

Iran/Persia Script

Passport to Peoplehood

Jews are a multicultural people who live around the world.

Big Ideas

- The Persian Jewish community is one of the world's oldest diaspora communities with a rich and complex culture.
- The status of Jews in Persia/Iran from ancient times through to today is tied to the outlook of its leaders. When the leaders are tolerant of religious minorities, Persian Jews thrive, when they are intolerant of religious minorities Jewish life is curtailed and often Jews suffer.
- Today, the majority of Persian Jews live outside of Iran, in Israel and the United States, but continue to celebrate their unique and rich Persian Jewish heritage.

Slide 1: Iran / Persia

Slide 2: Iran

The country we now call Iran was known as Persia for thousands of years. Persia was often a conquering nation, and, at its height, Persia's Achaemenid Empire ruled over 44% of the world's population. Today, Iran is still the second-largest country in the Middle East and one of the most populous.

Slide 3: Flag of Iran

The flag of Iran is green, white, and red. The emblem of Iran is in the center. The statement "God is Great" is written in white a total of 22 times on the fringe of both the green and red bands as a symbol of the day of the 1979 revolution. Green stands for Islam, white for peace, and red for bravery.

Slide 4: Mount Damavand

Iran is one of the world's most mountainous countries. Mount Damavand, a dormant volcano, is the tallest mountain in Iran.

Slide 5: Tehran

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The history of Tehran, the capital of Iran, dates back almost 7000 years. Today, Tehran is the largest city in Iran and Western Asia. Over 16 million people live in its greater metropolitan area.

Slide 6: Azadi Square (“Freedom Square”)

Azadi Square, also called Freedom Square, is the largest square in Tehran and the second largest in Iran. The Azadi Tower, located in the center of the square, was built in 1971 to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Achaemenid Empire by Cyrus the Great.

Slide 7: Persian Food

Persian cuisine is very diverse. It incorporates flavors from many nearby countries and regions, from Russia to Greece. Some consider kebabs to be the national dish of Iran. Others say it is fesenjan, a sweet-and-sour lamb stew.

Slide 8: National Flower

Red roses are the national flower of Iran.

Slide 9: Persian Jewish History

Jews first came to Persia in 586 BCE, when they were exiled from the land of Israel to the kingdom of Babylonia, which included modern-day Iraq and Iran. When Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylonia, Jews became part of the Persian empire. Under Cyrus and rulers who came after him, Jews lived freely and spread throughout the region. Jews have lived in Persia ever since.

Slide 10: Persian Jewish History

Over the centuries, the status and safety of Persian Jews have changed many times. When the people in power were fair, Jews enjoyed the same rights as other Persians. At other times, Jews were persecuted and discriminated against. The 19th century was especially harsh. When whole Jewish communities were forced to convert to Christianity or Islam, many Jews emigrated to what is now Israel.

Slide 11: Modern Iranian Jewish History

Throughout much of the 20th century, starting with Iran’s first constitution in 1906, Jews had the status of an official minority. Although this accorded them full rights under the law, it did not always prevent them from harm. Iranian Jews were able to become prominent and successful. However, in 1979, the Islamic Revolution made Iran less safe for Jews, and most of

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the community emigrated. Although Iran's Jewish population of 10,000 is still one of the world's largest, most Iranian Jews now live in Israel, New York, and Los Angeles.

Slide 12. Iranian Jews Today

Today, Jews continue to be recognized by the law, and are allowed to vote and practice their religion. The law even requires that there be a Jewish member of Parliament to represent Jewish interests. However, in everyday life Jews still live under many restrictions. For example, it was only very recently that Iranian Jews won the right to keep their children out of school for Shabbat. Still, today, under 10,000 Iranian Jews choose to live in Iran and gradually push for more rights. This is a photo of Siamak Moreh Sedgh, the current Jewish member of the Iranian Parliament.

Slide 13. Immigration to Israel

About 200,000-250,000 Jews of Iranian descent live in Israel. Most of them prefer to be called Persian Jews. Most Israeli Persian Jews live in the city of Holon, just outside Tel Aviv, while many also settled in Jerusalem, Netanya, and Tel Aviv.

Slide 14. Rita

Rita, the popular Israeli singer, emigrated from Iran to Israel when she was 8 years old. Today, she releases music in Persian that is enjoyed by audiences in Israel and around the world, especially in Iran. [Option: Play the video: Here, Rita sings one of her most popular Persian-language songs, "Shane".]

Slide 15. Persian Jews in the United States

Immigration to the United States brought entire communities to coastal cities, most prominently 60,000-80,000 in New York and Los Angeles. Today, there is a vibrant Persian Jewish community in Los Angeles. There are Persian synagogues, kosher markets that specialize in Persian food, and Farsi language Jewish newspapers. This is a photo of Jamshid "Jimmy" Delshad, who was born in Iran and came to the United States in 1959. He was elected mayor of Beverly Hills in 2007 and again in 2010.

Slide 15. The End