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## Iranian Jews

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# IRANIAN JEWS

Iranian Jews have been living in Iran (Persia) since 2700 years ago and there are many holy and historical places of Jews in this country such as the tomb of Prophet Daniel in the city of Shoush, Ester and Mordechai in Hamedan and Prophet Habakkuk in Touiserkan.

There are also tombs of several outstanding Jewish scholars in Iran like "harav Uresharga" in Yazd and "Hakham Mullah Moshe Halevi" in Kashan. Muslims had respected these also.

At the present, population of the Jews in Iran is estimated about 25'000 to 30'000 of which about 15000 people are in Tehran (the Capital) and the rest of them in terms of population are residing in Shiraz, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Yazd, Kerman, Rafsanjan, Borujerd, Sanandaj and Oromieh respectively.

Administration of Jewish Social Religious affairs in the past has been under the two authorities, "Hebra" (the assembly of the elite of community) and "Bet-Din" (the house of religion). Since 1938, Hebra was formally registered under the title of "Tehran Jewish Committee (Association)" and now is operating under supervision of the Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of culture and Islamic Guidance and Endowments Organization. This association has committees (subgroups) like Cultural, States, Youth, (Domestic) Dispute Settling, and Cooperative committees (for poor families).

By establishment of the National legislature in Constitutional period (about a century ago), religious minorities in Iran obtained representation in the parliament and since then Jews have always had representatives in the



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parliament. After the victory of the Islamic revolution (1979), a Jewish representative in the parliament. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, a Jewish representative has had an active presence in the Constitution of Elite Council. According to the Constitution, Jews have a representative in Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament called "Majlis"). Political, social, and religious activities of Jewish society revolve around Jewish religious authorities (Chief Rabbi Yousef Hamedani Cohen), Jews representative in Islamic Consultative Assembly and Tehran Jewish Committee Board of Directors. Any position declaration or pursuance of legal, political, and social issues of Jewish society is addressed through above bodies.

At the present, this community has many synagogues, special schools, cultural complexes, youth, students and women centers, aging centers, central libraries, computer training centers, music training centers, gathering halls and butcheries according to Jewish religion in different regions and cities of the country. Information and publishing of Jewish cultural works as many different books and journals almost always have been present and after the Islamic Revolution, in addition to periodical local bulletins, the magazine of "Tamouz" (up to 1989) and the monthly of "Ofegh-BINA" (organ of Jewish Committee since 1999) have been responsible for the task. Tehran Jews usually do their sport activities in the sport club of "Gibor." This club is responsible for sport training courses and competitions as well as contests between religious minorities and always has the cooperation from Jew and non-Jew coaches. Jewish Women Organization is cooperating with this club in women sport affairs too. Charity Hub is also one of the charity agencies of Jewish society that its main activity is managing the Dr. Sapir Hospital in south of Tehran city that provides services to all of Tehran citizens. The cost of maintaining this hospital is primarily provided by the Jewish charitable.

Religious teaching for Jews is taught formally up to the end of high school according to books approved by Education Ministry in certain hours (instead of Islamic teachings and the Quran) in public schools. Along with this, sessions for training of religious teachings and the explanation of Torah and sometimes teachings of Talmud are taught irregularly in the synagogues (Talmud Torah). In addition, groups of youth usually organize religious gathering and congregations and religious speeches in most of synagogues of Tehran and other cities throughout the country.

Tehran Jews has established and made use of many schools that in recent years because of reduction in population as well as dispersing of Jewish students in

other public schools, a number of these schools have been reposed to Education Office and Muslim students. Now, there are five special schools teaching Jews that are active in Tehran.

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### **Cultural Committee**

Among daily and important tasks of cultural committee is answering to Muslim scholars about different aspects of Jewish religion and culture. In addition, association of the Cultural Committee has the responsibility of editing and evaluation of several books and academic dissertations about Jewish religion and in some cases a representative from this committee has also participated in the defense session of dissertations formally.

Fortunately, the Jewish Committee as a formal authority is reflecting views in the field of Jewish culture at the scientific and academic circles of the country. So that in almost all of the meetings, seminars and even mass media programs which are held on monotheistic religions, cultural and religious delegates from Jewish religious community are invited to take part in them by Tehran Jewish Committee.

In addition to an agreement reached by colleges of religious course of Tehran universities, in each educational term, a session of Jewish religion subject matter is provided in which an expert from the Cultural Committee in the university is present or the university students actively take part in such meetings held by Cultural Committee.

Publications make up another part of activities of the Cultural Committee. Sidour "Tefilat Yasharim" (prayer book) along with Persian translation of its important parts has been prepared and provided recently. Compilation and publication of Jewish and Persian yearly calendar is the responsibility of experts of this cultural committee.

Press and Publications Division of Tehran Jewish Committee take part in the Tehran International Book Fair every year and have a special pavilion for answering many of Iranian Muslim clientele.

### **The Journal of "Ofegh-BINA"**

This magazine as the organ of Jewish Committee began its publication since 1999. This is a social, news, and cultural journal and aims at providing information services to Iranian Jewish community as well as making their Muslim

countrymen and women familiar with Jewish culture and establishing communication relationship between the two. Most of its authors and operators are made up of Jewish youth and Mr. Haroun Yashayaei; the chairman of board of directors of Tehran Jewish Committee is its managing director.

This magazine has been welcomed and promoted by the authorities of Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **Persian-Hebrew Dictionary**

This dictionary is compiled by "Solomon Haim" (1889-1968), one of the most famous Jewish scientists of Iran. He has compiled the most well known French-Persian, Persian-English, and English-Persian dictionaries and for this he is of high respect and prestige among the people of Iran.

He began his 10-year effort in 1935 for compiling Hebrew-Persian Dictionary and published a valuable and unique book that since then has used by Jewish and non-Jewish scholars of Iran in the Hebraic language and texts. He also began compiling a Persian-Hebrew Dictionary, but most regretfully, he could not complete to work, because of his lamentable death. According to his testament, the edition and publication of this dictionary was put on Tehran Jewish Committee which despite of all efforts, this objective has not been achieved and now a special task force in the Cultural Committee are editing and adding new words, updating and final typesetting of the work to be prepared for publication.

### **Schools**

Of the most important duties of the Cultural Committee is to handling and supervising special Jewish schools and providing classes for religious teaching and training of Jewish religious acts for those Jewish students that study in public schools.

According to an estimated statistics, about 3000 Jewish students are studying in Iran that in Tehran half of the Jewish students are studying in special schools and other half attend in public schools. In other cities, all of Jewish students take part of public schools and their religious teachings and acts are usually taught on Fridays (weekend holiday in Iran) and these special classes are held in Tehran, Shiraz, and other Jewish-residing cities of the country.

### **Nursery Schools**

Nursery schools of Tehran Jewish Committee have been among quite successful agencies in the community and always more than 100 Jewish children have been learning special lessons and skills in these schools and have been using their facilities under the principals and experienced trainers.

### **The Library**

The central Library of Jewish Association with more than 8000 titles and 14000 volumes of books is active now which is one of the important centers of Jewish Committee that because of multiplicity of titles and the subjects of the books and preparing the last published edition of newly published local and foreign books, has many borrowers and members.

Aside from Jewish members and clients, many of clients of this library are formed by non-Jewish scholars and researchers who by providing guidance from Cultural committee and Library authorities make access and utilize of reach and comprehensive source of the Library especially in the division allocated to the religion and culture.

### **Computer Center**

Providing Jewish special schools with computer sites as well as training formal courses and extra computer courses in these schools are among responsibilities of the Computer center of Tehran Jewish Committee. All services of typesetting, Page setting and typography, the press and publications of Tehran Jewish Committee as well as providing technical support for computer units of this Committee and related centers are included among the tasks of this center's experts.

Designing, operating, supporting and updating internet Base of the Tehran Jewish Committee which are among the most important activities of this center are done in direct cooperation with Cultural Committee and the journal of "Ofegh-Bina". At the present, this site is in Persian and soon its English version also will be in operation.

Providing various computer software including translation of "Psalm" (Tehilim) and designing Hebrew font compatible with Persian software is of scientific activities of this center.

### **Youth Committee**

Organizing the activities of Iranian Jewish youth in cultural, artistic, sport, and social fields is one of the most important duties of Tehran Jewish Committee. Attraction of emigration abroad, disappointment in finding appropriate jobs and problems in regarding to mating and marriage in Jewish community are among special problems of Iranian Jewish community youth.

Sport teams of Jews for boys in footstall, volleyball and basketball fields are active now. Young people and their families have welcomed forming classes for training music in different levels. Organizing recreational and pilgrimage tours in different parts of Iran for Jewish youth are of other activities of this committee.

For helping the marriage of young people, the Board of Directors of the Committee have allocated a kind of interest-free loan for any Jewish couple who are applicant to obtain loan and provide their marriage certificate.

### **Iranian Jewish Students' Organization (I.J.S.O)**

is among the centers belonging to Tehran Jewish youth, which is a place for cultural, social, and artistic activities for Jewish university students. This organization by organizing weekly meeting covering scientific, social, musical lectures and free discussion as well as holding scores of cultural seminars along with publication of student local bulletins, plays an important part in student activities of Iranian Jewish community. A branch of this organization, that is located in Shiraz, has similar activities.

### **Jewish Women Organization**

The general weekly meetings of this organization usually are on social and cultural issues and are attended by more than 50 women. Consideration and attention to the legal rights of Jewish women and participation in their different gatherings and meetings and familiarity of Jewish women with their own legal rights are among activities and goals of this organization.

### **Dr. Sapir Hospital**

Dr. Sapir Hospital and Charity Center is the biggest charity of religious minorities in Iran. This large charity center which has been helping all poor and needy citizens from the first days of its establishment and at the present more than 90 per cent of its clients are non-Jewish citizens, has obtained a high prestige and reputation for Iranian Jewish community, during more than half a century. Now, it is one of the most important contact means with the authorities of the Islamic system and Iranian compatriots. Tehran Jewish Committee employs all its possibilities for the maintenance of Dr. Sapir Hospital and equipping it with all modern health and medical means and equipments.

### **Synagogues**

There are about 100 synagogues in Iran of which about 26 are in Tehran. Iranian synagogues in terms of the history and place of construction have a variety of architectural styles. There are several synagogues in Tehran, Yazd and Isfahan cities, which because of their antiquity and beauty of architecture have been ear marked as national historic sites by Cultural Heritage Organization of the country and have been recorded and come under protection of that organization. Apart from some of the synagogues in the south of Tehran city and some other cities which their Jewish residents have migrated, most of the

synagogues in different parts of the country are up and active. In two of the great synagogues of Tehran and one great synagogue in Shiraz, on every Friday evening (Sabbath) about 500 people are gathering and holding congregations.

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Iranian Jews in the vicissitudes history of this Islamic country always tried to have good coexistence with their compatriots. Although in many of historical epochs, problems and sometimes disasters have happened for this society but the vigilance and wisdom of Muslim and Jewish leaders has prohibited the continuation or recurrence of those problems and disasters.

After the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, despite the emphasis of the Constitution on formality and maintaining the rights of Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian religious minorities, social pressures exerted on this community caused emigration of many of them. However, the coherence of this community was maintained by efforts of Jewish community authorities and through many meetings with leaders and heads of administrative, legislative and judiciary as well as legal proceedings, welfare and security of Jewish citizens was maintains at a somewhat desirable level. Now, the relations of Jewish authorities with high-ranking officials of the state are at a very desirable level. In spite of some humiliations from some of the journals and the mass media to the rights and religious sanctity of Jews, Jewish authorities view the problem largely due to actions of political Zionism and the regime of Israel, which sometimes causes suspicion toward all of Iranian and the world Jews. Jewish Committee while responding and prosecuting these humiliations and misunderstandings toward the Jewish religion and culture, has always been formally announcing the separation of sanctity and religious causes of the Jewish community from Zionist political objectives and in many instances, has protested against crimes of Israeli regime and violation of human rights by this regime.

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The country of Iran is one of the most ancient historical lands of Jews where one can see many indications of Jewish identity in its different parts. All of the world Jews can, without facing any difficulty, while visiting the vast and historical country of Iran and visiting its beautiful picturesque, visit the relics and historical shrines of Jews as well.

Tehran Jewish Committee is ready to provide any coordination and guidance for Jewish fold who are visiting to Iran.

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