mashallah ibn Athari](#) – Persian astrologer and astronomer
- [Meulana Shahin Shirazi](#) – Early [Persian](#) poet
- [Rashid al-Din](#) – Doctor, writer, and historian
- [Sa'ad al-Dawla](#) – Physician and statesman

[\[edit\]](#) Politics

- [Abie Nathan](#) – Humanitarian and peace activist
- [Ciamak Moresadegh](#) – Jewish member of the Majlis of Iran
- [David Alliance](#), [Baron Alliance](#) – Iranian born British businessman and a [Liberal Democrat](#) politician
- [David Nahai](#) – Former head of the [Los Angeles Department of Water and Power](#)
- [Eitan Ben Eliyahu](#) – Former Major General in the Israeli Defence Forces
- [Habibollah Asgaroladi](#) – Conservative Iranian politician, leader of the [Islamic Coalition Party](#) (convert to Islam)
- [Haroun Yashayaei](#) – Chairman of the board of the [Tehran Jewish Committee](#) and leader of Iran's Jewish Community
- [Jimmy Delshad](#) – Former two-term mayor of [Beverly Hills](#)
- [Manuchehr Eliasi](#) – Former Jewish member of the Majlis
- [Maurice Motamed](#) – Former Jewish member of the Majlis of Iran
- [Michael Ben-Ari](#) – Israeli politician and current member of the Knesset
- [Mordechai Zar](#) – Israeli politician and former member of the Knesset
- [Moshe Katsav](#) – Former President of Israel
- [Shaul Mofaz](#) – Former Israeli Minister of Defense, currently number two on the [Kadima](#) list in the Knesset

[\[edit\]](#) Science and academia

- [Amnon Netzer](#) – Professor of the history and culture of Iranian Jews
- [Avshalom Elitzur](#) – Physicist and philosopher
- [David B. Samadi](#) – Expert in [robotic oncology](#)^[97]
- [Samuel Rahbar](#) – Discoverer of [HbA1C](#)
- [Shaul Bakhash](#) – Professor of Iranian studies at George Mason University
- [Soleiman Haim](#) – Compiled an early and influential [Persian language](#) dictionary
- [Hamid Hemmati](#) – Laser telecommunications group manager at NASA-JPL.

[\[edit\]](#) Business and economics

- [J. Darius Bikoff](#)
- [David Merage](#) – Co-founder of [Hot Pockets](#) snack food company
- [Ghermezian family](#) – Billionaire shopping mall developers
- [Habib Elghanian](#) – Prominent businessman executed by the Islamic Republic
- [Isaac Larian](#) – [Chief Executive Officer](#) of [MGA Entertainment](#)
- [Joseph Parnes](#) – Investment Advisor
- [Nasser David Khalili](#) – Billionaire property developer and art collector
- [Neil Kadisha](#) – Businessman
- [Ezri Namvar](#) – Real estate financier^[98]
- [Nouriel Roubini](#) – Economist
- [Paul Merage](#) – Co-founder of [Hot Pockets](#) snack food company
- [Robert and Vincent Tchenguiz](#) – Property developers
- [Nazarian family](#)

[\[edit\]](#) Art and entertainment

- [Adi Nes](#) – Photographer
- [Bahar Soomekh](#) – Actress
- [Bob Yari](#) – Film producer
- [Dalia Sofer](#) – Writer
- [Dan Ahdoot](#) – Stand-up comedian
- [Elie Tahari](#) – High-end fashion designer ^[99]
- [Gina Nahai](#) – Writer
- [Jonathan Ahdout](#) – Actor
- [Mor Karbasi](#) – Singer
- [Richard Danielpour](#) – Composer
- [Rita](#) – Israeli pop-star
- [Roya Hakakian](#) – Writer
- [Shaun Toub](#) – Actor
- [Subliminal \(rapper\)](#) – Israeli hip-hop singer
- [Tami Stronach](#) – Choreographer
- [Yossi Banai](#) – Israeli performer, singer, and actor

[edit] Religion

- [Shmuley Boteach](#) – Famous [American](#) Rabbi
- [Uriel Davidi](#) – Former chief rabbi of Iran
- [Yedidia Shofet](#) – Former chief rabbi of Iran
- [Yousef Hamadani Cohen](#) – Current chief rabbi of Iran

[edit] Miscellaneous

- [Dan Halutz](#) – Former [chief of staff](#) of the [Israel Defense Forces](#)
- [Eden Natan-Zada](#) – Israeli soldier responsible for the 2005 Shfar'am terrorist attack
- [Eitan Ben Eliyahu](#) – Former commander of the Israeli Air Force
- [Janet Kohan-Sedq](#) – Track and field athlete
- [Menashe Amir](#) – Persian-language broadcaster in Israel
- [Rico Shirazi](#) – Alleged Israeli mob boss ^[100]
- [Soleyman Binafard](#) – Wrestler

[edit] See also

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Holocaust Cartoon Competition • Iran-Israel relations • Islam and Judaism • Jews of Iran (documentary film) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judæo-Iranian languages • Judæo-Persian languages • Judeo-Persian dialects • List of Asian Jews • Madare sefr darajeh • Mountain Jews • Persian people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purim • Religious minorities in Iran • Shiraz blood libel • Tehran Jewish Committee • 30 Years After • Bar minan |
|--|--|---|

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