

One point that may warrant criticism is that Jews are less visible in the media or are spoken about less frequently. At times, contrary to the views expressed by Imam Khomeini and the Leader (Ayatollah Khamenei), even occasions such as the Jewish New Year or the birth and passing of Prophet Moses are not reflected in national media, an issue that could receive greater attention.

How does the broader society view Jews? Despite being a minority, is there any sense of separation or alienation?

Jews, Muslims and other religious minorities in Iran live alongside one another with mutual respect and do not feel alienated, because they consider Iran to be their own country. As mentioned earlier, there are many shared values, and the spirit of hospitality and adaptability among Iranians, whether Jewish or Muslim, has played a key role in this coexistence.

Whether in the past, when neighbors knew one another well and supported each other, or in today's more urbanized life where social ties may be looser, this sense of solidarity continues in workplaces and social settings. This model of coexistence shows that despite differences in belief, shared human, ethical and civic values far outweigh divisions. From a monotheistic perspective, all human beings are creations of God, and just as no parent wishes to see discord among their children, God does not approve of injustice or conflict among His servants. This religious and human outlook can serve as a model for better coexistence worldwide, as reflected in the Torah's teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Could you explain the difference between Judaism and Zionism, and why some people conflate the two?

Judaism is a monotheistic and

divine religion with a history of more than 3,300 years, dating back to the time of Prophet Moses. Zionism, by contrast, is a political party and movement that emerged in the late 19th century within the context of nationalism. Zionism has exploited certain religious ideals of Judaism. According to Jewish religious beliefs, a return to the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Al-Quds) can only take place with the emergence of the promised savior. Zionism, however, removed these beliefs from their religious framework and pursued actions devoid of justice and human dignity, actions that were not endorsed by many Jews from the outset. Over time, as Zionist objectives became clearer, Jewish opposition to the movement grew. Today, there are even Christian and Muslim Zionists, but because Zionism emerged from within a Jewish context and misused its ideals, Jewish op-

position to it has been more pronounced. Over the past two years, particularly following the Gaza war, this distinction and opposition have become more visible, with Jewish communities in countries such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom staging protests against the actions of the Zionist regime. In Iran, this opposition has also taken shape through gatherings and statements. Therefore, religious Jews have consistently emphasized that just as ISIS does not represent Islam, Zionism does not represent Judaism. Even ISIS claims to act in the name of religion, while Zionists make no such claim.

Is the kind of antisemitism seen in Europe, particularly around the Holocaust, present in Muslim societies and especially in Iran?

What is known as antisemitism has its roots in European and

Christian history and has never existed as an organized current in Islamic countries, particularly in Iran. There may be isolated disagreements, but no systematic anti-Jewish movement has been observed in Iran. Today, Iranian Jews are fully free to practice their religious rituals. Synagogues operate without the presence of special security forces, whereas in many European countries, due to security concerns, entry to synagogues requires passing through protective checkpoints. This contrast underscores the genuine coexistence and solidarity between Muslims and Jews in Iran, a coexistence that stands in sharp contrast to the actions of the Zionist regime in the occupied territories, where the rights of other residents are ignored and repression and killing are used as tools of control.

How do you assess the roots of

tension between Muslims and Zionists in the occupied territories?

The main root of these tensions lies in the denial of the rights of others and of minorities, whether from a religious, human or human rights perspective. All residents of a land have the right to life, freedom and basic rights. When these rights are repeatedly violated, tension and conflict become inevitable. The iron-fist pressure exercised by the Zionist regime cannot go on indefinitely. What ultimately ensures the survival of human society is the observance of justice and fairness, a principle also embedded in the belief in the promised savior, meaning the establishment of a divine and just order in which oppression and injustice are eliminated and people live peacefully alongside one another. One can only hope that such conditions will be realized sooner rather than later.

Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue

A striking, spiritual landmark of Tehran

PERSPECTIVE

The Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue is among the oldest and most prominent religious centers of Tehran's Jewish community. More than a place of worship, it stands as a historical marker of the long-standing Jewish presence in Iran. Located in Tehran's historic Oudlajan neighborhood, it is one of the capital's oldest and largest surviving synagogues. Its main structure was built in 1894 during the reign of Qajar king Naser al-Din Shah, a period when much of Tehran's Jewish population lived in traditional quarters such as Oudlajan and needed a dedicated space for worship and communal life. The synagogue is named after Ezra Yaghoub, a well-known Jewish merchant who stipulated in his will that his wealth be used to build a house of worship. Yaghoub

was among the first prominent Iranian traders to establish commercial ties with Manchester in England. After his death at the age of 40, his wife allocated a substantial part of his estate to charitable causes, including the construction of this synagogue. Architecturally, the building blends local design with Jewish religious elements typical of the Qajar era. It sits within a relatively large compound and includes two main prayer and gathering halls: a larger southern hall with a capacity of more than 200 people and a smaller one that can accommodate around 150. The overall design is modest but rooted in traditional aesthetics, preserved through successive restoration efforts. The synagogue has undergone several renovations and, in 2004, was officially registered as a national heritage site by Iran's Cultural Heritage Orga-

nization, in recognition of its architectural features and historical value.

Historical role, social function

Historically, the Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue served purposes that went well beyond religious worship. In the decades before World War II, it became a hub for Jewish migrants arriving in Tehran from cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand via Afghanistan and Iranian city of Mashhad, many of whom later planned onward migration. During World War II, Polish Jewish refugees also stayed there temporarily and received assistance from the local Jewish community. From the 1960s onward, as Jewish residents gradually moved from Oudlajan to northern Tehran and later abroad, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the synagogue's active congregation declined. Today, religious services are held mainly on special occasions and on Shabbat, the weekly holy day. The synagogue is no longer used for daily worship but remains an important historical and religious site and a gathering place for the Jewish community on specific dates. Public visits are generally possible only by prior arrangement, usually through cultural associations or guided tours, and access is not broadly open to the general public or non-Jews.

History, social standing of Jews in Iran

The presence of Jews in Iran dates back more than 2,700 years. In the sixth century BCE, following the Babylonian exile, many Jews settled across the Achaemenid Empire, including in what is now Iran, where they were welcomed by Cyrus the Great. Over centuries, Iranian Jews have maintained close interaction with other ethnic and religious groups and have become an integral part of Iran's social

fabric. They speak Persian, share Iranian cultural norms, identify strongly as Iranian, and have long taken part in the country's economic, cultural, and social life.

Jewish rituals, practices in Iran

Like Jewish communities elsewhere, Jews in Iran observe a range of religious practices at both communal and family levels. **Worship in synagogues:** Synagogues serve as venues for Friday prayers, daily services, religious study, and communal observances. On holy days such as Shabbat and major festivals including Passover, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, special services are held. **Study, education:** Alongside worship, Torah reading, Talmudic studies, and Hebrew rituals form a core part of religious life. These activities usually take place in religious schools, study rooms, and educational sections, with children actively involved. **Family ceremonies:** Life-cycle events such as Hebrew naming ceremonies, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs marking religious maturity, weddings, and memorial services continue to be observed. However, the community's smaller size today means some ceremonies are held on a more modest scale.

shrinking population, Iran's Jewish community has managed to safeguard its religious and cultural identity, operate within existing legal frame-

Heritage that has endured

For those interested in historic architecture or the history of Iran's religious minorities, the Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue offers a compelling visit. Beyond its architectural and cultural value, it stands as a symbol of the Jewish community's continuous 2,700-year presence in Iranian history. It reflects religious and cultural coexistence, active participation in urban life, and the effort to preserve religious identity alongside peaceful coexistence with followers of other faiths. Despite challenges and a



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works, and keep its traditions and rituals alive to this day.

This article first appeared on Shaya News in Persian.

