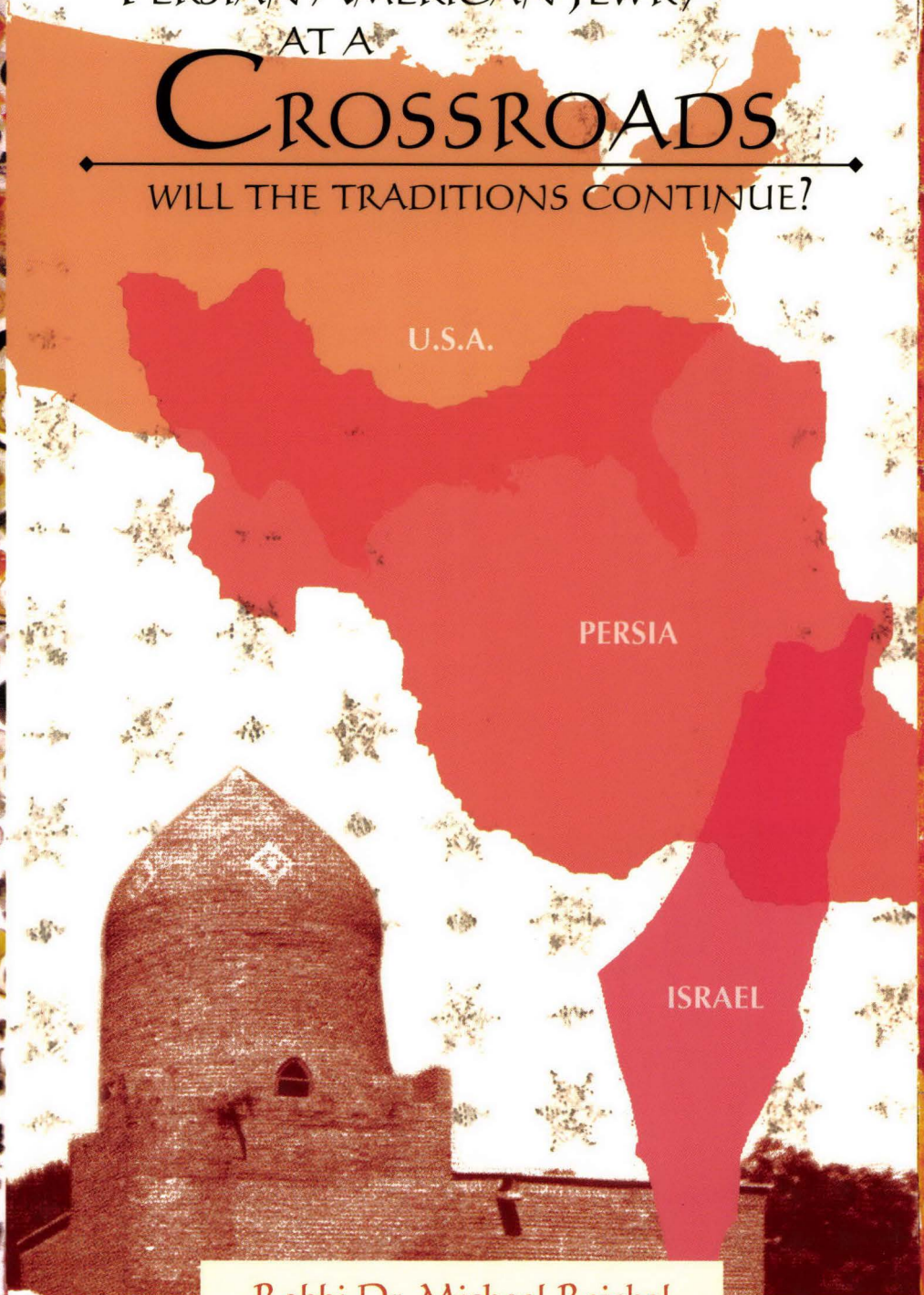
Persian American Jewry at a Crossroads

Will the Traditions Continue?



Rabbi Dr. Michael Reichel



North Shore Hebrew Academy

Annual Journal Dinner
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Persian-American Jewry at a Crossroads:
Will the Traditions Continue?
by Rabbi Dr. Michael Reichel,
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Persian American Jewry at a Crossroads:

Will the traditions continue?

By Rabbi Dr. Michael Reichel

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Preface

The impetus for the publication of this book is the Persian American Jewish community who regard the comprehensive examination of their history and their American educational experiences and attitudes as an important contribution to research. The lack of a body of research on Persian American Jewish education and educational experiences impacts the ability of the Persian American Jewish community to formulate a position on the pressing problem of acculturation within the American Jewish community that is mostly of Ashkenazi descent. The problem is manifested by the varied directions chosen by the Persian American Jewish community to educate their children. Some Persian American Jews choose to send their children to Ashkenazi Yeshiva day schools or local public schools, while others have attempted to create their own educational institutions.

Persian Jews who send their children to Ashkenazi or public schools generally do not learn the laws and customs of their heritage or their history and culture. Rabbi Dr. Soleyman Sassoon, past president of Otzar Ha-Torah, and Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Jerusalem, wrote:

> I have not been able to find that there are any curricula in the schools in which these things are being taught. In fact, my impression has been, over the past ten years, that children are intentionally deprived of any knowledge of their background, in order to produce a standard type. Thus, all the beautiful *minhagim* (customs) tend to be obliterated in this country (Dobrinsky, 1988).

The pages that follow discuss Persian Jewish history within the context of cultural diversity and provide insights into Persian American Jewish parental choices for schooling of their children that suggest the nature of the thinking motivating educational choices. In addition, clarifying the Persian American Jewish community's philosophy may provide insight into whether or not Ball's (1993) five approaches on how schools work are applicable to the Persian American Jewish community. In addition, philosophies may differ from one generation to the next and therefore, a multi-generational comparison is helpful to clarify the Persian Jewish community's position related to education of their children. Furthermore, the Persian American Jewish community has grown in size, become economically successful and increasingly influential and become more active in the broader American Jewish community.

A study of the attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jewry in Jewish education may augment Jewish educational literature and affect the future implementation of curricula in yeshivot who service these communities. Moreover, studying Persian Jewish education experiences contributes to the history and sociological literature of ethnic groups in America. What follows is a brief history of the Persian community as well as a discussion of the Persian community in the United States, and an examination of the Persian community's attitudes and experiences related to Jewish education.

The researcher is of Ashkenazi Jewish descent. As principal at the North Shore Hebrew Academy Middle School in Great Neck, New York, he has been afforded professional opportunities to intermingle with many families and educate students who are Persian American Jews. Supplementing the researcher's professional responsibilities are contacts

and participation in students' family, social and life cycle gatherings. These contacts provided additional insights into family attitudes and experiences about Jewish education.

Acknowledgments

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My gratitude to the doctoral committee chairperson, Dr. Mareleyn Schneider, for her wise and consistent counsel, direction, input, and encouragement. I am indebted to the other members of my committee, Rabbi Dr. Chaim Feuerman, and Dr. Judith Friedman Rosen, for their critical suggestions, advice, and generous assistance through all stages of writing my dissertation.

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The vision for the need for my research to be shared with the greater community belongs to my dear friends Miranda and Eddie LeVian. Thank you for your graciousness and generosity in helping to fund the publication of this book.

I am grateful to my parents, Hyam and Carol Reichel, and in-laws, Harvey and Naomi Wolinetz who instilled in me the drive to follow my dreams.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research (Banks, 1994; Guild, 1994) completed in the past two decades indicates that culture and heritage play an important role in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, as well as mastery of academic skills and attitudes toward education. To address diversity in culture and heritage, multicultural education attempts to address the phenomena that people fear what they do not understand. The fear may be manifested as hostility toward misunderstood individuals. James Banks (1994) defines multicultural education as education that "tries to create equal educational opportunities for all students by ensuring that the total school environment reflects the diversity of groups in classrooms, schools, and the society as a whole." In addition, multicultural education addresses a perceived bias that schools and their curricula favor a white Anglo male cultural perspective.

Throughout American history, there have been various attempts to correct the problems mentioned above. Francis Ryan (1993) describes attempts to educate a culturally diverse society in a historical review:

> Throughout American history, schools, like society itself, have addressed cultural diversity in different ways. In the early days of the republic the call for a common American culture echoed throughout society in general and schools in particular. Throughout the nineteenth century, this need for a common culture - the fostering of

> the melting pot guided most phases of the educational enterprise. Formal public school instruction in cultural diversity was rare, and outright appreciation or celebration of minority or ethnic culture essentially was non- existent in most schools. By the 1930's, several educators, aligned with the progressive education movement, called for programs of cultural diversity who felt that unless students were given an opportunity to explore their ethnic heritage thoroughly, they could not develop the positive identity and the self-confidence for successful adjustment to American society. This appreciation of cultural differences espoused by the progressives became popular in many schools from the 1930's through the 1950's.

Eileen Wynne Ball (1993) suggests that there are five basic approaches related to how schools work on educating students toward the "good society" and/or "the American dream." The first two approaches are student-focused rather then society-focused. The first approach is termed *teaching the culturally different* and was developed during the school desegregation movement of the 1960's. This approach attempts primarily to bridge the gap between culturally different students and the school, so that students fit in and succeed within the existing social system. The goal of this approach is to provide tools that enable the student to access the existing system.

The second approach is termed *the human relations* approach. It

was developed based on the post-World War II Intercultural Education Movement. Activities and information are incorporated into the school day to reduce prejudice and stereotyping and to teach students of different cultures to live together. Certain days are set aside to learn about other cultures (such as Black day, Indian morning and Jewish afternoon).

Neither approach substantially changes the structure or curricula of the schools. Three additional approaches are more institutionally based, offering significant changes in the educational system and curricula. The third approach is termed *the single group.* This approach offers an in-depth study of a particular group, such as women or African-Americans. The goal is to inform students about a group's history, contributions and oppression as well as the impact of these oppressive forces on the development of the group's culture.

The fourth approach is called *multicultural education,* where the school program is reformed so that all students experience success, social equity and cultural pluralism. In contrast to s*ingle group,* the focus is not on one particular oppressed group but is more inclusive of many cultures.

The fifth approach is called *multicultural and social reconstructionist* and, like multicultural education, is inclusive and focuses on all students. However, social reconstructionists are more explicit in preparing students to politically analyze inequities inside and outside of school and to use collective social action to promote cultural pluralism. This approach of Ball (1993) suggests that multicultural education is not so much a product, as it is a process and attitude about diversity. This awareness may lead to learning about who we are, both in our differences as well as in our shared similarities. Thus, the implementation of

multicultural education may enlighten students and help them toward the appreciation of cultural pluralism, related to multiculturalism.

Related to Ball's *multiculturalism* is the term *cultural pluralism.* Janzen (1994) described multiculturalism as an approach that seeks to ensure "that ethnic groups will remain intact and that their idiosyncratic ways of knowing and acting, will be respected and continued". It is a rejection of the *melting pot/assimilation* idea in which the primary goal is the amalgamation of all groups into the American mainstream. *Cultural pluralism* as defined by Janzen (1994) is similar to a concept embodied in Jewish practices. Jews are generally told that the observances and traditions of one's parents are to be observed as passed down from previous generations and that one may not shift from the family's traditional moorings.

Multicultural and/or cultural pluralistic education has serious implications for Jewish educational structure and curricula. In general, if American schools are perceived to be biased toward white Anglo males, then American Jewish schools, in particular, may appear to invite examination about potential emphasis on the white Ashkenazi male cultural perspective.

When studying and analyzing the culture and customs of Jews, Jews are encouraged to study the origin of ritual practice and traditions of Jewish communities other than their own (Aviner, 1991). The concept of subcultures is reflected in the following passage from Rabbi Herbert Dobrinsky's book on Sephardi laws and customs. He writes "[these subcultures] have allowed for a diversity of expression within the acceptable norms of the divine law ofttimes expressed by the echo which

was heard from on high when the divergent interpretations of Hillel and Shammai were at apparent loggerheads "both are the words of the One Living G-d'" (1988). Following one's family's customs is further expressed by Dobrinsky (1988): "The one force which kept the Jews together within their own locality was the observance of the Jewish law in accordance with the particular custom of the locality".

The policies and decisions of the Persian American Jewish community may be closely related to the trends of multicultural education in general. Members of the Persian American Jewish community have learned about diverse cultures in their elementary education experiences and in New York State mandated middle school social studies curriculum and in many Yeshiva Day schools. Yet, the Persian Jewish heritage may be neglected and not examined in Judaic or general studies curricula. In particular, the feeling of neglect has been expressed to the researcher by the Persian community. Members of the community have argued that Persian youth may feel that their history is less important.

For Persian American Jewish culture to survive, ethnically heterogeneous schools have to assume responsibility for preserving their heritage. Therefore, to maintain their heritage yet acculturate into the American Jewish society, the Persian American Jewish community may choose the multicultural model as well as the cultural pluralism rubric. Thus, the Persian American Jewish community acculturates while maintaining its unique identity.

To date, very little has been written about Persian American Jewry, and no in-depth study on Persian Jewish education has been undertaken. The paucity of scholarly literature offering a comprehensive treatment of

the attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jewry in Jewish education was more apparent following a review of catalogues at the libraries of Yeshiva University and the archives of New York Association for New Americans. Likewise, on-line searches of Amazon.com, Educational Abstracts and First Search did not garner any related research. Letters and phone calls to leading authorities on Persian Jewry did not produce any record of research on Jewish education. Amnon Netzer, (Professor on Persian Jewry at Hebrew University), Yoseph Shahery (the editor of Shofar, a Persian monthly magazine) and Rabbi Michael Serels (former Director of Sephardic studies at Yeshiva University) were contacted by the researcher and supported the need for research examining the attitudes and practices of Persian American Jewry.

Comments in various books and journals support the dearth of relevant prior research. In 1992, Netzer laments that a thorough study of Iranian Jews in the United States remains to be done. Walter Fischel (1982) argues, "No sources have as yet become known to shed light on the Jewish Oriental Diaspora during the two centuries' long period" (p. 265). Gorenberg (1992) states that in particular, the history of Crypto-Jews of Mashad is absent from most histories of modern Jewry. Netzer, in a personal communication with this researcher on January 16, 1998, maintains:

> I know of very few sources concerning the Iranian Jews in the United States. These are : 1) Lea Baer in the first volume of Padyavand which you mentioned. 2) Amnon Netzer, Iranian Jews in the US, Gesher, vol.1/110, Jerusalem 1984, pp79-90 (Hebrew). 3) Idem, Iranian

Immigration," Jewish - American History and Culture, ed. Jack Fischel et al., New York 1992. pp. 265-267.

4) Irangeles ed. Ron Kelley, Los Angeles 1993. (general).

These references do not discuss Jewish education.

Moreover, Philips (1995) suggests that the ethnicity of Iranian Jews has been studied less than that of Soviet or Israeli Jews. Philips claims that substantial articles and monographs have been published on Israelis and Russians but that Iranian Jews have not been extensively researched. Jalali (1982) reports that there is little research on the (general) Iranian family apart from information generally available on Iranian life consisting of accounts of travelers, anthropologists and outside observers. Menashri (1988, 1992) examines the rift between the religious fundamentalists and the more modern streams in Iran in reference to education, and includes no information about Persian Jewish education.

Literature on Persian American Jewish experiences generally discusses psychology and changing social roles and family conflicts, but not Persian Jewish education. For example, Kelly (1993) reports on Persian Americans in Los Angeles including some references to Jews, yet nothing about Persian Jewish education. The changing of the Persian Jewish community's norms and values, such as the weakening of the patriarchal role, is discussed in Jalali (1982). Moslehi (1988) focuses on the general immigration experience and the inherent hardships encountered by Persian Jews. Fischer (1978) describes the changing role of Persian women. Hanassab (1989, 1991) examines acculturation and dating habits of young Iranian women. Unger (1995) explores the

traditional and changing values in the Mashedi American community in New York and the cultural separation with other Persian communities and the wider American Jewish community.

Among Persian Jews, Netzer (1989) argues that whether in Iran or Diaspora, Jewish education has not been thoroughly researched. Thus, the primary goal is to discuss Persian Jewish history and to investigate formal Jewish education in one Persian American Jewish community; namely, the community in Great Neck, New York. A secondary goal is to provide a model for further research toward understanding the attitudes and experiences related to Jewish education, background and values of the broader Persian Jewish American community.

After a discussion of the historical background of Persian Jews, the communities of Mashad and Teheran are examined related to the attitudes and experiences of Persian Jews. Persecution, poverty and life as Crypto-Jews (Marranos) over many generations may have affected views and commitment to Judaism and Jewish education. Religious outlook and general gestalt may vary among segments of the larger Persian communities. These worldviews and perspectives may affect the dedication of Persian Jews to greater Torah study and observance, as well as influence institutional policy and curricula.

The Persian population as a whole and, in particular, the descendants from Mashad, appear to be unique because they may be the only Crypto-Jews to have maintained their Judaism for many generations. Patai (1962) suggests that throughout Jewish history only a few of the New-Christians and New-Muslims were able to transmit their secretly held Jewish heritage to their descendants. By the onset of the twentieth

century, only small groups of Crypto-Jews were found, mainly in Portugal and in Mashad. Others had succumbed to pressure and adopted a "new" religion. The new faith that their fathers were coerced into adopting was continued by future generations. Consequently, these communities should not be called Marranos or Crypto-Jews, because they did not remain loyal to their ancestral faith. Rather they should be referred to as Jews living against the laws and traditions of Judaism.

Possibly as a result of pressure or because many Persian Jews deemed their laws and traditions as not being essential for survival, Persian Jewry has not been the subject of studies and articles. The academic and popular analyses and fictional accounts available have portrayed the history, makeup, and suffering of the Persian Jewish community. Most published studies in scholarly journals have been written in Hebrew or Farsi and are in general, historical, stressing the persecutions and life under Muslim rule.

In the United States, the study of Persian Jewry has been limited to some psychological and sociological research. The classical English language book of Sephardi laws and customs written by Dobrinsky (1988), while not including sociological research about Persian Jews, includes Iran in a listing of regions of Sephardim without mentioning Iranian customs. An important aspect of Persian American Jewry that has been neglected and is the focus of this study, is an analysis of the attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jewry with respect to Jewish education. Perhaps as a result of economic instability, historical persecution and isolation, formal Jewish education among Persian American Jews has not been investigated. Little has been done to describe

the acculturation, experiences, and attitudes of Jewish education among Persians.

CHAPTER II

PERSIAN HISTORY

Modern Persian History

The history of Iran prior to 1905 was characterized by conquests by Arab Muslims, Seljuk Turks, Mongols, and Tamerlane. Modern Iranian history began with a nationalistic uprising in 1905, the granting of a limited constitution in 1906, and the discovery of oil in 1908. The Grand Assembly, Iran's ruling body, ratified electoral reform rewarding the social forces that had helped create the parliamentary government after the civil war. The parliamentary government granted minorities, including Jews, seats in the legislature (Abrahamian, 1982,). In 1921, Reza Khan, an Iranian officer of the Persian Cossack Brigade, seized control of the parliamentary government. He appointed himself minister of war and became prime minister in 1923. Two years later in 1925, the Majlis elected him Shah, king of Persia.

Reza Shah Pahlavi, as he was called, ruled for almost 16 years. During his reign, Iran began to modernize, and a broad program of Westernization was undertaken. The central government reasserted its authority over the tribes and provinces, and abolished all feudal land titles. The central government under the Shah also provided educational, health and legal services to all citizens, even in the most remote villages (Hirschfeld, 1979). In September 1941, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favor of his twenty-two year old son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

Despite growing prosperity during the 1970's, owing to greatly

increased oil revenues, opposition to the Shah among conservative Muslim religious leaders was widespread. The Shah persecuted political opponents and banned opposition parties, often placing their leaders under house arrest or sending them into exile (Hirschfeld, 1979). However, under the Shah the majority of the Jewish community prospered. A sign of the community's wealth was seen in the first skyscraper in downtown Teheran which was built by a Jew (Soroudi, 1981). In 1978, the fundamentalist Shiite Muslim, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who wanted the nation governed by Islamic law, led riots in several Iranian cities. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was a long time foe of the Pahlavi regime and who had been exiled to France, was the catalyst for these riots and the ultimate overthrow of the Pahlavi government.

The efforts of the Pahlavi dynasty to modernize the country and the great prosperity resulting from the oil boom in the 1960's and 1970's came to an abrupt end with the revolution in 1979 (Netzer, 1989). Although Jews represented less than one percent of the Iranian population, many people in the Jewish community prospered under the Shah and a few families had become very wealthy. The overthrow of the Shah in 1979 by Khomeini had a significant impact on the Jewish community.

According to an emissary of the Israel government stationed in Iran, Jews received threatening letters and signs appeared on billboards: "Death to the Shah and death to the Jews" (Seligman, 1983). The Jews were accused of supporting the Shah, Israel, Mossad, and the CIA, all of whom were defined as "Satan" (Netzer, 1992). Only those individuals close to the Ayatollah or believers in his vision for Iran were to benefit from the revolution (Iranian Refugees Many Faces of Persecution, 1984).

Supporters of the Shah were executed daily by firing squad (Dilmanian D, 1996). In the months following the revolution, the anti-Zionistic character of the new regime resulted in Jews being executed by the Khomeini regime (Netzer, 1992).

Jews were singled out and charged with being spies for Israel and promoting Zionistic interests (Iranian Refugees Many Faces of Persecution, 1984). The Iranian Jewish community was forced to sign anti-Zionist declarations, and the leader of the Jewish community, Habib Elghanayan, was executed (Encyclopaedia Judaica, Iran). Jews were made to proclaim that they were a religious community, not a political one. The confiscation of Jewish wealth caused thousands of the more affluent Jews to flee Iran (Demick, 1997). It was estimated that Jewish property valued in excess of a billion dollars was confiscated by the Khomeni regime which claimed "the Jews had amassed fortunes at the expense of the Iranian people" (Encyclopedia Judaica, Iran).

Persian Jewish History

Persian Jewry has no dependable historical records. Ben Tzvi (1963) reported that few original documents of Jewish history in Iran exist. The Jews who survived persecution throughout the ages did not leave written descriptions of the atrocities (Melamed, 1951). Moreover, the inaccessibility of Iranian State papers and diplomatic correspondence, as well as the lack of Jewish archives, community records and statistical data prevent a comprehensive investigation of Jewish persecution in Iran (Fischel, 1950).

The Jewish community of Mashad, in particular, has no recorded history. Any documents, manuscripts, or personal writings that may have

existed were lost or destroyed when the village was plundered (History of Mashad Part I). The existing history of Mashad is based mostly on the oral information supplied in 1944-1945 by Farajollah Nasrullayoff-Levian, head of the Mashad Jews in Jerusalem (Patai, 1983).

Nonetheless, the Persian Jewish community is the only Diaspora community mentioned in the Bible, and it traces its history further back then any other Jewish community in the world (Hakohen, 1986). Until 1979, Iran's Jewish community had remained intact longer than any Jewish community in any other Muslim country except Morocco and Turkey (Elazar, 1989; Haddad 1984).

The history of the Jews in Iran began with the deportation of the Jews from Samaria to the Median cities by the Asyrian King, Tiglath-pilser III (d. 727 BCE). The Jewish population in Iran increased by subsequent deportations that took place during the rule of Sargon II of Assyria (d. 705 BCE) and his son Sennacherib (681 BCE) and later Nebuchadnezzar (d. 681 BCE), who destroyed the Temple (Netzer, 1993).

Although the declaration of Cyrus (538 BCE) allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, some Jews preferred to remain in Iran (Netzer, 1993). After the destruction of the second temple and the Roman exile, many Jews traveled from all areas of the world to Iran to settle (Azrachian, 1992), and it has been claimed by some Persian historians that the Persian Jewish communities that developed were comprised of members of the original ten lost tribes (Chasm Andaz, 1997). In addition, tradition suggests that Jews who were exiled from Israel by Nebuchadnezzar took with them soil and water samples from the Holy Land. They vowed to settle only at a spot where the earth and water

equaled the earth and water of their old home (Cowen, 1991-92). The Talmud Sanhedrin 94a affirms the foregoing tradition. The Talmud asserts that during the reign of Sennacherib, the Jews settled in a town called Shustar in Persia claiming, "This is twice as good as our land." Furthermore, Muslim and Jewish legend suggests that after comparing the earth and water samples in many places, Jews found that the earth and water of Isfahan were compatible with the earth and water of the Holy Land. Isfahan became a Jewish city and became known as *Al Yahudiyyah* or city of the Jews (Kashani, 1980; Cowen 1991-92). Further evidence of Jewish history in Iran includes the graves of the prophet Ezra south of Khoramshar, the prophet Habakkuk in Tusserkan, and Mordechai and Queen Esther, from the story of Purim, in Hamadan. Isfahan's ancient cemetery has graves dating back more than 2,000 years.

According to the Megillah of Esther, the Jewish settlement in Iran gradually expanded to include almost the entire empire under Xerxes's rule (Kashani, 1980). Kashani (1980) compiled a list of 80 different towns in which Jews lived. The status of the Jews in Persia changed abruptly with the advent of Islamic rule in 642 CE, at which time Persia lost its autonomy and officially changed its state religion. Islam became the religion of the Persians, and the Jews became Dhimmis, second-class citizens (Haddad, 1984). As Dhimmis, the Jews were deprived of equality but were protected by the rulers according to the regulations of the "covenant of Omar." They were free to engage in commerce and trade, yet restrictions were imposed (Barnavi, 1992, p. 22). Restrictions were based on the verse in the Koran "Until they pay the tribute out of hand and are humbled" (Stillman, 1975). Fischel (1969) explained that "people of

'the revealed book' were granted protection and safety, religious and cultural autonomy and free exercise of economic activities against the payment of a poll tax. The poll tax was paid as an acknowledgment of the Jews' submission to the political authority of Islam."

By the 12th Century, more than half a million Jews lived throughout Iran (Netzer, 1993). The Mongol invasion of the 12th Century brought change to Persia. Although they were pagans, the Mongols did not distinguish between Dhimmi and Muslim. They treated Shiites, Christians, and Jews equally, much to the chagrin of the orthodox Muslim majority (Stillman, 1979). In the 16th Century, the founder of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736) made the Shia creed the official religion of Persia. The imposition of an official new state religion was done with much bloodshed and violence and signaled a difficult time for the Jews of Iran (Netzer, 1993). The intolerance shown by the Shia creed towards Jews and the followers of other religions found its expression in many new restrictions (Soroudi, 1981). The Shiite clergy had tremendous influence and was determined to clear Persia of all infidels (Fischel, 1932).

A European visitor to Persia in 1512-1516 found that followers of Shia Islam never spared the life of any Jews they encountered (Fischel, 1982). Humiliating rules were imposed on the Jews. The concept of ritual uncleanness (*Najes*) deprived the Jews of their normal lives and brought upon them poverty and socio-economic isolation. Anything touched by a non-Muslim was considered ritually unclean (Banooni, 1996). Muslims of Persia seized synagogues for use as mosques (Ben Tzvi, 1963). Traditional religious books of the Jews were confiscated and destroyed (Fischel, 1935). Jews were forced to live in a specified quarter

or Ghetto.

The Jewish quarters were called *"Maale Yehudiya"* (the Jewish quarter) and because of ritual uncleanliness laws, all Jews were prohibited to live outside the ghetto (Banooni, 1996). Jewish houses in the ghetto were described by Hakohen (1986) as made of mud and clay, set in enclosed, stifling courtyards without appropriate fresh air and clustered about crooked alleys and market places. The home of the Jew consisted chiefly of one large room covered with a rug. In this room, the family ate, slept and congregated. In the hot summers, they slept in the courtyards on their mattresses to alleviate the heat. These living conditions for Jews continued until the late 19th century.

In spite of the poor living conditions and the ghettoes, the reign of Shah Abbas I (1558-1629) saw a new positive policy toward all non-Muslims. As a result, there was renewed immigration of Jews to Persia from neighboring countries, and the Jewish population in Persia reached 10,000 families, a number that remained constant for the whole century (Fischel, 1982). During the years 1559-1561, a Jesuit missionary reported that in Ormuz there was an organized Jewish community with several rabbis and synagogues (Fischel, 1982). At the end of the reign of Shah Abbas I, living conditions worsened for the Jews of Persia. A Jewish renegade, Khuda abu El-Hassan Lari, a Jewish slaughterer, was removed from his position because he was suspected of not slaughtering animals in accordance with Jewish law. He suggested the imposition of new humiliating laws on the Jewish community (Hacohen, 1986).

Subsequently, Shiite authorities forced Jews to wear special headgear and a badge as a sign of discrimination and humiliation

(Hacohen, 1986). Jews were not permitted to wear normal shoes but had to indicate their identity by going barefoot or wearing distinguishing footgear (Lewis, 1984). Jewish women were not allowed to wear a chador, a long veil that covers the entire body. The prohibition was intended to place Jewish women on the same level as prostitutes, who also did not cover themselves (Banooni, 1996). Kashani (1980) reported that Jewish women also had to wear shoes that had bells on them so that Muslims would hear them approaching.

In addition, Holy books of the Kabbalah were confiscated and destroyed because the Shiites were suspicious of sorcery and magic, reinforced by the common practice of Jewish women selling charms against illness, danger, and protection from the evil eye. These Jewish women also claimed to be able to see into the future and prepared fertility potions (Banooni, 1996; Fischel, 1935). Fischel (1982) claimed that the image of Jews as heretics and practitioners of sorcery and magic was transferred from medieval Christian Europe to the Middle East.

Religious and state persecution caused a tremendous change in demographics. The Iranian Jewish population of the 17th century was reported to be at no more than 100,000 people. A decree, promulgated in 1656, empowered the grand vizier to force the Jews to convert to Islam. The proclamation was sent to at least 18 different towns (Fischel, 1935). Jews were taken out of the Jewish quarter and tortured throughout the Persian Kingdom as a means of forcing conversion. The decree encompassed the entire Jewish community of Persia (Fischel, 1982). A Jesuit missionary wrote:

The Jews had spread themselves all over Persia

> in far greater number than might be supposed, and were leading a most peaceable existence without any suspicion of the terrible misfortune which was hanging over their heads.... It came as an unexpected blow and threw them into dreadful consternation when, all of a sudden, an edict of the King (Abbas II) was issued and published in every place in Persia commanding them on the pain of death to abjure the Jewish religion and profess, thenceforth, that of Mohammed (Fischel, 1982).

Synagogues were closed down and Jews were required to publicly proclaim their faith in Islam. Jewish leaders tried to avert the catastrophe through *bakhshish* (bribery), but were unsuccessful. The new Muslim, called *Jadid al-Islam,* were required to have their daughters marry Muslims and to eat a portion of camel meat boiled in milk during a special ritual. In addition, their names were recorded in a registry to keep track of the *Jadid al Islam* (Fischel, 1982). One hundred thousand Jews throughout the Safavid Empire were reported to have outwardly embraced Islam (Banooni, 1996). A survivor of a pogrom in the 1600's wrote that Jews who were forcibly converted to Islam, were paid one or two pounds for the conversion, and the officials banned the reading of the Torah and Jewish prayer for the entire community (Moreen, 1987).

When the Muslim clerics realized the conversion decree of Shah Abbas II had failed because Jews were not truly practicing Islam and because there was a loss of revenue from special taxes on Jews, they

repealed the ban. Mira Musud, a government official of the Shah examined the Jewish community's behavior and desires and found conditions reported by the Muslim clerics were accurate. Thus, Shah Abbas II in 1661 decreed that all Jews could return openly to Judaism (Fischel, 1982). Once the government authorities detected the eagerness of Jewish communities to regain their freedom of worship, they seized upon an opportunity and extorted money from Jews, further impoverishing them (Moreen, 1987). Conditions continued to deteriorate for Jews because the Shahs after Abbas II reverted to persecution. In May, 1678, the leaders of the Jewish community of Isfahan were brutally murdered and left unburied in the royal square for a week for all to see. Netzer (1993) reported that there were no settlements whose Jewish community did not suffer humiliation, persecution, and forcible conversion to Islam. Either because of laxity in ritual performance or conversion to Islam or religious persecution, the majority of Persian Jewry did not follow the laws of Judaism. A quorum of ten required to pray was difficult to find, and there was a general lack of observance of Jewish law (Fischel, 1935).

The declaration that Jews were ritually unclean and therefore had to be separated from the Muslim population was decisive in making life for Jews an uninterrupted sequence of persecution and oppression (Fischel, 1950; Kashani 1980). The entire Jewish community often was held responsible for crimes committed by individual Jews. As late as the end of the 19th century, Jews in the city of Yezd wore a white patch the size of a large coin framed in red on the front of their coats. In another city, Bushir, the Jews were required to wear a red Turkish fez instead of a more comfortable turban. The fez was not only a symbol; it did not shield

Jews from the hot Persian sun. In addition, Jews had to style their hair differently from that of their Muslim countrymen (Fischel, 1950).

In the late 1790's, the Jewish community of Tabriz was massacred. Infants and children were impaled on spears (Soroudi, 1981). Between 1834 -1848 in Persia, entire Jewish communities and many individuals were forcibly converted to Islam. In 1839, the Jews of Mashad were forced to become Muslim. When the Jews were driven out, the town of Maragha ceased to be a Jewish community. The community of Lar also became free of Jews. Only through the intervention of the Persian governor did the Jewish communities in Urmia and Salmas escape a similar fate. In 1888, a massacre of Jews occurred in Isfahan and Shiraz (Fischel, 1950).

Rabbi David d'Beth Hillel observed in 1832, that "many hundreds of Israelites in Persia, in order to save themselves from a violent death, renounced the religion of their fathers and became Muslim. Communities of Jews in some Persian provinces disappeared completely during the first decades of the 19th century" (Fischel, 1950). The number of Iranian Jews who converted to Islam in the 19th and 20th centuries was larger than in all other Muslim countries and perhaps was in the millions (Hadad, 1984; Netzer, 1974). The forcibly converted Jews, in many cases, continued to adhere to some Jewish practices and observances. However, within two generations the memory of these Jewish traditions faded away, and these Jews became fully observing Muslims (Patai, 1971). In October 1910, 250 Jewish homes in Shiraz were subjected to looting and destruction; 12 Jews were killed and 55 wounded. Many survivors of the massacre in Shiraz moved to Teheran thinking they would be better protected under the

shadow of the government institutions (Netzer, 1974).

In 1828, the Jewish population in Teheran was approximately 100 families. Notwithstanding international presence in the capital, Jews continued to endure persecution, illustrated by a riot in Teheran in May 1897 (Singer, 1990). In the same year, placards were posted in streets and bazaars inviting the population to celebrate the Shah's birthday by massacring the Jews (Cowen, 1991-92). Lewis (1984) reported that when bigotry reared its head, Jews were its first victims. He added that in the late 19th century, Jews were frequently the victims of Persian street mobs.

In Teheran, riots against Jews occurred in 1922 (Cohen, 1986). Nevertheless, the process of migration from smaller towns and villages beginning in the 1930's and continuing till 1970 increased the population of Teheran to 40,000 Jews. It is estimated that in 1979 approximately 60,000 Jews lived in the capital city.

When the history of the Jews in 19th century Persia is considered, conditions were so bad that Ambassador Moshe Yegar described the travails of Persian Jews in the 16th-19th centuries as "an almost continuous chain of forced conversions, libels, assassinations and various other acts of persecution including plundering, raping, beating and killing." Patai (1971) added "that by the 19th century, restrictions, discrimination and persecutions had reduced the Jews of Persia in Teheran, as well as in their other urban centers, to a sad state of ignorance and misery." Fischel (1932) described the plight of the Jews as "if there is a stepladder of suffering, then the people of Israel have reached its highest rung. But on this rung, the first place must be given to Persian Jewry."

The Jewish traveler J.J. Benjamin, an observer and recorder who

traveled in Persia in the mid - 1800's, summarized the misfortunes of Jews in Persia in the 1800's:

1) Throughout Persia the Jews were obligated to live in a part of the town separated from the other inhabitants; they were considered as unclean creatures, who bring contamination with their intercourse and presence.

2) They had no right to carry on trade in goods.

3) In the streets of their own quarter of town, Jews were not allowed to keep any open shop. They may only sell their spices and drugs, or carry on the trade of a jeweler, in which they had attained great perfection.

4) Under the pretext of being unclean, Jews were treated with the greatest severity, and should they enter a street inhabited by Muslim, they were pelted by boys and mobs with stones and dirt.

5) For the same reason, Jews were forbidden to go out when it rained; it was said the rain would wash dirt off them, which would sully the feet of the Muslim.

6) If a Jew was recognized in the streets, he was subjected to the greatest insults. The passers-by spit in his face, and sometimes beat him so unmercifully that he fell to the ground and had to be carried home.

7) If a Persian killed a Jew and the family of the deceased brought forward two Muslims as witnesses to the murder, the murderer was punished by a fine of 12 tumans; but if two witnesses could not be produced, the crime

remained unpunished, even though it was publicly committed, and was well known.

8) The flesh of the animals slaughtered according to Hebrew custom, but declared tref (not kosher), were not sold to any Muslim. The slaughterers were compelled to bury the meat, for even Christians did not venture to buy the meat, fearing the mockery and insult of Persians.

9) If a Jew entered a shop to buy anything, he was forbidden to inspect the goods, but had to stand at a respectful distance and ask the price.Should a Jewish hand touch the goods, he had to take them at any price the seller chose.

10) Sometimes the Persians intruded into the dwellings of the Jews and took possession of whatever pleased them. Should the owner make the least opposition in defense of his property, he incurred the danger of forfeiting his life.

11) In a dispute between a Jew and a Persian, the former is immediately dragged before the *Achmud* (religious authority), and if the complainant brought forward two witnesses, the Jew had to pay a heavy fine. If the Jew was too poor to pay the penalty in money, he paid the fine with his person. He was stripped to the waist, bound to a stake, and received forty blows with a stick. If the sufferer uttered the least cry of pain during this proceeding, the blows already given were not counted, and the punishment started again.

12) In the same manner, if a Jewish child had a quarrel with a Muslim, the Jewish child was led before the *Achmud* and was punished with blows.
13) A Jew who traveled in Persia was taxed at every inn and every caravansary he entered. If a Jew hesitated to satisfy demands that were made of him, he was mistreated until he yielded.
14) If a Jew showed himself in the street during the three days of the *Katel* (feast of the morning for the death of the Persian founder of the religion of Ali), he was murdered.
15) Daily and hourly suspicions of Jews were commonplace and a continual cycle of extortion and inciting fanaticism existed (Lewis, 1984).

Rendsburg (1988) suggested that Crypto-Jewish experience (disguising of one's religious identity to protect one's self) was not exclusive to Persian Jews but was similar to the Persian cultural ruse of hiding one's identity called *taqiyya* or *kitman*. *Taqiyya* was believed to be practiced in Persia since Queen Esther as told in the story of the Megillah of Esther, one of the books of the Hebrew Bible. Rendsburg added that the practice of *taqiyya* was an acceptable practice in both ancient and modern Persia.

Religious Practice and Knowledge of Judaism

Grayzel (1968) asserted that because of living under oppression since the 17th century, Jews of Persia did not rise to the cultural heights of their ancestors. Furthermore, Moreen (1987) reported that there was no

evidence to suggest that prior to the mid -17th century and the beginning of the persecution, Persian Jews were local judges or held similar decision-making positions. The 17th century Jewish communal leaders of Isfahan, Nasi Siman Tov and Zacharia were reportedly neither rabbis nor especially learned men. Their functions were limited to collecting funds for the Jewish community and for public works that would benefit the community, and collecting taxes due to government authorities. In some communities, there was a *Mullah* (learned religious leader) who served as the rabbi, legal authority, *shohet* (ritual slaughterer), *mohel* (ritual circumciser) and cantor (Hakohen, 1986). Netzer (1988) asserted that poor religious leadership among Persian Jews continued into the 19th and 20th centuries because rabbinical leaders were involved in cultural and social matters rather than spiritual matters. Sadok (1991) reported that in 1970 Iranian Jewish community leaders were pleasant people and liked by all, but did not have proper ordination as religious leaders.

Moreen (1987) reported that Jews of Isfahan adhered to the Torah, yet they seemed to have made no contribution to the development of Halacha or religious law. Persian Jews were ignorant of Jewish laws, and most Persian Jews did not know any Hebrew, yet they observed the traditional rituals. In the 18th century, Jews in Ormuz were Jews by name only. They did not know any Hebrew and had no knowledge at all of the Jewish religion though they observed some ceremonies of the ancient law. So much changed through mixture with ceremonies taken from the Maures and the heathens that traditional Jewish ceremonies were not recognizable anymore (Fischel, 1982).

In the 1880's, Jews in Teheran were described as "poor but

ignorant" (Adler,1905). Poverty explained to some extent the cultural deterioration of Jews in Persia. Moreen (1987) claimed that there seemed to have been among Iranian Jews no wealthy people willing or able to support houses of learning and scholars of traditional studies. Elazar (1989) reported that Iranian Jewry for centuries was not concerned with Jewish culture. Persian Jews were concerned with improving themselves economically and politically (Elazar, 1989). A letter from a member of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, a Jewish educational institution in Persia, stated that the conditions of Iranian Jews were attributed to "no religious leaders directing the communities of Jews in Persia. You cannot imagine to what degree the religious leaders in these communities today are ignorant and unworthy of the vocation" (Rodrigue, 1993).

Because of the lack of religious leaders, Jews began to lose their Jewish character and adopt Persian customs and habits. They assimilated Persian ceremonies, and superstitions, influencing their way of thinking, of understanding life, their aspirations, and their hopes for a better future. In August, 1908, an Alliance worker wrote, "I am sure it will surprise you to hear that Orthodox Jewry is the least represented and that it is becoming more rare with each passing day." He wrote, "It can be stated without exaggeration that nine-tenths of the Jewish population of Hamadan are affiliated with the Bahai religion (On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance in Iran, 1996).

On August 3, 1920 a letter sent to the Alliance offices stated "in the communities of Persia, more than any other communities in the East, the study of our sacred language has been neglected, the moral principals of our religion have been misconstrued, and superstitious practices have

taken the place of Religious beliefs" (Rodrigue, 1993). Fischel (1950) reported that in the 1940's Jews were few in number and assimilated into the Persian population. In 1946, "A Jewry of some 80,000 has in fact no leaders, neither spiritual, social, nor political" (Netzer, 1981). In 1951, the American Jewish Yearbook described the Jewish culture: " Despite their numbers, the Jews in Iran had few spiritual, social, or political leaders."

In the mid 1900's, Sadok (1991) reported that large portions of Iranian Jews were not interested in a strong Jewish education. Parents not only did not support Jewish education, sometimes they were even against it. He reported that "if we want them to make aliya to Israel we first have to make sure that they will continue to survive as Jews." Cohen (1997) reported that the majority of the younger generation was not observant. Prayers and rules of Shabbat were not observed. Jews used microphones, collected money, and wrote donations in their ledgers on these holy days. Sadok (1991) reported that 50-60% of the Jewish children in Teheran went to non-Jewish schools.

Until 1979, the *Beit Din* (rabbinical court) of Teheran that handled Jewish marriages, divorces and matters of inheritance for the State functioned only with the aid of *dayanim* (judges of the religious court) sent from Israel. The Teherani Jewish community lacked rabbis, higher level yeshivot and teachers' seminaries. They relied on outsiders to service their religious needs (Cohen, 1997c). Fischel (1982) suggested that scholars tried to justify the lack of religious continuity, contending that they were busy fighting for physical survival and had no time to concentrate their efforts on religious issues. Netzer (1984) characterized Iranian Jewish communities of at least two generations as desolate of

Jewish religious activity as well as Zionism.

Isolation from World Jewry

The Jewish minority in Persia had been left entirely to itself until the end of the 19th century. No outside organizations, Jewish or otherwise, took any interest in the fate of the Jews of Persia. Contact with Jews in Europe and elsewhere occurred when a *shaliach* (courier messenger) came to collect alms for Jewish institutions in Palestine. Ben Tzvi (1963) reported in 1839 that a survivor of the Mashad pogrom described the plight of the Jews: "Now we have no hope other than, first, the grace of the Almighty, secondly the arrival of the Messiah, thirdly the arrival of the British who will keep us alive, treat us compassionately and save us from the this exile in Ishmael."

In 1865, Mullah Rabbi Yitzchak, chief Rabbi of Teheran, appealed to the Presidium of the Alliance hoping for World Jewry's help. He said:

> You would not want your brethren, your own flesh and blood, to be destroyed in abject poverty, sacrifices to constant persecution. We are subject to the ridicule of our enemies, who consider us defenseless and do with us what they will. Not a day, hour or even minute goes without another tragedy befalling us. Our lives, property, honor and all that we hold dear are subject to their wrath, a situation which is worse than slavery" (Cohen, 1986).

With an outbreak of famine in 1871, Persian Jews asked for direct assistance from their European brethren. They beseeched them "in some

way or another, if possible, bring us forth out of this burning furnace of Iran to the Holy Land... or place us under your protective wings, or cause us to emigrate to other countries" (Fischel, 1950).

In July 1873, Shah Nasr al-Din met with the Central Committee of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris. The spokesman of the Alliance was Adolphe Cremieux who informed the Shah that Persian Jews were aware of their obligations to King and country. The Shah was asked and agreed to recognize the establishment of Jewish schools. He further reassured Persian Jews and promised to protect all foreign nationalities in Persia (Fischel, 1950). In the Shah's diary, the Royal Logbook, he wrote on July 12, 1873 that he had "assured that he would indeed protect all foreign nationalities in Persia" (Fischel, 1950).

Sir Moses Montefiore suggested that the Shah's reply and the subsequent details of their agreement, be reproduced in Hebrew, English and Persian. Lithographed copies were sent to the leaders of the Persian Jewish communities with instructions to affix the proclamation in the main entrances of their synagogues. In addition, copies of written petitions handed to the Shah in many countries of Europe on behalf of their Persian brethren were published. A pamphlet, titled Mishloach Manot, was distributed to the Jews of Persia to show the solidarity of their European Jews with their brothers. Nevertheless, intervention of European Jewry neither brought about the social improvement nor lessened the persecution and suffering of Jews living in Persia (Fischel, 1950). Kashani (1980) reported that although the laws were changed, local Muslim clerics did not follow the decrees and only minor improvements were visible.

Shah Nasr al-Din was viewed so favorably in many Jewish

communities that the early religious Zionist visionary Rav Yehudah Alkalai compared him to the Biblical Persian leader, Coresh the Great, and believed that redemption and salvation had begun (Kashani, 1980). A second meeting between the Shah and leaders of European Jewry took place in Buckingham Palace on July 4, 1889. In this meeting, the need for schools and the promotion of education among Jewish subjects of Persia were stressed. The Jews requested that the Shah reaffirm throughout his provinces the edicts of 1881 allowing Jews to practice their religion openly. In reality, the edicts of 1881 had applied only in Teheran (the capital since 1788). Teheran's Jewish residents experienced fewer restrictions and were persecuted less because the Shah lived in Teheran, and Teheran was the location for many foreign diplomats (Cohen, 1997b).

In 1894, diplomatic representatives of the United States in Teheran tried to help Persian Jews through political intervention and the monitoring of Jewish communities. The vice counsel general, John Taylor, informed the State Department about the renewal of persecution against Jews in Hamadan. He wrote: "The lawless spirit of the people, the failure of the ruling authorities to control the situation and the stupidity of the populace, all combined to make the Jews the most available outlet for the lowest passions of man" (Fischel, 1950). In a report, dated May 17, 1897, the American Consul wrote to the secretary of state in Washington that he had intervened on behalf of Jews in Teheran when a mob of Muslims, after speaking to the Shah's ministers ,were about to loot and destroy Jewish property. The American Consul was unsuccessful as looting and property damage occurred (Fischel, 1950).

On May 10, 1918, Mr. John Caldwell, an American minister in

Teheran, was empowered by the secretary of state to use $15,000 to help the Jews of Persia who were reported to be "in a starving condition and in dire need" (Fischel, 1950). The money had been deposited with the State Department by the Joint Distribution Committee. It was not until 1947 that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee established the foundation for social, medical, and educational assistance of Jews in Teheran and other communities in Iran (Cohen, 1997b).

Persian Jewry during and after WW II

The general economic improvement in Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty was paralleled in Jewish communities both socially and economically. The constitutional movement in Iran that had been supported by Jews opened for them new roads toward material and moral regeneration and removed discriminatory and humiliating medieval restrictions. Jews had their own deputy in Majles who effectively served the Jewish community (Fischel, 1950; Loeb, 1977). Iran, neutral during World War II, even became a haven for Polish Jews escaping the Holocaust.

Between the spring and autumn of 1942, approximately 25,000 Polish refugees arrived in Teheran. Two thousand were Jews, of whom half were children. The Jews arrived in Teheran and waited to set sail for Palestine. The seriously ill were sent to hospitals in Teheran and all others were sent to a camp outside of Teheran. The refugees received medical supplies, fruits and vegetables from the local Jewish community, and parcels and money from the Hadassah women's organization (Omer, 1991). In addition, between 1949 and 1951, Iraqi Jews were assisted by local guides and emissaries from Israel, in escaping via Iran to Israel.

According to Banooni (1996), the government of Iran during the 1940's generally prevented hostile outbreaks towards Jews. Between 1948 and 1968 no attacks on the Jewish population were officially recorded. Jews were no longer barred from any profession and were required to serve in the army and pay regular taxes. The elimination of the face-veil from the general society removed a source of insult to Jewish women, who had previously been required to have their faces uncovered. Secular education was made available to Jewish girls as well as to boys, and for the first time Jews were able to become government-licensed teachers (Loeb, 1977). Above all, universal education was thought to bring Iran inextricably into the 20th century. As a result of higher education, Jews prospered in business, entered all fields of education, and participated in every professional aspect of Iranian society (Hirschfeld, 1979). They also developed a worldwide carpet and antique export business with non-Iranian Jews (Gibson, 1992).

In 1948, the State of Israel was created. Iran's delegation to the United Nations Commission on Palestine had voted against the creation of the Jewish State. Jews moved en masse to Teheran to escape fear and intimidation of Muslims in smaller communities. In 1950 in the town of Sanandaj, Jews were attacked by local residents resulting in 12 deaths. Subsequently, the majority of Jewish residents relocated to Teheran.

Many Jews immigrated to Israel from Teheran while others remained (Haddad, 1984). Menashri (1997) lamented that the Iranian migration of the late 1940's and early 1950's overlapped the major immigration of Jews from the European Holocaust and other Arab countries, and therefore Persian Jewish history and acculturation were not

seriously discussed or documented within Israeli society.

In the 1970's, young Iranians living in the Diaspora often viewed themselves as Iranians of the Jewish faith emphasizing the Iranian culture and heritage. These Iranian Jewish youth were very emotionally connected to their homeland. Netzer (1984) reported that Iranian Jews did not forget their roots and quoted an Iranian Jewish publication as follows: "Whoever forgets his homeland, the land in which he was born and grew up, is a traitor, this action is a terrible education to transmit to the young generation, a feeling of lack of gratitude."

Other Iranian Jews were proud of both their Iranian and Jewish heritage and no longer wanted to hide or curtail their Judaism as they had in Iran. They read and heard that American Jews succeeded in all areas of economic, political life and were looking to replicate this success (Netzer, 1984). In the United States, Iranian Jews in America felt more Jewish because they were openly proud of their religion. In Iran, Muslim society had prevented open displays of Jewishness (Netzer, 1992). Young Iranians discovered that successful business and professional people were also observant Jews; traditions did not have to be shed to succeed in America (Baer, 1996). Moreover, parents wanted their children to succeed in America, but without losing their Iranian identity and mores (Netzer, 1992).

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE CRYPTO-JEWS OF MASHAD

The name Mashad comes from the word sanctuary, referring to a burial site, or place where a martyr died (Esposito, 1995; Patai 1983). Mashad is the burial place of Ali Raza, the eighth of twelve Muslim prophets, the son-in-law of Mohammed, who died in 818 A.D. (Tokayer, 1992). Esposito (1995) explained that Ali was believed to have the status of chief of martyrs because of his suffering and ultimate slaughter by his enemies. On holy Muslim days, thousands of Muslims arrived in the holy town of Mashad to visit Ali Raza's tomb.

In 1726, Nadir Shah conquered the town of Mashad. In1740, he moved 40 Jewish families from the city of Kazvin to Mashad to watch over the spoils of war taken from India. Nadir Shah wanted to establish Mashad as a center of business and trade and institute it as his capital. (Fischel, 1935; Kashani, 1979). The 40 Jewish families became the center of the Jewish presence in Mashad. The Jews were tolerated by the local population due to the shift in the country's official religion and policies of the Nadir Shah who was a follower of the Sufi sect.

Levian (1996) reported that the Jews were only allowed to live in the most inferior areas of Mashad. However, they quickly acclimated and built synagogues as well as a community infrastructure. A visitor to Mashad in 1830 wrote that the Jews were well to do and had comfortable houses with gardens. Nevertheless, they had to wear clothing identifying them as Jews (Patai, 1997). Local Muslims fearing the powerful

government of Nadir Shah, generally refrained from inflicting damage upon the Jewish community. With the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, their resentment resurfaced and the Jews of Mashad were again persecuted. In the late 18th century under the rulers of the Qajar dynasty, life for the Jews in Mashad deteriorated, and the deterioration continued for almost a century (Cohen, 1997a; Levian, 1996).

Alahdadi pogrom

In March 1839 (Nisan 12, 5599) on the day of mourning for Hussein, grandson of Mohammed, the tradition of commemorating his anniversary through passion plays and ritualistic bloody self-flagellation was carried out. During the commemoration, a mob poured into the Jewish quarter, burned the synagogue, and destroyed the Torah scrolls. During this pogrom, dozens of Jews were murdered and Jewish stores were looted and destroyed. Only four stores remained untouched, and most of the Jewish community's possessions were plundered. The furniture of the synagogue was sold and the money received was used to build a mosque. Moreover, several young beautiful Jewish women were taken away from the Jewish community to join a harem (Yehoshua-Raz, 1992; Levian, 1996).

There is disagreement as to the exact year of the pogrom. Although most scholars argue it to be in 1839, others suggested it was 1837 or 1838 (Fischel 1935 p. 54 footnote #27). In addition, Yehoshua Raz (1992) quotes many sources to show that there were conflicting accounts of how many Jews were actually murdered. The reports range from 32 to 56. Kashani (1979) maintains the most reliable number is 32 because it was the one recorded closest to the event. The Jewish

community was faced with the dilemma of whether to die a martyr's death or convert to Islam. The community leaders determined that the events of the pogrom did not dictate giving up one's life for sanctifying the name of God. Chaklai (1982) reported that community leaders believed that Muslim wrath was temporary. Other members of the Jewish community stated that since "the basis of Islam and Judaism are the same", whenever it became impossible to observe Judaism one could follow Islam (Dilamanian, 1998). The latter assumed that Gods of both religions are the same, each reflecting "master of the world" in their own tongue. As a result, the Jews could readily state without feeling compromised that there was no God except *Allah.* It then would not be difficult for a Jew to even assert that Mohammed was a prophet of God since Judaism acknowledges the existence of other religions and accepts that others have belief systems that do not infringe on Judaic beliefs.

Kashani (1979), however, wrote that some Jews whispered under their breaths *Musah* (Moses) instead of *Mohammed* during the declaration ritual. Others, though, justified their verbal commitment based on the Maimonides' response that verbal statements alone are not a sin, especially if the person has full intentions to continuing traditional observance of Judaism. Moreover, Patai (1997) suggested that Mashad Jews' commitment to religion prior to the pogrom was flexible due to communal leaders' contacts with Sufis. High ranking religious officials of the Jewish community actually ate in non-Jewish homes in the 1930's. Their *dayan* (Jewish, religious judge) is even claimed to have eaten non-kosher food. Thus, several reasons were offered to explain the seemingly easy conversion or participation in public declaration of Allah as God and

Mohammed as prophet.

With forced conversions, Jews of Mashad officially ceased to exist and the Jews became *Jadid al-Islam* or New Muslims. A chief priest, Mujtahid, was officially appointed as the New Muslim's supervisor. Mujtahid was both an instructor of Islam and the inquisitor for Islam. During the two decades following the forced conversion all signs of Jewish life disappeared, including the use of mikveh and the synagogue. Jewish men prayed in the mosques and ate non-kosher meat slaughtered by Muslims. They were required to diligently study the Koran and other religious books of Islam (Fischel, 1949). Levian (1996) reported that Jewish religious instruction was outlawed; thus, Jewish education became non-existent. As a result, in 20 to 30 years, the majority of the new generation of Crypto-Jews possessed very little knowledge of the laws, customs and traditions of their parents.

Yehoshua-Raz (1992) listed additional rules promulgated on Jews in the aftermath of the forced conversions. They were:

1) Any New Muslim who reverts to Judaism was to be killed,
2) Jews were not to construct synagogues in towns lived in by Muslims,
3) The residential houses of Jews were not to be taller than a Muslim's house,
4) Jews were prohibited from carrying weapons,
5) Jews had to ride side saddle on their donkeys,
6) Jews were not to own horses,
7) Jews' clothing had to be of an identifying style

or they had to wear a patch on their clothing, and

8) A New Muslim was the sole inheritor of his family's wealth.

Yehoshua-Raz (1992) listed additional rules forced on Jews in 1870 by Muslim clerics:

1) Jews were not to raise their voices when speaking to Muslims.

2) A Jew was not to wear two shoes of the same set.

3) Any meat purchased by the New Muslims had to be wrapped well when carried home.

4) Jews were not to live in finished decorated homes.

5) The doorways of Jewish homes were to be lower than normal.

6) A Jew was not to travel outside the town.

7) Any Jew found drunk was condemned to death.

8) Jews were not to eat fresh fruit.

9) Jews had to take rebukes and insults without responding.

10) If a Muslim owed money to a Jew, the Jew had to ask for it in a low subservient voice.

11) Jews had to give Muslims the right of way when walking.

Yet, Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that most Jewish women did not allow their children or themselves to take part in major violations of

Jewish law. Through the efforts of Rachel, the *Mashateh* (hairdresser), and others like her, Jewish women remained truthful to their religion after the pogrom. While working, Rachel gave Jewish women words of encouragement and strength to uphold their ancestors' faith. She advocated the proper rearing of children; she collected and distributed money to poor Jews. Slowly, through the efforts of women, the Crypto-Jews began to live a dual life as New Muslims in public and Jews in secret (Dilamanian, 1998).

Religious Practices and Education of the Crypto-Jews

A French traveler in Persia in 1845 wrote that there are "Jews in this town (Mashad) who are Mussulmans in form but not in heart." Patai (1979) reported that ritual slaughter of meat was done in cellars of private homes, yet meat was bought from non-Jewish Persians as a charade to accommodate Muslim rules for Jews. The non-kosher meat was either given to the dogs or to poor people. Kashani (1979) wrote that Jewish holidays were partially observed and small prayer groups were arranged for prayer services. In order to avoid detection, Jews did not blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, nor did they sit in Sukkoth. Similarly, Chanukah candles were lit, but not in tandem, so as not to arouse the suspicion of non-Jewish neighbors. Fischel (1935) noted that in some instances major holidays were postponed because of the fear of spying neighbors. However, circumcisions were generally performed at the proper time.

Marriage ceremonies were held publicly following Muslim rituals and followed by a private Jewish ceremony. Dual marriage contracts were the norm and many still exist in private collections and museums (Yoresh,

1968). Marriages between close relatives, especially between first cousins, were practiced among the Jews of Mashad. These marriages were assumed as obligatory to maintain and strengthen family ties, protect their secret lives and insure that the community would stay strong and self-contained (Patai, 1983).

Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that Jewish women tried to observe the laws of *Niddah* (family purity and ritual cleanliness). However, public baths were substituted, an unacceptable ritual replacement, for a mikveh. Jews were also forced to bury their dead among non-Jews, but proper Jewish burial customs were secretly followed (Kashani, 1979). On the Sabbath and Jewish holidays stores remained open, staffed only by young children. When a customer entered, the young boy explained that their father would return in a few hours or that the item was out of stock. This practice was actually encouraged by Mullah Mordechai Aghlar (Dilamanian, 1998; Kashani 1979).

The degree of daily Jewish religious practice in 19th and 20th centuries Persia was unclear. Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that a missionary visiting Mashad in 1844 found that some Jews who had accepted Islam secretly practiced Judaism (Yehoshua-Raz, 1992). Dilamanian (1998) reported that "they continued to practice Judaism at home to the degree that was observant." Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that the Jews of Mashad were not negligent in any law of the life cycle laws and holidays. This level of observance was echoed by Kashani (1979) who suggested that cellars used as small synagogues were also used for a Talmud Torah school for boys. Jewish education was offered after attendance in the Muslim school.

Patai (1974; 1997) reported that around 1860 a *midrash* (Jewish school) for twelve year-old boys began to function in a dark narrow cellar, accommodating no more than 10 to 15 students. The age of 12 was carefully chosen to guarantee the secrecy of the underground school. The school had no books or equipment, the instructor sat on a cushion, and the children sat either on the floor or on leather hides. The teaching of the Hebrew language was important to maintain a connection with the rest of Jewry, yet the language of instruction was in Farsi. The school became public during World War I. In 1945, the *midrash* was a two-story, ten classroom structure. The teachers had blackboards and chalk, and served 100 students.

Levian (1996) claimed that within 50 years of the *Alahdadi* pogrom the strict laws of kashrut were kept in every Jewish home. In addition, due to selfless dedication, all Jewish families in Mashad were once again acquainted with their Jewish roots, and observed their customs and traditions with a renewed faith. Patai (1971) reported that to help keep their traditions, a secret language was developed called *Lo Torani* (not Torah-like). It contained, in addition to Persian, many Hebrew elements, but was not the pure Hebrew of the Torah. The font used was very similar to the Rashi typeface.

In 1900, there was a terrible famine which the local Muslim population blamed on the Jews. The Muslims claimed that Jews were hoarding wheat in their cellars and threatened another pogrom. In 1902, Muslims gathered in their mosques claiming that New Muslims were fraudulent because they did not intermarry, eat regular meat, or work on Jewish holidays. A pogrom was averted when an important dignitary of

the town interceded.

Dilamanian (1998) reported that the Jews of Mashad lived in constant fear. Large gates were installed at the entrance to the Jewish quarter, which were locked in the evenings for security. The Crypto-Jews tried not to keep any written documentation that incriminated them as less than full Muslims. Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that *gittin* (divorce documents) were never issued. In addition, Jewish books and Torah scrolls were sent to other towns for safe keeping, as well as to help disguise the Mashadi's Jewish identity.

Fischel (1935) stated that in the 1930's "Jews were still compelled to appear as Muslims while trying to hold on secretly to their Judaism under the most difficult conditions." Patai (1997) asserted that in 1942, a blood libel was invoked and the Jewish community of Mashad was attacked. Fortunately, no one was killed. In 1946, before Passover, a hostile mob went on a rampage and burned down a few homes. The police did not interfere. However, when a Muslim religious leader of Mashad spoke out, the mob dispersed (Bassali, 1997). In 1947, another occurrence of a blood libel before Passover was attributed to the increased presence of Christian missionaries. Within five years after this incident the vast majority of Mashad Jews had moved to Teheran; others migrated to Bukhara, Afghanistan, India and England (Mardkhai, 1994; Ben Zvi,1963).

Cultural-Religious Successes and Challenges

In 1936, there were twelve synagogues, containing 30 Torah scrolls and four Hebrew schools with a total of 140 pupils. Patai (1997) reported that in 1946 "Mashad can be called the Jerusalem of Persia. The

Jews of Mashad are the best Jews among all the Jews of Iran." He added that "Hebrew is spoken by most of the Jews of Mashad, and almost all of them understand it." Teachers of Judaica were given great respect, the classrooms were generally quiet, and children spent their time productively (Patai, 1997).

The crypto life did not, however, allow for great scholarship; and therefore many of the leaders of the Mashad community were not well versed in halacha. Nonetheless, there were some rabbinical leaders, like Rabbi Siman Tov and Mullah Mordechai Aklar, who served the Crypto-Jewish community. Unfortunately, when the opportunity arose, these leaders and others among them, Haj Mola Amin Kordavani in 1920, Rabbi Morad Aghlar in 1936 and Farajollah Nasrullayoff-Levian in 1951, emigrated from Mashad to Palestine and eventually died there (Shaare Tova Youth Committee, 1986). Netzer (1981) suggested that the migration of the rabbis created a vacuum of Jewish scholars and religious leaders in Mashad. Evidence of the lack of Judaic scholarship in Mashad was also reported by Dilamanian (1998) who found that even semi-literate people were referred to as "Mullah."

The End of the Jewish Community in Mashad

Haddad (1984) reported that some Jews of Mashad who yearned to return to an open Jewish life took advantage and opted to emigrate to Palestine. In the 1920's and 1930's a few hundred Jews emigrated to Palestine accompanied by their religious leader, Mordechai Aklar. This wave of emigration was comprised mostly of wealthy families involved in international trade. Migration to Palestine was illegal and took two months through a circuitous route via Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Chaklai, 1982).

With the establishment of the State of Israel, Yehoshua-Raz (1992) reported that 8,000 Jews sold their businesses and land at a loss. Israeli planes landed in Teheran in 1946 and transported Mashadi Jews to Israel free of charge (Dilamanian, 1998).

By 1955, 70% of the Crypto-Jews had emigrated to Israel. The vast majority of the approximately 2,000 remaining Jews moved to Teheran. A visitor to Mashad in 1970 was introduced to 10 Jewish families who still lived in Mashad as Crypto-Jews, remaining there because of financial holdings (Sadok, 1991; Yehoshua-Raz, 1992). In 1997, the last remaining Jews of Mashad emigrated (personal conversation with Mehran Ettesami, 1998).

Jews of Mashad were the most prosperous Jews in Iran because of their connections with other Muslims and their ability to trade freely. Most businesses were in carpets, animal skins, clothing, antiques, spices and drugs (Schechtman, 1960). Muslims often extended credit to members of the Mashad community because of its reputation for honesty in business dealings (Hakimian, 1997). Fischel (1935) reported instances of the Jewish community using its wealth to benefit other Jewish communities. At the turn of the 20th century, the Mashad Jewish community donated money to the Jews of Yezd, one of the poorest Jewish communities in Persia. In the 1930's, Fischel described the Mashad community as "always to be found ready, whenever there is a question of defending the flag of religious Jewry" (1932). During World War I, Mashadi Jews ransomed Turkistan and Bucharian Jews who were caught crossing the Afghanistan border.

There were still challenges to the Mashadi religious community.

Patai (1997) found that outside sources and visitors to Mashad seemed to contradict internal Persian Jewish observations. In 1887, European traveler Ephraim Neumark stated that "there can still be found in Mashad old people who remember their religion and observe it in secret. But the children, never saw Judaism in their days and are total Gentiles" (Patai, 1997). Cohen (1997a) wrote: "Despite the fact that their ancestors had zealously observed the Jewish faith in secret for 130 years, the younger generation had tended to abandon Judaism, and there have been cases of mixed marriages."

Concern for intermarriage and renouncing of the Jewish faith among Mashadi Jews was noted by the Jewish State of Israel. The Ashkenazi chief Rabbi of Israel, Yitzchak Hertzog, cautioned that among Mashadi Jews there may be problems of *Mamzeirim* (illegitimate children born as a result of unsanctioned unions) because of improper Jewish divorces and cases of intermarriage. The Sephardic chief Rabbi, Ben Zion Uziel contradicted this assertion, stating the insular Mashadi community protected its lineage. Patai (1983) argued that for more than 100 years there was not even a single case of divorce in Mashad. On the rare occasion that a proper Jewish divorce was needed, the ritual was conducted in neighboring towns where the legitimacy of Jewish law was assured (Yehoshua-Raz, 1992).

The anti-Semitism of World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel closed the chapter on an organized Jewish presence in Mashad. Remaining Jews either moved to major Iranian towns or became part of the Diaspora.

CHAPTER IV

JEWISH EDUCATION

Unlike Jewish communities in other Muslim countries, Iranian Jewry did not maintain a high standard of Jewish learning (Abramovitch, 1997). Netzer (1989) reported that in the 12th century, the Jews of Persia were well versed in Jewish texts. Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon said "there is no one so ignorant in the whole of Babylon, Assyria, Media and Persia, that does not know the twenty four books, the punctuation, the grammar, the superfluous and omitted letters, for the precentor does not read the Law, but he that is called up to the scroll of the law reads himself' " (p. 447). Nevertheless, because the Jewish population of Iran was scattered, close communication between communities did not exist (Netzer,1989). Therefore, there was no united Jewish educational organization, which resulted in an overall decline in Judaic scholarship in Iran.

Maktab - Traditional One Room Schools

Throughout the ages, Persian *Kuttabs* (*Maktab* singular for one room schools like the European cheder) generally taught their pupils how to pray; only the minimal amount of Hebrew was needed for that skill (Adler, 1905). Raz (1992) explained that there was no predetermined curriculum; rather, the instruction included parts of the Bible translated into Judeo Persian. Few Persian Jews were familiar with modern Hebrew language. Most Jews spoke various dialects of Judeo-Persian, which was

replete with Hebrew words and idioms. Persian Jews generally wrote Farsi in Rashi script (Cohen, 1986). Very few Jews learned Talmud, Midrash, Halacha and Responsa. The Jews who did study these texts often did not understand them (Kashani, 1980; Melamed, 1951). According to Netzer (1989), boys usually began their Jewish education at the age of four and generally ended at bar mitzvah; their education with its paucity of content was endured rather than enjoyed.

In the city of Kermanshah in 1930, students between the ages of 15 and 18 could barely read the Bible and translate the passages mechanically (Cohen, 1986). Adler (1905) observed that general studies were not taught to youth because of the lack of trained teachers. Patai (1983) reported that most tombstone inscriptions in Mashad, seen in 1944, were written in faulty Hebrew. Banooni (1996) maintains that Jews rarely had Hebrew or Persian books since Jews did not have access to Muslim printing presses. The few available books were imported. Heterogeneous classrooms in terms of ability and age made the school environment uncomfortable, made teaching problematic and made discipline difficult to maintain (Cohen, 1996). Furthermore, there was not one yeshiva in all of Iran in the 1900's capable of producing trained Rabbis (Netzer, 1989).

The full day Talmud Torah school in Teheran in 1905 conducted its classes in the courtyard of the synagogue. The teacher (known as a *melamed*, mullah, *chacham*, and caliph) instructed with a very long bamboo cane in hand. The cane was used to keep students awake and on task. The Melamed barely made a living and subsisted on fees that parents paid in goods or money. Many of the mullahs did not take money from the poor and some worked only for the heavenly reward (Cohen, 1996;

Kashani, 1980). Adler (1905) reported that children sat on the floor along the synagogue wall facing the teacher. They did not have books or writing boards.

Girls did not receive formal education. An example of the prevalence of female illiteracy was seen in the wedding customs before a marriage of Persian Jewry. Women held a consultation concerning the invitation of women to the wedding. Since women were unable to read and write, an old woman of the family was asked to be the inviter. Names were mentioned, and only after the inviter demonstrated to those assembled that she remembered every guest did she go from house to house announcing the wedding. This invitation procedure was called *salah binan* (consultation) (Patai, 1983).

The typical education given to girls was expressed by Niknam (1995). She stated, "From the earliest age that I can remember, my grandmother, a devout Jew, had given me my Jewish identity by telling me the stories of the Bible, how the Jews cooked and what the Jewish festivals were about." The girls learned the appropriate blessings, prayers, and laws of the kitchen from their mothers. Sometimes groups of girls met informally with older women to receive some instruction in Bible stories. Historically there was no organized system to teach girls (Chaklai, 1982).

Adler (1905) reported that the Jews of Persia at the turn of the century asked for help from their European brothers to establish enlightened schools which included general studies. The town of Sanandaj wrote to the Alliance Israelite Universelle begging for the establishment of an Alliance school even though they did not have the financial resources

to maintain a school. In 1902, the Chief Rabbi of Shiraz in 1902 asked for the Alliance's help to open a school (Cohen, 1981). Adler (1905) reported that at the turn of the 20th century, the only institution where modern education might be acquired by Iranian Jews was the American Mission School. This option was not open to marginally committed Jews who feared proselytization. Of note, the chief minister of the Shah, Sadre Aazem, suggested that the position of Jews would be much improved if they were better educated. Adler further suggested that Jews might surpass educationally their Muslim neighbors if given equal opportunities.

Educational Institutions and Attitudes

In the late 1800's and early 1900's the Alliance Israelite Universelle school system replaced most of the Persian Jewish Kuttabs. The Alliance Israelite Universelle, founded in 1860 in Paris, advocated that Jews needed to rely on themselves for their defense, to that end the Alliance defended the interests of Jews throughout the world (Schwarzfuchs, 1997). In 1898, the first Alliance school was opened in Teheran followed by similar schools in Hamadan in 1900; Isfahan in 1901; Shiraz and Sheena in 1903; and Sanandaj and Kermanshah in 1904 (On the occasion of the 100th, 1996). Many other schools opened in later years in Nahavand, Kermanshah, Bijar, Borujerd, Yazd, Kashan and Sandaj. Some of these schools were coeducational institutions; the majority provided separate gender education. The local communities and the Alliance itself jointly funded the schools.

The Alliance schools grouped children by age. Each school had a principal, a graduate of the Alliance seminary in France who had been trained in modern educational pedagogy. The classrooms generally were

aesthetically pleasing; pupils sat on chairs and not on the floor; each room had a blackboard; and students were encouraged to write (Cohen, 1996). Alliance schools played decisive roles in the cultural and educational uplifting of the Jewish population. The days that schools opened and the principal and teachers arrived were considered festive celebrations. Stores closed and people of the community dressed in their finest clothes to greet their new educators.

A student of the Alliance school described his experience this way: "The language of the Alliance school was French and the program of studies was designed to produce an enlightened, secular and modern-thinking person who would be a loyal and useful citizen of his country. Little attention was paid to Jewish studies, the Hebrew language and the study of Jewish history; these were presented from a secular point of view" (Netzer, 1989). Unfortunately, as Netzer (1989) reported, the Alliance schools only had classes to the sixth grade. The first school where it was possible to learn through the 12th grade was not established until 1950.

The Alliance schools were viewed as having an excellent effect on both children and parents in Teheran. The acquisition of fluency in French and English allowed Jews to have greater success in business and trade then their Muslim peers (Kashani 1980). The Alliance educational network produced cadres of westernized Middle Eastern Jews who now had a distinct advantage in opportunity over the largely uneducated Muslim masses. Jews rapidly developed an economic life in the Muslim world by the 1970's that was disproportionate to their numbers or their social status in the general population (Stillman, 1979).

An Alliance-educated Jew, Simon Zareh, remarked, "Due to my French language background from the Alliance, I was able to obtain further education in France. I am not alone. Almost every day, I encounter other successful businessmen and women, doctors, scientists, educators, rabbis, judges, surgeons who owe their success to the Alliance" (On the occasion, 1996). Alliance schools did not only educate the Jewish population, they were also spokesmen for the Jewish population. They addressed the abuse of Jewish rights and liberties when needed (Fischel, 1950).

Similar comments about Alliance schools were widespread. In 1996, a community elder of the Iranian community stated, "Alliance, through expansion of knowledge among the youth and their orientation with educational legacies of the progressive world, has played an important and vital role in enlightening the society, causing most of the students to travel abroad, get acquainted with foreign trade, and be able to work in various public and government offices and departments" (On the occasion, 1996). In a report to the Alliance, a writer at the turn of the 20th century reported:

> This odious regime of intolerance and oppression has become appreciably more gentle since the day you first opened your schools here. Taking advantage of a certain prestige and influence, the strength of which can only be explained by the ignorance and spinelessness of the local authorities, your directors have succeeded in putting a stop to the fierce malevolence of some and the insatiable greed of the others. Our

> communities have benefited from the respect and consideration with which we are viewed in the eyes of the Persian world. Your representatives, here designated by the title *Reis Yahudah* (leaders of the Jews) are looked up as agents of considerable power. You have provided the majority of the communities of Persia a state of well being which they had never before imagined (On the occasion,1999).

Ben Tzvi (1963) commented that while Alliance schools contributed to the general cultural standard of the Jews, it also, albeit unwittingly, effaced Jewish religious values. The students found themselves insufficiently educated in their cultural traditions. Among its pupils the Alliance schools did not cultivate respect for tradition or knowledge of ancient or modern Jewish history and culture. The schools stressed French culture and language, taught systematically in an articulate fashion. Unfortunately, the spiritual treasures of Iranian Jewry were not included in the curricula of the Alliance schools (Cohen, 1986).

Kashani (1980) explained that not all of Persian Jewry welcomed the secular Alliance schools. Many of the older generation of Jews and rabbis vehemently opposed the establishment of the Alliance schools. To ban the opening of the Alliance schools, some older generation Jews found support from the rabbinical authorities in Jerusalem. The Jews of Mashad preferred to maintain a low profile as Crypto-Jews, and therefore their leaders repeatedly advised against the establishment of an Alliance school in Mashad (Bassali, Y, 1997). The first attempt to open an Alliance school

in Mashad was in 1920. The attempt failed to gain permission from the elders of the Jewish community of Mashad. Another attempt in 1937 also failed (Bassali, H, 1995). Loeb (1977) reported that the Jewish community of Shiraz asked the Alliance to close its functioning school because of the lack of Jewish and religious instruction in the curriculum.

The influence of the Alliance schools among Jews was not always positive. Melamed (1951) suggested that learned Jews of Shiraz were not following tradition. The covering of heads while sitting and eating in the Sukkah and other traditions were ignored. Racism among some of the faculty of the Alliance, as well as attitudes of superiority and insensitivity toward Persian Jews, was apparent. Even faculty who came from other Middle Eastern countries verbalized their feelings that Persian Jews represented a backward community (Cohen, 1986).

Furthermore, Cohen (1986) reported that neglect of Judaic studies in Hamadan was so great that the world secretary of the Alliance chastised the principal asserting that Hebrew was not being taught even in the 9th grade. Rodrigue (1993) reported that the Zionist organization in Iran in 1920 was dismayed and wrote to its headquarters in London protesting the lack of a Jewish nationalistic school in Teheran. Similarly, Alliance school educators were regularly chastised for failing to teach and practice the basic tenets of Judaism.

According to Ben Tzvi (1963), some families at the turn of the 20th century who could not afford the tuition of the Alliance schools sent their children to Christian mission schools. At the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, various Christian societies from England and America attempted to spread the teachings of the Gospel. Missionary

schools were opened in 1876 in Teheran, 1881 in Hamadan, 1889 in Isfahan and in 1894 in Kermanshah. Christian society expected to find fertile soil to proselytize among the poverty stricken ghettos of the Jews. They established schools and supplied economic and medical help in many towns. Their curriculum included the study of Persian and English, a certain amount of general studies, and Hebrew. Needy children were not obligated to pay tuition and were given free meals, clothing, and writing materials. Cohen (1996) reported that the parents of needy children received some financial assistance. In addition, the establishment of advanced workshops for vocational training attracted Jewish girls. Fischel (1950) noted that Christian societies in the 1800's published and distributed the New Testament, transliterated into Hebrew characters and distributed the Old Testament in Judeo-Persian.

Alliance schools were successful in checking the spread of Christianity and Bahai religions among Jews of Persia. Fischel (1950) cited a historian of the Protestant mission in Persia, who wrote " 'Among the Jews the fond hopes of the early days have not been fulfilled .... The close connection of the Jews and the Jewish world outside of Persia and the munificent donations of the French Alliance Israelite makes the Jews less accessible to missionary influences.'" Netzer (1988) found that Alliance and other Jewish schools were so successful that even non-Jewish students enrolled in order to receive a higher quality education than was available in other schools.

In 1933, the Shah's uniformed education standards led all Alliance schools to abandon French as the teaching language. In addition, curricula were modified to mirror Iranian standards so that it became for all intents

and purposes an Iranian educational institution. Cohen (1996) commented that the limited Jewishness that remained in the Alliance schools was found on Jewish holidays when schools were closed, and in the enrollment of the school, with the majority of the Alliance students being Jewish. During World War II, nationalistic feelings in Iran resulted in the expulsion from Iran of all foreign teachers (Netzer, 1989). The deportation of foreign teachers negatively affected Alliance schools, as most of the principals were French citizens.

During World War II the financial assistance from France ceased and the survival of the educational institutions in Iran were in jeopardy. Through the activities of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), vocational training schools and workshops were established. In 1950, the JDC also established a free food program and medical care for its students (Bauer, 1997). Jewish vocational schools under the auspices of ORT (Society for Spreading Artisan and Agricultural Work Among Jews) were opened in Teheran, Isfahan and Shiraz. In addition, Otzar Ha-Torah schools were opened whose aim was Hebrew education and the strengthening of traditional Judaism. New schools were opened and teacher training seminars, summer camps and other educational facilities were established (Fischel, 1997; Kashani, 1980).

In 1953, a yeshiva of higher learning was established in Shiraz by Yitzhack Baal Ha-Ness under the auspices of Otzar Ha-Torah (NSHA, 1995). The program was directed by a rabbi originally from Bnei Brak, Israel, and included the granting of a high school diploma and rabbinical ordination. A maximum of 50 students who graduated the program went

on to serve as Hebrew teachers, and some graduates became ritual slaughterers and butchers (Kashani, 1980; Loeb, 1977). The school was closed within a decade because of budget cuts to the supporting agency, the JDC, and the lack of support from Otzar Ha-Torah.

Kashani (1980) emphasized that Otzar Ha-Torah schools filled a void by teaching Jewish tradition and laws to more committed religious Jews. The schools were opened five days a week as compared to six days for state schools. Otzar Ha-Torah schools were closed as required on Friday for the Muslim holy day and on Shabbat. Unfortunately, the Otzar Ha-Torah schools yielded little success. Loeb (1977) reported that students were unable to explain words which were out of context no matter how often they encountered the word in a text. One observer, Penina Sarraf, noted that her family, an educated family in Iran, was only able to explain the first paragraph of the Shema prayer service. The Hebrew teachers were described as unable to speak Hebrew correctly. Classes were nearly impossible to conduct in Hebrew and, therefore, lessons were conducted almost entirely in Persian. Most teachers were said to be ignorant of Judaic subjects, with only a superficial acquaintance of the Siddur, Torah and Midrash. As a result, the younger generation did not have a historic conception of Jewish identity or pride in their heritage.

In 1970, Sadok (1991) reported that as Jewish children got older they received less Jewish education both in quantity and quality. Children in elementary school did not take their Jewish studies seriously and did not prepare their Judaic studies or Hebrew language homework. Students did not treat their Judaic studies teachers with respect. Students were often disorderly and exhibited behavior that was never practiced in front of their

Muslim teachers. The school system implicitly encouraged the negative perception of Judaic studies by promoting students who passed general studies classes but failed Judaic studies classes (Loeb, 1997).

There seemed to be an overall lack of seriousness and support for Jewish education. The Director general of Otzar Ha-Torah in Iran in 1977 wrote "that no curriculum exists except an outline for grades one to six, which includes a checklist of terms relating to the *Yomim Tovim* (major Jewish holidays)" (Dobrinsky, 1988). Sadok (1991) claimed that if no more than two-three hours of Jewish education a week were offered, parents considered sending their children to Jewish schools. Prospective rabbis abandoned teaching positions in Iran because of the lack of communal observance (Fischel, 1981).

Netzer (1981) described the Jewish youth of the 1970's as living desolate Jewish cultural lives. In 1973, Ezrah Spicehandler, the past director of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, maintained that the Jews of Iran, specifically in Teheran, had hardly any traces of authentic Judaism. In the 1970's intermarriage increased in Iran, because of assimilation among Jewish and non-Jewish students in the universities (Netzer, 1981). Unger (1995) reported that Mashedi Jews who moved to Teheran routinely drove to the synagogue and also dined in their favorite restaurants without concern for Kashrut restrictions. Melamed (1951) observed that as early as 1951 money was collected in the synagogue on *Shabbat* and other holidays for the needs of the synagogue and community.

Ironically, along with the lack of religious observance, the Jewish population which was only .25 % of the general Iranian population in the

late 1960's and early 1970's, contributed disproportionately to the larger society: 2% of the university professors, 6% of the doctors, and 4% of university students were Jewish (Netzer, 1981).

Despite these achievements Cohen (1996) stated, "Unfortunately it must also be stated that the Jewish community in Iran did not receive suitable modern Jewish education." Netzer (1981) accused the Jewish leadership of being too involved with the physical welfare of the community without concern for its spiritual guidance. Cohen (1986) emphasized that Iranian Jews needed a Persian-Jewish school because none of the existing institutions incorporated Persian-Jewish history, culture or customs into their curriculum. Azrachian (1997) stressed the importance of passing on Jewish heritage and culture from generation to generation, although he feared that it was not done. Earlier Netzer (1981) remarked that community leaders missed the opportunity and neglected to channel funds and energy into attracting good teachers for Jewish education even after some financial independence was achieved.

Nevertheless, in 1970 there were 80 different Jewish schools in Iran. Otzar Ha-Torah had 35 schools servicing 5,000 students. The Alliance had 33 schools, which serviced more than 5,000 students. An additional 10 schools were run by other private organizations. Khomeini's revolution of 1979 closed all institutions connected to Israel and staffed by Israelis. The institutions connected to the JDC, Otzar Ha-Torah, and the Alliance continued under strict government control (Elazar, 1989).

Religious observance and Culture

In a conversation with other scholars, Netzer (1981) asserted it was a myth that the Jews of Iran were traditionally observant; this notion was

fabricated by the Iranian immigrants themselves in the 1920's. He claimed that the only non-Persian source that identified total commitment to religious law and observance was a letter from an employee of the Teheran Alliance school in June 1904. The employee wrote:

> We must attest that, to their credit, they have proved able to maintain the faith of their parents. Through centuries of oppression and vicissitudes, there was but one thing to cling to, one thing that saved their character and their dignity from destruction: their religion and its law (On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance in Iran, 1996).

Rabbinic leaders and other sources previously mentioned rejected the claim of continuity of religious observance. With respect to the law, Chacham Ovadia Yossef (c) wrote that in relation to Jewish legal decisions "it is not a proof what the *dayanim* (Judges) in Persia decree, because it is well known that not all of their dayanim are knowledgeable or experts in their fields." Elsewhere Rabbi Yossef argued that Iranian Jewry did nothing in terms of Jewish ritual for their children except circumcise the males. In addition, many falsely claimed they were of priestly lineage (Yossef, a). Rabbi Isaac Hertzog, the second Ashkenazi chief Rabbi of Israel, suggested that there were no individuals in Persia in the 20th century who knew how to correctly write a legally binding divorce document. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Palestine, admonished the Jewish community in Shiraz about some co-religionists worshipping and sacrificing to demons. He pleaded with

community leaders to prevent such actions.

Although there were differences among Jewish leaders about the extent of religious adherence to practice and law, a renaissance in Persian Jewry's literary expression began in 1917 with the establishment of the Society for the Promotion of the Hebrew Language. In the same year, a Judeo-Persian and Hebrew printing press in Teheran was used. The presses supplemented Jerusalem publications which had been available since the mid-19th century. Judeo-Persian was written in Hebrew characters and was created in the 13th century (Donzel, 1990). Fischel (1960) reported that Hebrew characters were used well into the 19th and early 20th century in private correspondence, poetry and prose, and therefore using Hebrew characters was to be expected. Fischel (1969) also explained that the Persian community regarded the Hebrew alphabet as an integral part of their religious and cultural heritage; Arabic or Persian script was not acceptable.

A history of the Zionist movement in Farsi was printed in 1920, as was a Hebrew language textbook. In addition, Persian newspapers included poems of Nachman Bialik translated from Hebrew into Farsi. Books about Jewish religious observances were also published in 1924 and 1927 (Fischel, 1950). These publications supplemented archival and private collections of Judaica, translated into Farsi, and were part of the record of rulers and theologians of early Persia (Fischel, 1952).

CHAPTER V

IRANIAN JEWS RELOCATE

Post 1979

Although records are unofficial since no official tracking of Iranian Jews exists, it is estimated that during the 1980's about 60,000 Jews fled Iran. Of this number, 35,000 (58.3%) migrated to the United States, 20,000 (33.3%) to Israel, and the remaining 5,000 (8.3%) to Europe, (specifically, England, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland). Of the 35,000 who came to America, 25,000 (71.4%) live in California (of which 20,000 live in Los Angeles) and estimates ranging from 8,000 to 15,000 live in New York City and Long Island.

Iranian Jews who took up residence in America in the years preceding 1979 were mostly students who chose to remain in the United States after completing their education. Three years before the revolution against the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Rabbi Yedidya Shofet, anticipating the problems ahead for Jews in Iran, advised his co-religionists to leave the country (Kelley, 1994). Netzer (1981) reported that the majority of Jews who left between 1978-1979 were wealthy Jews. In contrast, most of the Jews who left during and after the Khomeini revolution had to leave all their possessions behind.

Unger (1995) reported stories of women departing Iran with 30 or 40 pounds of jewelry concealed on their bodies and in their clothes. Many

Jews converted their assets into gold bullion and diamonds, enabling them to take their riches with them. Other Jews borrowed all they could from the banks, packed the cash into suitcases and fled Iran (Spero, 1989). Kelly (1994) recounted the words of an escapee, " 'I couldn't say good-bye to anybody. We didn't have permission to let anybody know. I just had a purse. We had no extra clothes, nothing. We were supposed to pretend we were going to see the sights for two or three days.' "

Netzer (1981) explained that "upper class" Jews were a new phenomenon that developed in the 1960's. In 1949, Persian Jewry had been described as:

> one of the most miserable and backward communities in the Middle East. Poverty stricken and illiterate, Iranian Jews were in a grave light. Only 1 per cent of Iranian Jews could be considered wealthy, 10 per cent belonged to the middle class, and 30 per cent subsisted on a minimum standard hardly comparable to a Western sustenance level. The remainder (more than 50 per cent) eked out a precarious livelihood as small traders, brokers, porters, beggars, and itinerant peddlers. The majority of the Iranian Jewish community lived in overcrowded ghettoes. Amid primitive and un-hygienic conditions such diseases as tuberculosis and trachoma spread rapidly and took a heavy toll of the undernourished population, especially of the children (Fine, 1951).

Between the end of World War II and the Khomeini revolution, Iranian Jewry was transformed from an oppressed poverty-stricken community into an affluent and relatively well integrated one (Mladinov, 1981). The Jews in Iran benefited from the financial boom caused by the oil industry and their involvement as jewelers, owners of automobile dealerships, steel and plastic factories and most importantly real estate development. Almost overnight many Jews became prosperous, achieving prestigious positions and becoming increasingly an integral part of Iranian society. They held key posts in the oil industry, banking and law (Faivelson, 1981; Spero, 1989).

Spero (1989) argued that the forced exodus tormented many older Iranians because they didn't want to acculturate to the host society or to lose old traditions. The older generation spoke Farsi at home and taught the language to their children. The older generation tried to transplant the old culture of Iran into their new environments; they had their own food stores and restaurants that featured Middle Eastern products. Exclusive Iranian hairdressers, clothing stores, nightclubs, Iranian business Yellow Page directories and ethnic magazines helped maintain the old homeland atmosphere (Spero, 1989; Unger, 1995).

On the other hand, younger Iranians who experienced wealth and success in Iran in the years before Khomeini felt a loss of cultural status upon their arrival in America. They moved from the forefront of Iranian society to the bottom of the social ladder in the United States. Many were forced to leave behind luxurious homes, servants, and a rich social life (Gann, 1985). The financial assistance given to new Iranian immigrants in the 1980's was not comparable to what was received by Russian

immigrants of the same period. Rolan Sabet, a leader in the Persian community, said the Iranian community is "too proud to push for it. The new Americans from Iran found it profoundly humiliating to ask for help so clearly needed. In Iran, only the lowest level of society ever asked for this kind of help" (Gann, 1985; Mladinov, 1981).

Moreover, Weiner (1991) reported that since the majority of Iranian Jews had been unable to obtain permanent residence, they were not entitled to public assistance, free medical care and even free education for their school age children . In their annual report of 1980, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) reported that they had helped more than 400 Iranian Jews to become reunited with close relatives in the United States. Most other Iranian immigrants came independently. Faivelson (1981) explained that many Iranian immigrants chose not to apply for political asylum because they feared the revolutionary government would find out and harm their families still living in Iran. For political reasons all Iranians did not receive refugee status and were not given permanent residence in the United States unless they had preferential status through close relatives who were United States citizens or permanent residents (Weiner, 1980). Furthermore, the hostility and indifference experienced by Iranian Jews, when compared to the treatment and money received by other Jewish groups, bewildered many Persians. Spero (1989) reported that in the early 1980's one young Iranian yeshiva director reported that "some American Jews even say Iranians are not human beings. We have no importance. We are treated like third class citizens" (Spero, 1989).

Iranian youth who entered the United States immediately following the Khomeini revolution are now entering adulthood and

starting their own families and have experienced growing up in two cultures. They grew up in traditional Iranian families, while simultaneously exposed to the intensity of the American youth culture. People who served the Jewish Persian community discovered these young adults wished to assimilate American economic and educational values without sacrificing the closeness of the traditional Iranian Jewish family (Philips, 1995). To do so, Persian communities, while growing in numbers, influence and wealth, often have socially separated themselves from the general population. They are often described by insiders as one of America's smallest and yet least absorbed immigrant groups.

Assimilation and Acculturation

The adult generation of Iranian Jews in the United States was concerned about the impact of American culture on the younger generation. For example, Unger (1995) reported that the sexton of the Mashadi synagogue in Kew Gardens, N.Y. worried aloud that there was too much freedom in the United States and the freedom might result in intermarriage and general assimilation. Alan Helmreich (1998) reported that Bernard Livi, a middle aged businessman stated, " ' Here you have more freedom.'" Baer (1996) explained that the separation of church and state and the freedom to practice one's religion was a new phenomenon for Iranian Jews. Thus, Iranian Jews were in the position of learning to adapt and establish cultural and religious traditions that bridged two worlds. Some failed and some succeeded in this integration.

Unger (1995) asserted that a leader of the Mashadi community predicted that there would be a split in the Mashadi community between those Mashadis who became completely observant and those Mashadis

who were not observant, with the non-observant assimilating more to a secular American culture. The Mashadi leader argued that attendance in public schools increased the likelihood of loss of cultural and religious identity.

An observant Mashadi youth's statement to Unger (1995) highlights this growing rift: "They think I'm too observant, supposedly. But at least I can almost ensure that my kids will be Jewish, for another generation. Their kids, I can almost guarantee, will not be Jewish. These people will become totally assimilated. Their children will lose all traditional values, and they're bound to intermarry." Another observant Mashadi lamented: "When your son/daughter has been routinely exposed to a non-Jewish environment, or an environment of Jews who don't appear to be Jewish, they might begin to eat with them, look like them and eventually intermarry" (Nassimi, 1994). Another remarked "By sending our children to public schools, we are self destructing" (Ben Chaim, 1995).

Helmreich (1994) stated that "without religious extremism or anti-Semitism, it will be very difficult to force all of them (Iranian Jews) to stay in the community." The research committee for the Central Board of the Mashedi community (1997) concluded that "though assimilation and intermarriage may not be a problem we face at the present, it is inevitable that the continued exposure to the secular lifestyles of the American people will have an adverse affect on our children and grandchildren unless we provide them with an adequate education in the rich heritage of the Jewish people." A young writer from New York concurred: "A Yeshiva is the best institution from which children can nourish themselves

with Hebrew, Torah, Israel, and morality" (Hakimian, 1994). Another explained: "The only answer is religion. It is one of the only things that differentiates us from other people" (Hakimian, 1996). Another observant Mashadi lamented about Mashadis driving a car on Shabbat (Anonymous, 1995b).

Baer (1996) reported that the animosity over assimilation and lax religious observance in the Mashadi community was a new phenomenon. In Iran, observant Jews did not look down on fellow Jews whose level of ritual practice and observance differed from their own. The non-observant never hid their heritage, and their children knew they were Jewish and felt an affiliation to Judaism. Hakimian (1989) pointed out that non-observant Jews were generally traditional in their beliefs but not necessarily in their actions.

Kelly (1994) suggested that the schism among Persian Jews might be caused by the belief that Persian Jewish traditions can only be maintained in Jewish schools, and therefore Iranian Jews need to send their children to Jewish schools. Stolz (1979) reported that in 1979 an Iranian student in a Lubavitcher yeshiva remarked, " 'I didn't know it would be so religious here. In Teheran, we had more science and math, but we are Jews and I want to learn about Judaism'" (Stolz, 1979). Baer (1996) reported that in the mid 1980's non-observant families started to send their children to yeshivot in an attempt to preserve familial traditions and values. Mladinov (1981) explained that many Iranian Jews were accustomed to a more flexible Shabbat observance, making it more difficult for them to accept the strictly enforced community standards of the American Jewish organizations. Although there are some exclusively

Persian yeshivot in America (including two in Great Neck, NY), Etessami (1998) cautioned Persian Jews about isolating themselves from other Jewish communities.

According to Rabbi Chaim Sedler-Feller of the Hillel Council of UCLA, the younger generation, having generally received little or no Jewish education, has developed "a rather cynical attitude towards their elder's religion." On the other hand, some parents are concerned about being alienated if their children are more religious than they are. Thus, they send their children to public schools because "there is always the threat of a child becoming more religious than their parents, which can cause serious intergenerational conflicts" (Dilmanian, 1991). Parents have told the researcher that they will stop giving their children a Jewish education before middle school or high school because they do not want their children acting like rabbis.

In contrast, Ettesami (1991) suggested that some children go to extremes in pursuing Jewish education. Over-emphasizing mysticism, religious cults, and guilt that leads to alienating children from their less religious parents. Berger (1989) explained that some young Jewish women in the 1980's found that young men who studied in the American yeshivot had much higher standards of observance then they did. The disparity created by these strictly religious youth causes even more religious tension between more and less observant Jews.

Intra-ethnic Conflict

Whether because of their unusual history, the Islamic influences they had absorbed or their status as smaller-town-provincials, Mashadis in the United States did not mix well with the seemingly more sophisticated,

flashy Teherani Jews. Unger (1995) suggested that the lack of mixing was influenced by contact with Russia and Afghanistan; Mashadis dressed differently and had their own cuisine and distinctive dances for festive occasions. In these festivities, in contrast to other sects, women played a key role.

Unger (1995) argued that on some level the Mashadi community felt implicitly superior to other Jews and people in general because they had endured so much. The less they mixed with others, they seemed to believe, the more likely they were to maintain their superiority. This sense of superiority led to strife with other Iranian and non-Iranian Jews. Moreover, Unger (1995) reported that Teherani Jews argued that the Mashadi gene pool was defective because of many years of intramarriage, which might increase the chance of birth defects and physical abnormalities among children. Teherani Jews also believed that the Mashadi were uncouth, spoke very loudly, and did not have basic fundamental social skills. In contrast, the Mashadi claimed that Teheranis had poor manners, were inferior looking (because of their darker skin), and had women who were not as pretty, thereby needing to wear heavy makeup and dye their hair blonde.

Helmreich, (1998) reported that marriage by Mashadis with other communities was taboo, even with other Iranian Jews. Notwithstanding that Mashadis had been living among Teherani Jews for over 30 years, marriage between Mashadis and Teheranis was all but unheard of in Iran and continues to be a rarity in the United States. However, the younger generation of Mashadis and Teheranis in the United States question their exclusivity and the aloofness of their communities. Publications and

magazines argue that "ultimately, we are all Jewish and that's what really matters" (Shaer, 1997). Others explain the feelings of exclusivity, "You learn to push others away and think that they are bad because they are not exactly like you" (Dilamanian, 1997). One young person stated:

> Our unease outside of our sheltered world signalizes (sic) how much we lack beneath all the pomp and ardor. To grow and mature as a healthy community, we cannot continue rejecting others. The community has to allow for Mashedi individuals to interact with non-Mashadis and associate with other communities, even marry other Jews, without ostracizing them from the community (Nassimi, 1996).

A young teenage girl opined, "It is not a sin to be friends with a non-Mashadi or a non-Persian" (Ariel, 1996). Another wrote: "It is very naive and ignorant of people in the community to think that they are the one group that won't assimilate, that our Mashadi heritage is enough to keep us together"(Hakimian, 1996). However, Hakimian (1994) cautioned that communication and contact with outsiders by Mashedi didn't mean an adoption of their way of life. A teenager wrote, "As a Mashadi community, we have kept mainly to ourselves, closing the door to other Jewish communities as a sort of defense. However we are in no danger from other Jews" (Namdar, 1994). Other Mashedis maintained that Jews were descendants of Abraham, read the Torah, know the story of Moses and needed to assimilate into other Jewish communities (Davoudian, 1997; Rahmanan, 1995).

According to Unger (1995), Persian Jews wanted less to assimilate and were concerned with retaining their traditional values. Persian Jews considered themselves very family oriented and respectful of parents, and preferred to socialize with the core family, eat meals together, and go out together. Spero (1989) suggested that the desire for family cohesion took precedence over other needs. Even on a school night, children were taken to the airport to pick up a relative or to attend an engagement party. Entire families went to family affairs and other joyous occasions, often returning late the next morning. The late night family or social occasions often affected children's schoolwork, and teachers often viewed this apparent disregard of school as part of the Iranian culture that did not value education.

Iranian Jews generally have respect for authority, traditionalism, integrity, and enjoyment of life. America is viewed by Iranian Jews as overly permissive, and as breaking down the barriers of the parental authoritative role (Jalali, 1982; Philips, 1995). Iranian Jews are accustomed to respecting extended family, displaying loyalty, and demonstrating closeness to their relatives (Hemation, 1995). Helmreich (1994) suggested that Iranian Jewish youth were critical of promiscuity, drugs and divorce in American culture. Traditional family values are in danger, as pointed out by Baer (1996), "In America, apparent business success and material assets and excesses are admired perhaps more than family honor, honesty, education and personal integrity."

The Iranian Jewish community is resisting change and believes that the community flourishes if proper leadership is cultivated and dedicated to retaining its Iranian Jewish culture (Hakimian, D, 1994;

Netzer, 1984). A writer in the community magazine stated, "What I want from our community is fairly simple: A religious moral environment where we can raise our children with dignity and a better standard of living than we had, where we can teach our children their heritage and background and provide them with educational roots that will help them have fulfilling lives" (Hakimian, 1995).

Teenagers in the Persian community tend to view money as the most important factor in their social interactions. They believe the best way for a male to climb the social ladder is to "make a million". It is very important to them "to live in the finest locations and drive fancy cars and to build the fanciest synagogues" (Anonymous, 1995a). In the words of another Persian Jew: "The reason we chose the United States was mostly for economic opportunities and higher living standards. Israel, the Jewish State, would be a better place to 'make sure our children grew up as Jews'" (Hakimi, 1991). A young man commented: "The Mashadi community has placed so much value on wealth that it has lost sight of the people behind the dollar sign" (Hakimian, D, 1994).

The clash of Iranian Jewish and American cultures has produced many conflicts between those people who grew up in Iran and those people who grew up in America. Mental health therapists who serve the Persian community report that they deal mostly with conflicts arising out of parental control issues. The issues include child discipline, the view that children are the property of the parents, the shunning of any contact with American children, the host country's perceived poor value system and contemporary dating patterns (Philips, 1995).

Jalali (1982) found there are power struggles within the Persian

Jewish family related to authority of the father, traditionally a symbol of influence and power in the family. At times, the Iranian Jewish father makes decisions for his children, even when they are adults. The feelings of male superiority are manifested by boys who sometimes terrorize their sisters and mothers.

Furthermore, Jalali (1982) wrote that there are also conflicts between the traditional family roles and the American idea of marriage.

> Traditionally, a husband expected his wife to take care of the home and children. Her actions at home and in public were expected to help his and the family's status. The father has the authority in the home and the mother is there to comfort her children when needed, and act as an ambassador between child and father. Discipline in the family is maintained by the father and generally consists of scolding and slapping. Mothers will often persuade their sons rather than give them orders, but are reported to try to dominate their daughters .

However, these roles are changing as can be seen in a Persian community periodical that reports Iranian Jewish families "see they are losing power over their children" (Primanesh, 1998).

Philips (1995) reported that Iranian born parents discourage their daughters from dating Americans because they want them to marry other Iranians. Iranian parents are also nervous about the sexual freedom associated with American dating. Teenagers report that they may date Americans "just for fun", but they wanted ultimately to marry fellow

Iranians. They attribute their preferences about marriage to having a shared language, traditions and sense of community with other Iranians. An Iranian therapist, a graduate of the Hebrew Union College's School of Jewish Communal Service, observed, "The younger generation wants more autonomy, but yet wants to have a relationship with the extended family" (Philips, 1995). The community's desire to remain insular perhaps stems from the lifestyle the community was forced to lead in Iran.

Yet, the desire to remain within one's community may be perceived in the general culture and the field of sociology as preferential. Families often choose to turn inward, associating only with one's own group, in order to reproduce a micro-culture resembling life in the old country. To retain the insularity, Iranian Jews eat the same foods and follow the same traditions while criticizing western culture's values and belief systems. However, children in these families, because of contact with the outside world through schools and friends, become acculturated, and conflicts frequently develop between the youth and their parents and the older generation, in general (Jalali, 1983).

With respect to Mashadis, Helmreich (1994) reported that "the youth want the adventure of dating non-Mashadis, but they also value the security of marrying a Mashadi." To encourage marriage and dating within the Mashadi community, a group called the Concerned Mashadi Parents Association (1993) established a *shidduch* (match-making) service that searches worldwide for appropriate Mashadi spouses. This association is in response, in part, to a fear among the Mashadi community that there are simply less eligible young ladies than prospective male mates (Anonymous, 1995b).

Because of the fear that a stigma related to a disability or some abnormality will effect a child's future choice of a mate, parents frequently refuse extra educational services and other support services. The concern was so strong, in one case that a child's life was endangered when parents did not report to school officials their child's diabetes. When a medical emergency occurred, no one at the school was aware of the child's illness (personal communication with the medical care provider). Another example highlights the fear of stigmatization or misguided parental protectiveness: A school official recalled a mother turning down educational services for her child because "it wouldn't matter what she does in school, she will make a nice family and a good wife (personal communication)."

The Mashadi community hopes for "a future which will hopefully witness successful integration into American society without bending to the pressure of assimilation" (Hakim, 1993). Biculturation, the process of synthesizing two cultures, combines important attachments to the old culture with the ideas and norms of the new culture. Some believe the two cultures can be synthesized without disrupting the basic sense of identity (Jalali, 1982). Helmreich (1994) concluded that for the Mashadi community "to remain vital and to thrive, it is of the greatest importance that its members be given positive reasons to remain. Real identity cannot be built on fear and guilt, although the lack of fear makes maintaining identity much harder. We must emphasize the beauty and richness of Mashadi heritage and traditions."

Trends and Conclusions

Iranian Jews in Los Angeles have an 82% self-employment rate,

the highest among any new immigrant group in the United States. Higher income and the possibility of advancement are the main reasons Iranians give for going into business for themselves. Unger (1995) estimated that 50% are in jewelry, 30% in carpets, and 20% in other areas including the garment trade. Iranian Jews who receive doctorates earn them in professions. A Ph.D. is not considered a path toward a better living. Iranian Jews do not pursue M.B.A. degrees because they believe that success in business may be achieved without graduate study (Serels, 1987). On the lack of higher education among Iranian Jewish young women, Banilivy (1998) advised, "Parents in our community should put more emphasis on their daughters' education. With a college degree, they would have an endless array of choices for becoming successful in life."

Although Sephardim have generally maintained a separate identity, contacts and joint ventures between Sephardim and Ashkenazi communities are made to help Israel and worldwide concerns of Jews (Dobrinsky, 1988). Nevertheless, the Mashadi community as a whole generally has shied away from involvement in the larger Jewish society's institutions and politics. This phenomenon may be attributed to their having been outsiders in Iran, an experience that left them believing it was safer not to be noticed (Unger, 1995). Netzer (1984) suggests that concern for relatives left behind in Iran contributes to the lack of political and public involvement. Some believe they may be targeted for money if the Iranian government becomes aware that some families have attained wealth in America. The fear of abduction or imprisonment is also real. In 1984, 2,000 Jews strolling in Teheran after Shabbat services were rounded up by the revolutionary guards, blindfolded and taken in buses to Evin

prison and denounced as Zionists (Berger, 1989). Although this event happened years ago, Iranian Jews in the United States still prefer a low profile.

In June 1998, the Jerusalem Post international edition reported that a 60-year-old Iranian male, known for his efforts on behalf of poor members of the Iranian community, was hanged for having ties to Israel. Since 1979, the newspaper claims that 13 Jews have received the death penalty for having connections to Israel. The June 4, 1999, edition of the Jewish Press, broke the story of 21 Iranian Jews who were arrested in Shiraz for "studying Hebrew". If found guilty, they could have been executed. However, as a result of pressure outside Iran, the trial produced jail sentences and no executions.

There are some members of the Iranian Jewish community who maintain that since most Iranian families have successfully settled and started businesses in America, the time has come for the community to focus on the future and to participate in civic life (Hakim, 1993). Dilamani (1997) suggested that if "some Mashadis would find the time to dedicate a few hours a month to volunteer at the fire department, it would make a world of a difference in the community's relationship with the village officials".

However, most often the Iranian community has established only minimal contacts with the social service agencies that are the backbone of the community (Kelly, 1994). The general lack of connection to and cohesion with American Jewry and even other Iranian Jews suggests that Mashadis do not feel a sense of responsibility to other Jews (Serels, 1987). Kelley (1994) commented that on the whole, Iranian Jews keep to

themselves, preferring the familiarity of their own social networks.

In addition to their cultural ghettoization, Iranian Jews are criticized for their lack of philanthropy. The director of religious affairs for the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, who is familiar with the Persian community, stated, "They are the least charitable Jews I've ever met in my life". Iranian millionaires are "notorious for their failure to contribute to Jewish fund-raising drives, whether on behalf of Iranians, other Jewish immigrants, American Jews or Israel" (Faivelson, 1981).

This insular, miserly perception of the Persian community is challenged by Unger (1995). He reported that the Mashadi community has been involved in a communal Jewish project by donating $100,000 for the dedication of a Hatzollah ambulance in Queens. Iranians have also gathered in honor of Yeshiva University and mingled with American born Ashkenazi Jews (Schiffman, 1989). In Great Neck, Persian and Ashkenazi Jews often mix for the benefit of educational institutions such as the North Shore Hebrew Academy and the North Shore Hebrew Academy High School. Some Persian American Jews have become involved in the local fire and emergency service corps. These examples, however, appear to be the exceptions to the rule. Nonetheless, more cooperation and integration is occurring as relationships slowly develop.

The research committee for the Central Board of the Mashadi Community (1997) rhetorically asked its community leaders: "Hasn't the preponderance of New Mashadi immigrants been focused on financially establishing themselves in this country, placing the education of their children as secondary"? The Mashadi Great Neck community looked into establishing a Modern Orthodox Day School emphasizing Persian heritage

and customs to service the local community. Its feasibility study (1997) stressed that "adequate education of our children, who are the ultimate future of our community, in a manner that will insure their growing into responsible Jewish adults, committed to the values and belief systems inherent of the Mashadi community, is needed."

Helmreich (1994) advised the Mashadi community that "in order to produce real Jewish identity... it must be accompanied by real learning. Not just affective ritual experiences in the home." Helmreich also directed the leaders of the Mashadi community that "organized efforts should be made to teach the children the history of the community. This can take the form of lectures and written material. The community should commission someone to write its history."

The Persian Jewish community is now at a crossroads and must choose whether to acculturate into American Jewish society or continue to remain an insular community. Part of the process requires an understanding of Iranian Jewish educational and religious history, beliefs, and actions. The chapters that follow present the results of a study designed to examine the Persian American Jewish community at a crossroads.

CHAPTER VI

METHODOLOGY

The attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jewry that impact on or are a result of Jewish education were examined in this study. The data collected and subsequent analysis augments Jewish educational literature, theory and practice and addresses cross-cultural issues in yeshivot that service the Persian Jewish community. Moreover, the presentation that follows contributes to the history and sociology of ethnic groups in America.

Setting for the Study

The setting was Great Neck, New York. This community contains a variety of ethnic Jews, many from Persian descent who moved to Great Neck to live in a rural setting yet, be close enough to their work in New York City. Great Neck is the first community in Nassau County on the Queens (Nassau) county border. In addition, the Great Neck community was a desirable neighborhood for Persian Jews in that a few Persian families had already settled there in mid 1960's. The initial Persian American Jewish Great Neck community consisted of well established, financially stable, respected families including the family of Rephael Aryeh who wanted a quiet asylum in contrast to their life in Iran.

In the years between 1992-2002, thousands of Iranian Jews emigrated to this upscale community which some believe to be the major center of Iranian Jewish life in the eastern United States (Fischler, 1999).

Sample and Design

Six hundred Persian Jews were mailed questionnaires. Individuals/families to whom questionnaires were mailed were identified from the Shofar magazine mailing list, families from the parent list of the North Shore Hebrew Academy, and from the Central Board of the Mashadi community who live in related zip codes. Names and addresses were crosschecked to avoid duplication. Some of the families appeared on multiple lists. The researcher in an attempt to avoid duplicate mailings, tried to crosscheck names and addresses on the multiple lists.

The respondents share a common language, communal activities and a desire to enhance the continuity of Judaism. Furthermore, membership in these organizations may reflect commitment to Jewish traditional lifestyle. Subscribers to Shofar receive a Persian Jewish newspaper that reflects the Persian American Jewish culture and concerns. While North Shore Hebrew Academy and the Shofar publication are available to members of all Persian communities within Great Neck, the Mashadi members are exclusively Mashadi descent. All other Persian Jews who emigrated from Teheran or other communities are commonly known as Teherani.

A questionnaire, structured and unstructured interviews and observations were used to provide a complete picture of the communities along with continual guidance and comments from community leaders. In addition, the researcher was supplied with rare literature not available in public or research libraries. The interviews were helpful because of limited information available about Persian American Jews. Furthermore, the questionnaire was the result of input from community leaders and

experts in the fields of sociology identified in a section that follows. The design of the study called for collection of data about the attitudes and practices of the Persian American Jewish community in a certain place at a given time.

Limitations

This study is limited to the Great Neck Persian community and may not be generalized to Jewish Persian communities elsewhere and is delimited to other Jewish communities not included. Nonetheless, as an exploratory study, it is also limited because it examines cultural differences that impact on the importance of Jewish education in one community.

To reach the multigenerational groups of Persian Jewish Americans who may not be fluent with the English language, a letter in Farsi introducing the purpose and relevance of the study as well as encouragement to complete a questionnaire was written by Penina Sarraf, a respected Persian educator and community leader. The letter supplemented a letter discussing the researcher's credentials, and providing an explanation and directions for completing the questionnaire. Notwithstanding, some respondents may not have completed the questionnaire because of its English text. In addition, the questionnaire consisted of 92 questions and some respondents may not have had the patience to complete such a detailed questionnaire. [Copy of the questionnaire may be found in Appendix A]

Data collected in the present study were self-reported and limited to respondents' understanding of the questionnaire and completing the

questionnaire accurately. It was expected that respondents would answer each question honestly and frankly. However, findings may be limited by respondents completing the questionnaire to please the rabbi-researcher then expressing true inner feelings and convictions.

Questionnaire

The best method for social research in collecting original data for describing a population too large to examine individually and directly is to conduct survey research (Babbie, 1989). Accordingly, the researcher developed a questionnaire used to gather data for the research. The questionnaire used was adapted from sociologist Dr. Mareleyn Schneider and Rabbi Naftali Haleva's 1996 study of Turkish young Jewish adults. Permission was secured from Dr. Schneider. Selected items from the questionnaire were revised and modified as per suggestions of leaders within the Persian educational leadership as well as elected officials of the community. Modifications were made because of the sensitivity of the respondents' religious and educational backgrounds, content and language of selected questions, as well as the desire to marginalize experiences. Rabbi Dr. Chaim Feuerman and Dr. Judith Rosen suggested minor changes in codification of the Maimonidean tenets as well as other minor changes in the questionnaire. Sociologist William Helmreich provided questions specifically related to the value respondents placed on textual investigation and the sincerity of their commitment to formal Jewish day school education.

The preliminary version of the modified questionnaire was given to two Persian Jewish community leaders, Penina Sarraf (a well-respected

Persian educator) and Michael Nassimi (an active member of the Mashadi Community Board) who made minor changes in wording to clarify items that might be misunderstood. Potentially offensive topics such as cultural attitudes and lax ritual observance such as driving a car on Shabbat were discussed and questionnaire items modified.

The questionnaire consisting of 92 items as shown in Appendix A, include queries about demographics, religious attitudes and practice, comparisons of parental religious practice to each respondent, educational background, opinions and values on Judaic education, and belief in the 13 Maimonidean tenets of faith.

Procedure

The questionnaire was sent with a self-addressed stamped return envelope to encourage and facilitate responses. Respondents were instructed not to write their names on the questionnaires to protect anonymity. Nevertheless, respondents may have felt uneasy in sharing their thoughts with an ordained rabbi who lives and works within their community. Some respondents voiced the opinion that the researcher could guess their identities based on their responses. Explanations about the coding aspects of data entry and group analyses attempted to allay their concerns. The use of the self-administered questionnaire as the major method of gathering data is partially due to the sensitive issues in this questionnaire, which could not have been garnered through interviews.

Kasdin (1992) argues that volunteer respondents may constitute a biased sample. A guarantee of anonymity in a mailed questionnaire sharply reduces the possibility of follow up clarification of ambiguous

responses. Babbie (1989) suggests that "each research method has particular strengths and weaknesses, there is always a danger that research findings will reflect, at least in part, the method of inquiry. In the best of all worlds ... research design should bring more than one research method to bear on the topic." Triangulation is the use of several different research methods to gather data and is viewed as a valuable tool in social research to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. Thus, interviews with lay leaders, educators of the Persian community, members of the Persian community as well as the researcher's written observations and anecdotal evidence gathered over 10 years of servicing the Persian community as an Administrator and teacher, supported and clarified survey responses.

Dr. Helmreich, a sociological and educational consultant to the Persian Great Neck community, maintained that any response rate above 15% would be acceptable and 25% would be considered excellent in these insular communities. The questionnaire was mailed out in November of 1998 to 600 individuals or families. A total of 142 individuals/families responded, a response rate of 23.6 percent.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures were carried out in several steps. First, a profile of the sample population was developed. Second, six research questions were assessed by comparing the attitudes of Mashadis and Teheranis on Jewish communal life, religious observances, intermarriage, Maimonidean principles of faith, the importance of textual study, and formal Jewish education. Third, additional analysis of selected areas of Persian Jewish education was undertaken to compare Mashadis and

Teheranis with respect to their attitudes concerning the Jewish faith. The additional analysis was carried out by using a statistical test comparing mean or average scores. Only those analyses that were found to be statistically significant are reported in addition to demographic information of the respondents. As a general rule, missing respondent data may have reduced the sample used in each analysis.

CHAPTER VII
RESULTS

The findings of data analysis are presented in this chapter. To introduce the findings, the chapter describes the demographic characteristics and educational background of the Persian American Jews participating in this study. The chapter then presents four sections describing the respondents, analyzing six research questions, presenting selected additional findings, and finally summarizing the major findings.

Demographics and Education of Respondents

A description of the respondents indicates that the majority were males (56.3%), born outside the United States (81.0%), Teherani (57.0%) and married (83.8%). The majority reported that they did not attend all day Persian Jewish schools (60.6%), but their Persian Jewish education was a combination of both religious and non-religious (56.3%).

The majority of respondents also reported that they had a college education or beyond (55.0%), were self-employed (56.3%), and were small business owners to high level executives or professionals (59.1%). Respondents reported that when they were not married and dated or if they were at the time of their responses to the questionnaire dating now, they

met their dates through friends, their parents at parties, at work, at school and in "more than one way".

A majority of respondents (97.2%) reported that they spoke Farsi and that their rabbis (69.0%) spoke Farsi. At home, Farsi, English or both languages were spoken. The average age of the respondents was 44.88 years; average residence in the United States was 23.06 years. The extent of formal Jewish education reported by the respondents was 8.04 years. Furthermore, the range in age and other demographic characteristics indicated that the respondents were a dissimilar group of Persian Jews. (See Appendix B-Table 1).

A majority of respondents' parents, mothers (67.6%) and fathers (62.0%), reportedly did not attend Persian Jewish religious schools. Respondents reported that their fathers are small business owners (56.3%), and mothers of respondents are homemakers (70.4%). Unlike respondents, 63.4% of their fathers and 77.4% of their mothers reportedly had a high school education or less. With respect to selected religious observances, a majority of respondents reported, that their parents (both fathers and mothers) observed kashrut (98.6%) either strictly or moderately. Similarly, respondents overwhelmingly reported that their mothers (99.3%) and fathers (91.6%) observed Shabbat. In contrast, respondents reported that religion was more of an influence in their mothers' lives than in their fathers' lives. For their fathers, a majority (59.9%) of the respondents reported that religion plays a fair to large influence in their lives. For their mothers, a majority (66.2%) of respondents reported that religion plays a fair to large influence in their lives. Respondents reported that their fathers and mothers had formal

Jewish education from a Jewish institution or private teaching for an average of tutoring of 5.55 and 3.84 years, respectively. There was also considerable difference in the years of formal Jewish education of respondents' fathers and mothers. (See appendix B-Table 2).

Assessment of Research Questions

Six research questions were formulated to guide analysis of the data and to compare the attitudes and religious beliefs of Persian Jews who consider themselves Mashadi and Teherani. Each research question is stated below followed by respondents' attitudes and religious beliefs. Because of the limited use of the questionnaire and type of data collected, profiles, and statistical descriptions are presented highlighting differences and similarities between Mashadi and Teherani Persian Jews. The responses reflect the exact language of the questionnaire.

Research Question 1: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in their attitudes about Jewish communal life as related to:

a. Living near a Jewish school,
b. Receiving a Jewish education,
c. Living near other Jews,
d. Living near a synagogue,
e. Visiting Israel,
f. Number of times visited Israel,
g. Visiting a rabbi for private discussions,
h. Memories of Jewish educational experience at the elementary school level, and
I. Memories of Jewish educational experience at the high

school level.

Communal life was equally important to Teheranis and Mashadis. Specifically, an almost equal majority of Mashadis and Teheranis reported that living near a Jewish school, receiving a Jewish education, living near other Jews, and living near a synagogue was important. A substantial majority of respondents reported that they had been to Israel. Among Mashadis, 96.6% reported that had been to Israel. In contrast, 91.4% of Teheranis reported trips to Israel. For Mashadis and Teheranis, the average number of trips to Israel was 7.31 and 4.88, respectively. All Mashadis and 77.8% of Teheranis reported affiliation with orthodox synagogues. Nearly 21% of Teheranis reported themselves as belonging to conservative synagogues; and 1.4% reported belonging to reform synagogues. Among Mashadis, 61.0% reported seeking consultation with a rabbi to discuss a variety of issues, while 46.8% of Teheranis reported seeking the advice of a rabbi.

Overall, respondents had positive memories of their Jewish education at the elementary and high school levels. Positive or very positive memories of their memories at the elementary school level were reported by 62.7% of Mashadis and 68.2% of Teheranis. When compared to memories at the elementary school level, memories of Jewish education at the high school level were less positive. That is, 50.0% of Mashadis and 52.8% of Teheranis reported themselves as having positive or very positive memories of their Jewish education at the high school level. (See Appendix B- Table3)

Research question 2: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in their

religious observances and attitudes toward religious precepts as related to:

a. Synagogue attendance,
b. Passover seder observance,
c. Lighting Friday night candles,
d. Lighting Chanukah candles,
e. Separate meat and dairy dishes,
f. Attending Purim celebrations,
g. Fasting on Yom Kippur,
h. Fasting on Tisha B'Av,
i. Understanding the *siddur* (prayer book),
j. Reading Hebrew newspaper,
k. Choice of closest friends,
l. How do you define yourself,
m. Lack of funds do you educate the son only,
n. Ways observe Shabbat,
o. Observe kashrut at home,
p. Observe kashrut outside the home,
q. Religious practice,
r. Influence of religion each day

Mashadis and Teheranis reported themselves as observant Jews. A majority described themselves as somewhat or very religious. A majority attended synagogue at least once a week, always attended a seder, lit candles on Friday night all the time, attended Purim celebrations as well as fasted on Yom Kippur. A majority of Mashadis and Teheranis did not fast on Tisha b'Ab, had limited knowledge of the Siddur, generally

did not read Hebrew newspapers, and had mostly or all Jewish friends.

While all Mashadis reported separating meat and dairy dishes, 65.4% of Teheranis reported that they did not separate meat and dairy dishes. Moreover, a majority of Mashadis and Teheranis reported that if there were limited funds for education, they did not support educating a son over a daughter. Interesting, however, 43.7% of Mashadis and 34.7% of Teheranis felt that with limited money, a son more than a daughter should receive money for education (See Appendix B- Table 4).

Mashadi respondents more than their Teherani counterparts observed Shabbat more strictly. Of the 19 listed ways to observe Shabbat, a majority of Mashadis reported that they observed 14 or 73.7% of the precepts compared to 9 or 47.4% of the precepts observed by Teheranis. More than 90 percent of Mashadis reported making or hearing kiddush Friday evenings, lighting Friday night candles, attending synagogue Saturday mornings, not smoking, cleaning or doing laundry or sewing. Observance of the foregoing precepts was not as strictly followed among Teheranis.

A majority of Mashadis strictly observed kashrut at home (94.9%) and outside the home (72.9%). Teheranis were more likely to strictly observe kashrut at home (52.5%) than outside the home (32.5%). Two questions asked respondents to describe their levels of religious practice and the influence of religion on their daily lives. With respect to religious practice, 96.6% of Mashadis and 89.9% of Teheranis reported that they were either "somewhat" or "very observant". Almost all (99.3%) respondents reported that religion influenced their daily lives. Among Mashadis, 65.5% indicated that religion had a "fair" to "large" influence

in their lives compared to 63.0% of Teheranis (See Appendix B-Table 5).

Research Question 3: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in their attitudes about intermarriage with members of other religions and intramarriage between different ethnic Jews?

All Mashadis and Teheranis "strongly objected" to religious conversion to another religion for their children. All Mashadis and 91.1% of Teheranis "strongly objected" to intermarriage with non-Jews. Similarly, both Mashadis (91.4%) and Teheranis (78.2%) opposed, "objected" or "strongly objected," to marriage by a child to a convert to Judaism. Teheranis (48.1%) were more willing, "grudgingly accept" or "accept," to support a child marrying an Ashkenazi Jew than a Mashadi (28.6%). A plurality of both Mashadis (37.5%) and Teheranis (37.0%) were "neutral" on marriage between one of their own children and an Ashkenazi Jew.

Research Question 4: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in their beliefs in the Maimonidean principles of faith?

The thirteen Maimonidean principles were separated into sixteen separate principles to help clarify, focus as well as disguise their origin. The revised sixteen principles of faith were examined. Mashadis (84.7%) and Teheranis (64.9%) reported that the Torah was either dictated or divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai. A majority of Mashadis and Teheranis reported that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each of 15 remaining Maimonidean principles. For Mashadis, overall agreement ranged from a minimum of 74.9% for the principle related to immutability of the Torah to more than 98% for the principles of G-d's creation of the world; there is only one G-d; and G-d created people. Among Teheranis,

overall agreement ranged from 65.3% related to the possibility of resurrection to 96.2% for the principle that Moses is the greatest prophet. The extent of agreement was similar among Mashadis and Teheranis related to Maimonidean principles (See Appendix B-Table 6).

Research Question 5: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in the importance of textual study?

With the exception of studying the Bible and the Hebrew language, Mashadis and Teheranis were divided on the importance of textual study. Mashadis (71.4%) and Teheranis (62.7%) felt that Bible study was important, and 61.4% of Mashadis and 60.0% of Teheranis believed that studying Hebrew was important. A plurality of Mashadis and Teheranis reported that studying the Talmud and the Prophets was important. However, the opposite was reported for the study of Hebrew literature. That is, a plurality of Mashadis and Teheranis reported that studying Hebrew literature was not an important textual issue. (See Appendix B- Table 7).

Research Question 6: Do Mashadis and Teheranis differ in their attitudes about formal Jewish education?

Attitudes toward formal Jewish education were analyzed through responses to the importance of formal Jewish education from pre-school through high school, as well as an examination of tuition as a factor affecting yeshiva high school attendance, and whether a formal yeshiva education that included general studies was preferable to a public school education supplemented with Talmud Torah. A majority of Mashadis and Teheranis agreed that tuition was an important factor in sending their children to yeshiva pre-schools, middle schools, and high schools.

However, at the elementary school level 59.5% of Mashadis agreed that yeshiva education was important, but less than half (48%) of Teheranis agreed. In fact 52.0% of Teheranis did not agree that a yeshiva elementary education was important for their children.

Respondents were asked to choose between a yeshiva day school with a perceived poor general studies department and a yeshiva day school with an average general studies department or a quality public school education plus Talmud-Torah twice a week. A quality public school was preferable to a yeshiva with a poor general studies department by Mashadis and Teheranis. While a yeshiva day school with an average general studies department was preferred by Mashadis over a quality public school and Talmud-Torah, Teheranis chose the quality public school plus Talmud-Torah. Specifically, 58.2% of Mashadis and 74.0% of Teheranis preferred quality public school rather than send their children to a yeshiva day school with a poor general studies department. When the quality of the general studies department was average, Mashadis preferred a yeshiva day school (See Appendix B- Table 8).

Additional Analysis

To determine whether there were differences among male and female Mashadis and Teheranis related to selected Jewish education beliefs and practices. Several analyses were carried out. Reliability of the items measuring the Maimonidean principles of faith and five items related to textual study were established prior to any comparison of the summated scores for Mashadis and Teheranis. Differences between the male and female Mashadis and Teheranis were found.

Male Mashadis were more likely to follow Maimonidean principles

than female Mashadis. In addition, male Mashadis also were more likely to adhere to Maimonidean principles than male and female Teheranis. Mashadis and Teheranis did not differ in their attitudes and beliefs toward textual study (See Appendix B-Table 9).

Summary

One hundred forty-two Mashadi and Teherani Persian Jews responded to a questionnaire about their attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to Jewish education, communal life, and religion. Six research questions were posed to compare Mashadi and Teherani responses to questionnaire items. For the preponderance of Jewish education attitudes and practices, Mashadis and Teheranis reported similar beliefs. Overall, Teheranis tended to be more secular in views. However, there were notable divergences. Mashadis were more likely to consult with a rabbi than Teheranis. Teheranis, unlike Mashadis, did not separate meat and dairy dishes.

Mashadis and Teheranis differed frequently with respect to Shabbat observance. Mashadis, not Teheranis, tended to recite or listen to someone else recite kiddush on Shabbat morning. On Shabbat, Mashadis generally refused to handle money, while Teheranis did. Mashadis, often wore special clothing to celebrate Shabbat; Teheranis did not. Mashadis reported not traveling on Shabbat and were likely to visit grandparents. In contrast, Teheranis traveled on Shabbat and were not likely to visit grandparents. Additional analysis revealed that Mashadi males reported adhering more closely to Maimonidean principles than either female Mashadis and or male Teheranis.

The next chapter discusses the findings and draws relevant

conclusions. In addition, implications and recommendations for further study and for Jewish religious leaders are discussed.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research completed in the past two decades indicates that culture and heritage play an important role in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, as well as mastery of academic skills and attitudes toward education (Banks, 1994; Guild 1994). The relationship between culture and academics is embodied in multicultural education. Banks (1994) defined multicultural education as creating "equal educational opportunities for all students by ensuring that the total school environment reflects the diversity of groups in classrooms, schools, and the society as a whole."

Related to multiculturalism is the term cultural pluralism. According to Janzen (1994), cultural pluralism means that "ethnic groups will remain intact and that their idiosyncratic ways of knowing and acting will be respected and continued". Multiculturalism is a rejection of the melting pot/assimilation philosophy in which the primary goal of society is the amalgamation of all ethnic groups into the American mainstream. In contrast, cultural pluralism, as defined, above reflects the principles

embodied in Jewish practices suggesting that observances and traditions of one's parents are to be observed as passed down from previous generations. It is suggested that multicultural education is not a product; it is a process and attitude about diversity, and brings strength and awareness to schools.

Multicultural education may have serious implications for Jewish educational structure and curricula. If American schools are perceived to be biased toward white Anglo males, then Jewish schools should be examined as to their emphasis on the white Ashkenazi male cultural perspective. Persian American Jews who send their children to Ashkenazi schools, generally do not learn the laws and customs of their own heritage or their history and culture.

The policies and decisions of the Persian American Jewish community may be closely related to the trends of multicultural education. Persian American Jewish children learn in their elementary school and in middle school social studies curricula as mandated by New York State about many diverse cultures. However, the Persian Jewish heritage is neglected and usually not dealt with in the Judaic or general studies curricula. As a result, Persian Jewish youth have expressed to the researcher that they feel that their history is less important than other cultures and may resent the teaching of other cultures.

To maintain their heritage and acculturate into American Jewish society, the Persian American community has chosen the multicultural model as well as the cultural pluralism rubric. The adoption of such a philosophy allows the Persian American Jewish community to undergo identificational assimilation, developing a new sense of ethnicity in

viewing themselves as Persian American Jews. However, there is no real sign of this community undergoing cultural assimilation, wherein the individual accepts the host culture including change of source religion and any other movements different from traditional footings and moorings.

To date very little has been written about Persian American Jewry, and no in-depth study on Persian Jewish education has been undertaken. Most studies on Persian Jews have been published in Hebrew or Farsi in scholarly journals and the articles are generally historical, stressing the persecutions and life under Moslem rule. Other studies of Persian Jewry in America have for the most part, been limited to some psychological and sociological studies.

Philips (1995) claimed that substantial articles and monographs have been published on Israelis and Russians, but Iranian Jews have not been extensively researched. Jalali (1982) reported that there is little research on the (general) Iranian family apart from information generally available on Iranian life consisting of accounts of travelers, anthropologists and outside observers.

The classical English language book of Sephardi laws and customs written by Dobrinsky (1988) includes Iran in a listing of regions of Sephardim yet does not mention any of Persian Jewish customs in his book. One aspect of Persian American Jewry about which no studies have been reported and addressed by this study was an analysis of the educational attitudes and experiences of Persian Jews.

The lack of a body of research examining Persian Jewish education impacts the ability of the Persian American Jewish community to formulate a position on the problem of acculturation with the American

Jewish community that is mostly of Ashkenazi descent. The problem is manifested by the varied directions chosen by this community to educate their children. Some Persian American Jews choose to send their children to Ashkenazi yeshiva day schools, local public schools, while others have attempted to create their own educational institutions (Sarraf, in a personal communication 2000).

Persecution, poverty, and life as Crypto-Jews throughout the generations may have affected Persian American Jewish views and commitments to Judaism and Jewish education. The religious outlook and gestalt of Persian Jewish community may differ among individual Persian communities. These worldviews and perspectives may affect their willingness to dedicate themselves to Torah study and observance, and may influence institutional policy and curricula.

A study of the attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jewry about Jewish education contributes to Jewish educational literature and affects the implementation of curriculum in yeshivot servicing these communities. Moreover, examining the educational attitudes and experiences of Persian Jews in the United States may contribute to the mosaic that makes up the history and sociology of ethnic groups in America.

The researcher was in a unique position to gain entry into this insular community because of his professional position as an Administrator at the North Shore Hebrew Academy in Great Neck, New York, which serves a large number of students (40% of the student body) from the Persian community. Supplementing the researcher's professional contacts was participation in community family gatherings as well as

casual social events in the community. As a result of these contacts, the researcher became friendly with many parents of students and significant others in the Persian community.

Amnon Netzer (1989), believed to be the foremost expert on Persian Jewry, argued that Jewish and general education among the Persian Jews, whether in Iran or in the Diaspora has never been thoroughly researched. In private communication with the researcher he wrote, "I know of very few sources concerning the Iranian Jews in the United States." Thus a major goal of this research was to learn more about formal Jewish education in one Persian American Jewish community. A second goal was to provide a model for further research in examining the attitudes and experiences in Jewish education of the broader Persian American Jewish community. To achieve the goals, this study sought to ascertain whether there are differences in attitudes and behavior between the two major ethnic groups of Persian American Jewry, thereby filling a void within historical, sociological, educational and religious research related to Persian American Jews.

Analysis of the data yielded in this study provided many interesting findings and conclusions, discussed in the pages to follow. An important factor related to differences in attitudes and experiences in Jewish education was the ethnicity of the respondent. In general, Mashadis reported themselves to be more traditional and closer to Orthodox practice in their attitudes and practices than their Teherani counterparts. There were also differences between Mashadis and Teheranis pertaining to employment patterns within Persian American Jewish families and community, religious observances, socialization

patterns related to friendships, meeting people and opinions toward marriage, converts and intermarriage. Furthermore, the data showed discrepancies between the Mashadis and Teheranis related to the desire to live in a Jewish locale, near a synagogue, the frequency of synagogue attendance, consultation and guidance from their rabbi as well as their formal Jewish education.

The connection to a Jewish community was reported to have been an integral factor in determining permanent residence for Mashadis and Teheranis. The larger the Jewish community, the more diversity in educational possibilities existed in formal and informal settings. The close proximity to a synagogue and a religious school allowed the educational process to continue through after school classes and other communal events. Moreover, the synagogue supplied the members of the community with support groups, cultural activities, and educational opportunities through formal study groups and lectures.

Living in close proximity to a synagogue made available to family members services and educational classes more often during the holidays as well as during the week. Synagogues were viewed as "Jewish Centers" supplying youth with many social and educational activities, lectures and sports teams. Furthermore, funerals, memorials, and other life cycle events were held within synagogues. Therefore, the closer the Mashadis and Teheranis lived to their synagogues the more likely they were to take advantage of synagogue programs.

The need by Mashadis and Teheranis to be part of a close-knit community was explained by a psychologist to arise from experiences of persecution and lack of security without their communities. In particular,

Mashadis looked for guidance from their community elders, therefore, many Mashadis felt the need to be near their wealthy leaders or community servants.

Farsi speaking Rabbis served Mashadi communities, providing strong association and affiliation with religious institutions and commitment to Persian Jewish culture and heritage. Older members of the community, who did not speak English, were able to continue their education and their religious observances. The older generation understood, spoke, and wrote Farsi, while younger generations understood and spoke Farsi minimally. Therefore, Farsi speaking Rabbis were indispensable for the older generation. In contrast, Teherani synagogues did not have functional rabbinic leaders but rather relied on communal leaders and cantors to facilitate their rituals.

Younger generations used English as their primary language and therefore English quickly replaced Farsi as the language of choice. At funerals and family celebrations that the researcher attended, eulogies were often given in three languages, Farsi, English and Hebrew. At family social events a mixture of music included Hebrew music followed by Persian melodies and ended with music of the contemporary culture. Further evidence of the influence of the younger generation is suggested by the proliferation in the last five years, between the years 1997-2002, articles in English magazines of the Persian community was evident especially in the publications directed to the youth. Magazines established by the Persian Jewish communities included more articles in English every year as the number of articles in Farsi decreased.

Observance by respondents and their parents of kashrut inside and

outside their homes, and observance of Shabbat showed differences among the Mashadis and Teheranis. In addition, the influence of religion in the daily lives of Mashadis and Teheranis and their beliefs in some of Maimonidean tenets supported the finding that Mashadis were more traditional than Teheranis.

All respondents reported they strongly objected to their children converting to another religion. Regarding their children's choice of a spouse, Mashadi respondents unanimously "strongly object" to intermarriage as compared to some Teheranis who only "object". Interestingly, none of the respondents reported they "accept" intermarriage with another faith as acceptable for their children.

An explanation of the discrepancy between Mashadis and Teheranis beliefs about intermarriage may be related to the perceptions expressed by people who were interviewed. Specifically, Teherani males were likely to look for a physical love relationship and were not so concerned with the primacy of maintaining their traditions as compared to Mashadi respondents.

However, there was unanimity concerning intermarriage in practice, as all married Mashadis and Teheranis were wedded to Jews. A psychologist (2001, private communication) who practices in the Persian community suggested that attitudes about intermarriage were historical and a cultural imperative to guarantee the perpetuation of their communities and long time traditions. In addition, the ability to intermarry historically was never a realistic choice because the Persian Islamic population would never marry a Jew as they were considered infidels.

Results also showed that 22.6% of the respondents objected to their

children marrying an Ashkenazi spouse. Yet, in reality the experts and those who service Persian communities believe that indeed it is higher than the 22.6%. The avoidance of intra-marriage is of interest yet follows the traditional pattern of marrying individuals who are similar to yourself. The hesitancy to marry Ashkenazi Jews is perhaps due to the unique cultural experiences of the Persian community as a whole, and the Mashadis in particular as discussed in prior chapters. The differences within these Jewish cultures are very difficult to bridge as a relative of an Ashkenazi who married a Persian confided to the researcher. He stated, "it is like stepping into a different world, the food is different, the language is different, and the jokes are different as well as the expectations for communal and family life."

Of importance, the marrying of a convert to Judaism was opposed by 83.8% of the respondents, even though Jewish law allows it. This phenomenon, as explained by Sarraf (2001), relates to the Persian Jew's suspicion of converts resulting from historical forced conversions in Jewish communities. Jewish communities that undertook conversions to Islam usually did not accept the new religion wholeheartedly, as the experience of the Crypto-Jews of Mashad has shown. The allegiances of the Jadid al Islam was to Judaism, but converts to Judaism were suspected of not fully accepting their new faith. A famous Persian folklore quote is "do not trust a gentile even in the tomb"; thus converts were not readily received even though Jewish law allowed them.

Maimonides developed 13 principles of faith that have received wide recognition and enduring fame. The principles fall into three groups, the existence of God as the creator, One, incorporeal, eternal, and alone

worthy of man's worship. The second refers to Divine revelation of the Torah, the authenticity of prophecy, particularly of Moses, and the immutability of the Torah. The last category deals with God in history, reward and punishment, belief in the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.

Maimonides regarded these principles as the pillars of the Jewish religion and failure to believe in a single principle placed an individual outside Judaism and considered a heretic. With this in mind, and the familiarity of many to these tenets in the daily liturgy, respondents' attitudes toward the tenets were examined. Male Mashadis reported more agreement with Maimonidean principles than other subgroups of gender and ethnicity.

Sarraf (2001) suggested that the Persian American Jewish community views aspects of Judaism in the same way as do Muslims. Persian Jews, like Muslims, follow dogma and do not question traditional religious law. Sarraf explained that the word Islam means "surrender" and entails following orders and does not allow the individual to think, question or challenge ritual, beliefs or dogma. Therefore, public rituals and beliefs are followed or professed but not necessarily internalized or appreciated. Thus, the general principles of Maimonides are believed by Persian Jewry except if they have not learned them or do not understand them due to lack of education.

The most valued text reported by the respondents was the Holy Bible, the "Old Testament", followed by interest in Hebrew language. Mashadis (71.4%) and Teheranis (62.7%) believe that Bible study is important; 61.4% of Mashadis and 60% of Teheranis considered studying Hebrew to

be important. Hebrew literature was viewed as least important as more Mashadis and Teheranis reported that studying Hebrew literature was not an important textual issue. Concentration on the Bible may be due to weekly chanting of a portion of the Bible during synagogue services. Furthermore, the Bible is the springboard of all Jewish literature, and reading the Bible is valued as the key to leading the prayer services or as one interviewee suggested, Bible reading enables the observant to recite the mourning prayer of kaddish.

In the Persian community, Talmud historically has not been viewed in such awe and importance as it has been in many communities of European Jews. The lessening of importance of Talmud study has produced generations who do not understand or appreciate how this type of learning is critical in halachic decision-making, in understanding the evolution of Jewish law interpretation, and in becoming familiar with famous Jewish sages. Thus, results of this study suggested that the Talmud does not have primacy within the Persian community. Talmud was reported as the most important by 26.8% of Mashadis and 20% of Teheranis and was third in the ranking of textual study as compared to the primacy given to Talmud from European Jews. As the American born generation continues to be educated in the predominately European Yeshivot, attitudes toward the importance of the Talmud may change and Persian American Jews may adopt the textual hierarchy of European Jewry.

The differences between Mashadi and Teherani attitudes were consistent with general perceptions of Persian communities as well as with general perceptions of lay leaders within different communities. The common explanation of the discrepancy between Mashadis and Teheranis

was that the Crypto-Jewish experience solidified and forced the Mashadi community to hold onto their culture as compared to the more assimilated ethnic groups who had access to the general culture that was prevalent before the 1979 revolution in Teheran and other major Persian towns. Furthermore, a psychologist serving the Persian community explained to the researcher that when you try to hide something and guard secrets, it becomes a significant part of your psychological makeup. Similarly, Sarraf (2001), an educational leader of the Persian community, suggested to the researcher that years of trying to publicly hide their Jewish customs and identity as Crypto -Jews strengthened the beliefs of all Persian Jews and the Mashadis, in particular.

To embark on a study of the roots of a culture, Schacter (1997) stated, "one must dig beneath the surface, and that means explorations of delicate and virtually impalpable connections, reactions, responses, influences and adaptations". In reference to attitudes, and opinions Brayer (1958) asserted that "when we have mapped the individual's sentiments, we have gone a long way toward predicting his behavior". Sarraf (1998) explained to the researcher "that the Iranians have not yet formulated a view on Jewish education, because their concerns are on the mundane issues at this stage and therefore, one must study their actions and reported opinions."

The present study and analysis focused on Persian Jewish community attitudes and experiences toward Jewish education and rituals. While differences between the Mashadi and Teherani communities have been highlighted, there are many more areas in which there was congruence in their responses. There was unanimity among Persian Jews concerning intermarriage as all married respondents were wedded to Jews.

The connection of the Persian community to Israel was very strong, with 93.6% of the respondents having visited Israel at least once in their lifetime demonstrating the desire for cultural and religious continuity. This connection toward Israel further enhanced Mashadi and Teherani commitment to Jewish culture and continuity. The connection to Israel showed that educational values of these communities were being perpetuated. For example, the Mashadi community sponsors an annual tour to Israel for youth to help solidify their commitment to Israel. As Freedman (1998) suggested, a visit to Israel is a sign of a connection deeper than a mere vacation. Rather, a visit helps enhance and solidify the connection to Judaism and it's ritual and cultural ties. Furthermore, data reported by Schiff and Schneider (1994) suggested that 89% of Jewish day school graduates and 25% of Jewish Americans have visited Israel. While less than the percentage of Persian Jews visiting Israel (93.6%), the data suggested that the high percentage of visitations and the lasting effects of the visits help maintain Jewish heritage.

Sarraf (2001) argued that the Persian community identifies with the traditional Jewish way of life and the centrality of Israel. This connection imbues in them the desire to visit the land of their forefathers. Other individuals interviewed for this study suggested that visiting Israel is parallel to the obligation of Muslims to visit Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Furthermore, many Persian American Jews have relatives who live in Israel.

Mashadi and Teherani Persian Jewish communities were unanimous in their desire for marriage within the faith and continuity of the Jewish religion. In contrast, among typical day school graduates, 4.5% married

non-Jews, and overall 52% of American Jewry intermarried (Schiff & Schneider,1994).

Moreover, the desire to live within a Jewish neighborhood with all the educational, religious and cultural activities available was important to all respondents as a means for continuing Jewish values and heritage. A very high rate of observance in Jewish rituals and holidays coupled with a strong belief in God and God's involvement in the world were prevalent in the responses of Mashadis and Teheranis.

The very high percentage of Persian Jews who celebrated holidays through ritual may be due to their strong sense of family and their desire to be with their extended families during the holidays. The desire to spend quality family time during holidays is evident in the culture of the general Persian society, which values trans- generational relationships and socializing over festive meals. A psychologist who wished to remain anonymous suggested that there is an unwritten rule that states, you must celebrate religious meals with your family and pointed out that if one dines at home for the holidays, they are viewed as strange and not connected to their families. The holiday meals usually consist of children and grandchildren of the patriarch and may number in the dozens. A family counselor confided in the researcher that most of the arguments that she resolves with newlyweds is the frequency of dining at each parent's house. The development of a schedule of visits seems to resolve many of these potentially explosive conflicts.

As a community, the Persian American Jewish community's attachment to the basics of observance of Kashrut and the celebration of Shabbat and holidays was consistently at a very high level. Kashrut was

observed within Mashadi and Teherani homes either strictly or moderately by 98.6% of the respondents, while 93.3% Mashadi and Teherani observed Kashrut strictly or moderately outside the homes. The rituals of holidays such as attendance at a Passover Seder were reported by both Mashadis and Teheranis as 100%; fasting on Yom Kippur is reported by 97.8% of respondents, with 1.4% not able to fast due to health reasons, attending Purim celebrations was reported by 99.5% of respondents divided between always (76.1%) or sometimes (19.6%) In addition, the lighting of Chanukah candles was performed by 99.3% of the respondent divided among sometimes (.7%) usually (6.5%) or all the time (92%).

Mashadi and Teherani observance of certain rituals and curricula of the yeshiva attended by the majority of the youth may point to causality. The curricula of the North Shore Hebrew Academy Middle School includes the extensive examination of the laws, rituals and observances of Holidays, Shabbat, observance of the Kosher dietary laws and prayers (Appendix C).

The level of Jewish observances of the respondents in this study eclipsed the typical Hebrew day school graduate as reported in Schiff and Schneider (1994). They reported that less than half of elementary day-school graduates and 75% of high school graduates kept kosher at home. Nevertheless, 98.6% of the respondents in this research either strictly or moderately observed Kashrut at home, and 93.6% observed Kashrut moderately or strictly outside their homes. Notwithstanding the data, the perceived level of observance of Kashrut laws may be diverse in that the day school graduates may have a greater in-depth understanding of the minutia of details in observing the Kashrut laws appropriately as

compared to some of the respondents in this research who have less formal Jewish education.

Some of those interviewed explained that perhaps the community's definition of observing Kashrut was the purchasing of kosher meat and not mixing meat and dairy products. Since the purchasing of kosher meat, the prohibition of shellfish and the mixing of dairy and meat products were avoided by all; the data were not surprising. Nevertheless, the owning and using of separate dishes for dairy and meat were rare and the dining in non-kosher restaurants was frequent. Therefore, the results of data analysis reflect Mashadi and Teherani views of Kashrut observance as defined above and not necessarily according to the strict dictates of Jewish law.

Results of data analysis showed that welcoming Shabbat was celebrated through the kiddush prayer welcoming the Shabbat by 85% of the respondents on Friday night, the lighting of Friday night candles were lit by 84.3% of the respondents and 80.7% of respondents attended synagogue on Saturday morning. Sarraf (2001) suggested the 84.3% of the respondents who lit candles was in large part due to the Persian mother who viewed the time of lighting candles as special. That is, it was a time for her to pray and ask for guidance for her family and success in her family's daily life, as well as to have an opportunity to speak to God about her general concerns.

Purim was more frequently celebrated by respondents than some other holidays probably because it was the only holiday that was exclusively related to Persian Jewish history. Respondents' participation in this holiday concretized their heritage and culture through meaningful ritual

participation. In addition, fasting on Yom Kippur also appeared to be extremely high, as only .8% respondents reported that they did not fast. Fasting and attendance in synagogue on the High Holidays provided opportunities to publicly celebrate rituals and to be seen within an active social milieu. Sarraf (2001) explained that the Persian synagogues are like their namesakes from the origin of the Greek term synagogue, which means gathering place or bringing together. Similarly the Hebrew word *Beit Knesset* (synagogue) also corresponds to a place of gathering. Therefore, the public social scene within the synagogue is key in the choice of an individual's ritual and observance in that attendance serves many functions.

The importance of a strong insular family is highlighted. Respondents reported frequent visits to family on Shabbat, inviting others to their homes and dining with friends and relatives. Furthermore, parents interviewed suggested that children frequently may go to school late because of family social events. These social events are part of a culture, in which time was not measured but rather enjoyed. Therefore, social calls might be for three to four hours of friendly talk over tea. The family gatherings were usually large events at the patriarch's home at which the extended family spent quality time bonding within trans-generational family members. Although the strong insular family was an important dimension of Persian Jewish religious life, Himmelfarb (1974) argued the Jewish schooling and not parental religiosity was the best predictor of the intellectual and moral dimensions of religious involvement

Extensive continual formal Jewish education is paramount in maintaining Persian Jewish culture heritage and practice. Himmelfarb

also suggested that "those who attend yeshiva or day school scored consistently higher (on his research instrument) than those who attended supplementary schools, even when adjusted for home observance." He stated, "Supplementary types of Jewish education do not increase adult religious involvement beyond the level obtained by those with no Jewish schooling, unless there are more than twelve years of supplementary schooling."

It is, therefore, imperative that the children of the Persian American community enroll in Jewish Day schools. To attract and to retain the children of Persian American Jews, Jewish educational institutions must provide academic excellence in general studies as well as providing positive role models with the "gestalt" with which the Persian Jewish community is comfortable. This "gestalt" must embrace the importance of the family and its role in daily life as understood by the Persian-American Jews. The research in this study, in addition to numerous comments written on the questionnaires, clearly showed that the level of comfort with the philosophy of the school helps retain the youth in a religious educational atmosphere.

Several respondents commented on their questionnaires that they were concerned about the *hashkafa* or gestalt of a high school. In general they were very comfortable and satisfied with the gestalt of the elementary school they attended, but they felt that the high school's agenda was to "steer their children into a fanatical observance of Jewish laws and ritual." A typical respondent wrote, " I chose a yeshiva that I know would not brainwash my child and turn him against his parents and family." Another respondent echoed the above statement: "I will absolutely not send my

child to any yeshiva that would influence my child in a direction that would cause a rift with members of my family such as (names a specific yeshiva high school) that brainwashes children and creates huge gaps inside the family."

The concerns of the respondents revolved around the negative experiences of friends or relatives in yeshiva high schools. A respondent summarized many concerns as follows: " the yeshiva high schools that are available... do not have a high modern standard of general studies education, does not promote a Zionistic way of life, or a moderate approach to Judaism." Respondents frequently wrote that they were concerned that if their children attended a Jewish school, they would not eat in their homes and would disrespect their elders because of the older generation's lack of observance and knowledge. Some respondents also felt that they had gained enough functional Judaic knowledge for their daily activities and did not need to be overburdened with laws and information that they felt only Rabbis or the fervently Orthodox needed to know. One respondent wrote, "I fear fanaticism", while another asserted, "students are not focused on the ethical and religious basics. They have forgotten how to respect their parents."

A parent stated, "I do not need my children to learn from those yeshivot which often seem to teach the child to disrespect their parents because of their level of religion. This is a sin in my eyes." Another wrote, "I do not want other people to brainwash my children to not eat our food or not to believe in us. I do not want my children to be Rabbis." Yet another respondent wrote "some rabbis insist that their teaching is all there is and expect children to follow them like a G-d. This is a sin".

The weakening support for yeshiva high schools may be related to the teachings and quality of these schools and the underlying feeling that a basic rudimentary Jewish education is sufficient for functionality within the Persian Jewish community. As pointed out by one of the respondents, the ability to read a prayer book, Bible and say the kaddish is sufficient knowledge for many within this community. This belief coupled with the fear that young people may look down on the older generation's traditional religiosity was suggested by many to be an influence related to lack of commitment to higher Jewish education.

From the data reported, the lack of a quality yeshiva day school providing excellence in Judaic studies as well as general studies limits enrollment in a yeshiva high school. However, a major factor in the decision to send their children to public high schools was the concern of a quality general studies education. General studies was seen as a key predictor of financial success, and therefore it was what was emphasized. Furthermore, the community acted according to its perception of community values. The community did not value continued Jewish education, and thus the mindset of many parents in the Mashadi and Teherani communities was against Jewish high school education.

The additional financial burden was also a hurdle when deciding a child's educational placement. Sarraf (2001) argued that religious education was always free in Iran. Jewish schools were paid by Otzar Ha-Torah, ORT and the Alliance. In addition, funding from America in the form of money, kosher candy and supplies was steady during the middle of the twentieth century. America was always viewed as a real "Uncle Sam" who helped take care of Persian Jewish needs. She stated, "I

remember as a little girl the chocolate that you sent me, showing me your love and that Jews around the world cared for me." Mashadis and Teheranis reported that they did not want to pay thousands of dollars for yeshiva high school education that in their native country was granted at no cost.

Respondents reported differences in their memories of elementary and high school. It is suggested that the differences may be attributed to the philosophy of the yeshiva day schools and the yeshiva high schools. The educational environment in the yeshiva day school and high school must provide a sincere, intensive, ongoing daily commitment to Jewish tradition and education rather than a supplementary education as Himmelfarb (1974) suggested. Helmreich explained (1998) that "In Iran, they were Jewish, they didn't need education to keep them Jews. Yet, subsequently they are slowly realizing that they can't keep their culture together in America as it was. Therefore, they now need education to keep them Jewish". The formal Jewish education must include the customs and history of Sephardi Jewry and in particular Persian Jewry in addition to the standard curricula of the modern orthodox day school.

The opening of the North Shore Hebrew Academy High School has provided the Persian Jewish American community with an appropriate continuum of the educational environment and Gestalt that they approve of. As the community familiarizes themselves with this High School the community will be drawn to continue their Jewish education in the model that they are accustomed to and thus alleviate many of their concerns.

Mrs. Geula Sabet (1998, in an interview) commented on the values of continuing Jewish education. She suggested that many Persian Jews know

the blessings and prayers, but she felt this knowledge represented an "empty background of the traditions". She argued that Jews need to understand the meaning of the prayers as well as reasons for saying them. Unger (1995) suggested that if a commitment to an intensive formal Jewish education is not provided, the third generation may be in danger of assimilating and blending into the secular American pop culture. The fear of assimilation is evident in Persian Jewish publications and in discussions with the community leaders. Soleveitchik (1980), argued that over time images of the native country fade with each generation. He stated, "the first generation of immigrants, or exiles, suffers from a sense of alienation and loneliness... with the passage of time the nostalgia of the immigrants subsides."

Thus, as future generations continue to search for a balance between retaining their traditions and melding into the American culture both Jewish and non-Jewish, Hansen's law suggested that the third generation seeks to remember what the second generation labored to forget. Gaps of knowledge and commitment of past generations may hopefully be filled through appropriate intensive Jewish education.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Implications

In summary, the findings of this study provided implications for religious practice among Persian Jews in Great Neck, NY. They are as

follows:

1. The ancient and modern history of the Persian community, in particular their trials and tribulations throughout the generations, may impact on their current conduct.
2. The ethnicity of the students may predict different values and attitudes among the Persian American students as well as their Ashkenazi and Sephardi counterparts.
3. Different levels of observance of ritual and philosophical beliefs may be predicted by the student's ethnicity.
4. There may be significant differences between male and females within the ethnic categories related to Jewish dogma illustrated by the thirteen Maimonidean tenets of faith.
5. Community and family cohesiveness and respect for authority are important values in the Persian Jewish American families.
6. The lack of commitment for a continual formal Jewish education may not be a stigma within these communities.
7. A majority of respondents may be concerned with extreme religious education that is furnished by some of the local yeshivot and rabbis, thus distancing the youth from familiarity with a committed Orthodox way of life.
8. Advisory committees that are representative of the communities may be needed to assist in developing school policies and practices in the institutions in which they attend.
9. Nurturing rapport with parents from other cultures through a school wide commitment to serve the needs of all its students.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. Additional research should be undertaken to examine other Persian communities. This study was limited to one community and generalizations to other Persian Jewish communities are limited.
2. Further investigation should be continued in a longitudinal study to determine whether the attitudes of Persian American Jews change over time through possible assimilation into the larger American Jewish community.
3. Research should be undertaken to compare the attitudes and experiences of this research with other Jewish minorities in America.
4. Research should be conducted to compare the Persian American Jewish attitudes and experiences, with their non-Jewish counterparts in related and appropriate areas and challenges.
5. Research should investigate if the differences seen among Mashadis and Teheranis can be explained by different socio-economic backgrounds or occupations.
6. Research should explore how Persian American Jews interpret what is meant by Hebrew literature when compared with other Jews of different cultural background.
7. Research should be conducted to determine why the study of Talmud is not as important as the study of Bible and Hebrew language among Mashadis and Teheranis.
8. Research should examine why Mashadi and Teherani females

are not as traditional as males in articulating the Maimonidean articles of faith.

9. Research should be conducted to identify characteristics of spirituality and other religious expression and compare them among Mashadi and Teherani females
10. Researchers should examine the characteristics determining formal Jewish education - beyond the lower or middle schools - as a priority among Persian American Jews.
11. Researchers should examine the differences between Mashadi and Teherani interpretation of keeping kosher as part of a study comparing religious observances among Persian American Jews.

Policy recommendations are as follows:

1) Educational and rabbinical programs should provide a greater focus on recruiting future religious and educational leaders among Persian American Jews.
2) Schools should include lessons on the history of the Persian Jewish experience including religious persecution and culture.
3) Schools should provide guest lecturers to share the history of Persian Jews.
4) Courses in Jewish law should include the customs of Persian American Jews.

The value of the present study may be enhanced by studies recommended above. While the results of this study may be helpful to individuals who service the Great Neck Persian American Jewish

community it must be emphasized that the findings of this study were based on self-report data of Mashadis and Teheranis who volunteered to participate. In view of limitations of self-report data, further research, as previously suggested, might support the observations of this study and provide implications for practice that would enhance informal and formal Jewish education and provide comparisons with other ethnic communities.

Glossary

Ashkenazim:

The literal translation is a Jew from Germany. In the course of time the term included all European Jews and their descendants (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Crypto-Jews :

Persons who while secretly remaining faithful to Judaism practiced another religion which they were forced to accept (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Diaspora :

From the Greek word meaning dispersion, and is used to refer to the voluntary dispersion of the Jewish people from their homeland (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Jewish Day School:

Jewish institution offering intensive Jewish education along with general studies. The course of study included the regular public school program and an intensive Jewish program (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Jewish Dogma:

Beliefs as represented by the Maimonidean Thirteen Principles of Faith formulated in commentary on the Mishnah. They are fundamental tenets of faith or concise abstracts of religion according to Maimonides (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Kashrut:

The laws and customs governing the foods permissible to eat according to Jewish law (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Mashadi :

Descendants of the Jewish community of Mashad in Persia. (Because of imprecision in its transliteration from Farsi the name is rendered in various ways in English: Mashhad, Mashad, Mashed, Mashad)

Marranos:

The name given to those who, fearing for their lives, left Judaism and adopted a new faith (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Sephardim:

Literal translation is Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Commonly used to describe any Jew of non-European ancestry (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Talmud Torah:

Jewish institution offering a Jewish education as a supplement to general studies education of different non-sectarian institutions. The Jewish supplementary school is usually sponsored by the host

congregation or synagogue (Encyclopedia Judaica CD Rom, 1992).

Teherani :

Descendants of Jewish community of Teheran and later applied to all communities of Persia excluding Mashad.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

The attitudes and experiences of Persian American Jews on Jewish Education

Using a pen or pencil, circle the appropriate letter or write in each box (with capital letters).

1. In what year were you born? _____

2. What is your gender?
   A. male
   B. female

3. In which city were you born? _____

4. In what year did you come to the USA? _____

5. Do you consider yourself:
   A. Meshadi
   B. Teherani
   C. other (specify) _____

6. What type of school did you attend?
   A. public school
   B. private school
   C. Jewish school

7. Which school did you attend?
   A. Alliance
   B. Otzar Ha-Torah
   C. Coresh
   D. did not attend

8. Which school did your mother attend?
   A. Alliance
   B. Otzar Ha-Torah
   C. Coresh
   D. did not attend

9. Which school did your father attend?
   A. Alliance
   B. Otzar Ha-Torah
   C. Coresh
   D. did not attend

10. What is the highest grade you have completed?
    A. less than high school
    B. high school
    C. vocational school
    D. some college
    F. finished college
    G. some graduate school
    H. finished graduate school
    I. finished professional school
    J. don't know/ can't remember

11. If ever married, what is/was the religion of your spouse?
    A. someone born Jewish
    B. a convert to Judaism
    C. Catholic
    D. Protestant
    E. Muslim
    F. other (please specify)_____

12. If you work, for whom do you work?
    A. self-employed
    B. family or parents
    C. Jewish community
    D. other (please specify)_____

13. What is your occupation?_____

14. What is/was your father's occupation _____
    _____

15. What is/was your mother's occupation?_____
    _____

16. Living near a Jewish school is:
    A. not important
    B. somewhat important
    C. very important

17. Receiving a Jewish education is:
    A. not important
    B. somewhat important
    C. very important

18. Living near a sizable number of Jews is:
    A. not important
    B. somewhat important
    C. very important

19. Living near a synagogue is:
    A. not important
    B. somewhat important
    C. very important

20. What type of Jewish education have you had?
    A. Jewish school
    B. Talmud Torah
    C. other (please specify)_____

21. How many years of formal Jewish education have you had?_____

22. Have you ever been in Israel?
    A. Yes
    B. No

23. If yes, how many times?_____

24. Which synagogue are you affiliated with?

_____

25. Do you ever go to a rabbi to discuss concerns, questions, and/or interesting issues?
    A. yes
    B. no

26. How often do you attend synagogue services?
    A. not at all
    B. only on special occasions
    C. only for High Holiday services
    D. once or twice a year
    E. few times a year
    F. once a month
    G. few times a month
    H. once a week
    I. few times a week
    J. daily

27. How often do you attend Passover Seder?
    A. never
    B. sometimes
    C. usually
    D. all the time

28. How often does someone in your home light candles on Friday night?
    A. never
    B. sometimes
    C. usually
    D. all the time

29. How often does someone in your home light Chanukah lights?
    A. never
    B. sometimes
    C. usually
    D. all the time

30. Does your family use separate meat and dairy dishes?
    A. yes
    B. no

31. Do you attend Purim celebrations?
    A. yes
    B. no
    C. sometimes

32. Do you fast on Yom Kippur?
    A. yes
    B. no
    C. no: because of health problems

33. Do you fast on Tisha B'Av?
    A. yes
    B. no
    C. no: because of health problems

34. How well do you understand what is written in Hebrew in a siddur (prayer book)?
    A. very well
    B. moderately well
    C. somewhat
    D. not at all

35. Can you read a Hebrew newspaper?
    A. Yes, a lot of it
    B. Yes, a little of it
    C. No

36. Describe your closest friends:
    A. none are Jewish
    B. few are Jewish
    C. some are Jewish
    D. most are Jewish
    E. all are Jewish

37. How would you describe yourself?
    A. not at all religious
    B. a little religious
    C. somewhat religious
    D. very religious

38. If there is enough money for only one child to be educated at the best school, the son (rather than the daughter) should receive the funds:
    A. strongly disagree
    B. disagree
    C. agree
    D. strongly agree

39. How do/did you meet the people you date? (Choose all that apply)
    A. through friends
    B. at parties
    C. through your parents
    D. at work
    E. at school
    F. through matchmaker
    G. other (specify)_____

40. What is/was the highest grade your father completed?
    A. elementary school
    B. junior high school
    C. high school
    D. some college
    E. college
    F. graduate or professional school

41. What is/was the highest grade your mother completed?

A. elementary school
B. junior high school
C. high school
D. some college
E. college
F. graduate or professional school

42. How many years of formal Jewish education did your father have?_____

43. How many years of formal Jewish education did your mother have?_____

44. Describe your memories of the Jewish educational experience, on the elementary school level

A. very positive
B. positive
C. fair
D. negative
E. very negative
F. not applicable

45. Describe your memories of the Jewish educational experience, at the high school level

A. very positive
B. positive
C. fair
D. negative
E. very negative
F. not applicable

46. How do (did) your parents observe kashrut at home:

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

47. How does (did) your mother observe kashrut outside the home?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

48. How does (did) your father observe kashrut outside the home?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

49. Indicate ways you observe Shabbat: (Check all that apply)

__ A. do not observe Shabbat
__ B. make or hear Kiddush Friday night
__ C. make or hear Kiddush on Saturday
__ D. light candles Friday evening (or see them lit)
__ E. attend Synagogue Friday evening
__ F. attend Synagogue Saturday morning
__ G. attend Synagogue Saturday afternoon
__ H. invite guests home
__ I. wear special clothing
__ J. buy or prepare special foods
__ K. pray at home
__ L. refrain from handling money
__ M. study the Parsha (Torah portion for the week)
__ N. study Jewish texts (excluding the Parsha)
__ O. refrain from travel
__ P. visit with friends and/or relatives
__ Q. do not smoke
__ R. do not do laundry or cleaning
__ S. do not sew
__ T. go to grandparents
__ U. other (please specify)_____

50. How does (did) your mother observe Shabbat?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

51. How does (did) your father observe Shabbat?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

52. How do you observe kashrut at home?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

53. How do you observe kashrut outside the home?

A. strictly
B. moderately
C. not at all

54. If your child wanted to marry an Ashkenazi Jew, would you ...

A. ... strongly object?
B. ... object?
C. ... be neutral?
D. ... grudgingly accept?
E. ... accept?

5. If your child wanted to marry a convert to udaism, would you ...
   A. ... strongly object?
   B. ... object?
   C. ... be neutral?
   D. ... grudgingly accept?
   E. ... accept?

6. If your child wanted to marry a non-Jew, would ou ...
   A. ... strongly object?
   B. ... object?
   C. ... be neutral?
   D. ... grudgingly accept?
   E. ... accept?

7. If your child decided to convert to another ligion, would you ...
   A. ... strongly object?
   B. ... object?
   C. ... be neutral?
   D. ... grudgingly accept?
   E. ... accept?

8. Do you speak Farsi?
   A. yes
   B. no

9. Does your rabbi speak Farsi?
   A. yes
   B. no

0. What language is mostly spoken in your home?
   A. Farsi
   B. English
   C. Hebrew
   D. other_____

1. How would you describe your religious practice?
   A. very observant
   B. somewhat observant
   C. not very observant
   D. not at all observant

2. How much influence does religion have on the ay you act each day?
   A. no influence
   B. a small influence
   C. some influence
   D. a fair amount of influence
   E. a large influence

63. How much influence does religion have on the way your father acts each day?
   A. no influence
   B. a small influence
   C. some influence
   D. a fair amount of influence
   E. a large influence

64. How much influence does religion have on the way your mother acts each day?
   A. no influence
   B. a small influence
   C. some influence
   D. a fair amount of influence
   E. a large influence

65. Which statements come closest to your belief about the Torah
   A. The Torah was dictated to Moses at Sinai
   B. The Torah was divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai
   C. The Torah was a combination of divine inspiration and human endeavor
   D. The Torah was completely the product of human endeavor with no divine authorship

For the following items, identify to what extent you agree with the statement.

66. G-d created the world.
   A. strongly disagree
   B. disagree
   C. agree
   D. strongly agree

67. There is only one G-d.
   A. strongly disagree
   B. disagree
   C. agree
   D. strongly agree

68. G-d cannot be depicted in pictures because G-d has no physical form or shape.
   A. strongly disagree
   B. disagree
   C. agree
   D. strongly agree

69. G-d created people.
   A. strongly disagree
   B. disagree
   C. agree
   D. strongly agree

70. People should pray only to G-d not to anyone else.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

71. The words of the prophets in the Torah are true.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

72. Moses was the greatest prophet of all.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

73. The Torah we read today is the same as the one given to Moses.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

74. The Torah will never be changed
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

75. G-d knows the actions and thoughts of all human beings.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

76. G-d rewards the righteous.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

77. G-d punishes evil-doers.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

78. A Messiah exists for the Jews.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

79. The Messiah will eventually come.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

80. Resurrection of the dead is possible.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

On a scale of one to five, 1 representing MOST IMPORTANT and 5 LEAST IMPORTANT, please rate the subjects below

81. How important is the studying of Chumash (Bible)? ____

82. How important is the study of Hebrew language? ____

83. How important is the study of Talmud?____

84. How important is the study of Navi (Prophets)? ____

85. How important is the study of Hebrew literature? ____

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86. Tuition is an important factor in sending my children to a yeshiva for pre-school.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

87. Tuition is an important factor in sending my children to a yeshiva for the grades of 1- 5th.
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

88. Tuition is an important factor in sending my children to a yeshiva for the grades of 6-8th .
A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

89. Tuition is an important factor in sending my children to a yeshiva for the grades of 9-12th .

A. strongly disagree
B. disagree
C. agree
D. strongly agree

90. If you had to choose between a yeshiva - day school that had a good Judaic department with a poor general studies department and a quality public school, where would you send your child?

A. Public School
B. Yeshiva

91. If you had to choose between a yeshiva - day school that had a good Judaic department with an average general studies department and a quality public school in addition to two days a week of Talmud Torah, where would you send your child?

A. Public School & Talmud Torah
B. Yeshiva

92. Please list and prioritize other factors in choosing a yeshiva education?_____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Table 1

Tables 1-9

Distribution of Demographic and Educational Background Characteristics of Sample Population (N=142)

Characteristics	Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Gender		
Male	80	56.3
Female	61	43.0
Response omitted	1	.7
Place of Birth		
United States	26	18.3
Outside U.S.	115	81.0
Response omitted	1	.7
Community		
Meshedi	59	41.5
Teherani	81	57
Response omitted	2	1.4
Types of School		
Public/Private	60	42.3
Jewish	45	31.7
Both	35	24.6
Response omitted	2	1.4
School Attended		
Alliance	14	9.9
Otzar Ha-Torah	12	8.5
Coresh	21	14.8
More than one	1	.7
Did not attend	86	60.6
Educational Level		
Less than High School	17	12.0
High School	21	14.8
Some College	25	17.6
College Graduate	38	26.8
Some Graduate School	6	4.2
Completed Graduate School	22	15.5
Completed Professional School	12	8.5
Response omitted	1	.7
Religion of Spouse		
Born Jewish	125	88
Convert to Judaism	1	.7

Response omitted	16	11.3
Employer		
Self	80	56.3
Family	18	12.7
Jewish Community	5	3.5
Other	20	14.1
Response omitted	19	13.4
Your Occupation *		
High level Executives, Professionals	10	7.0
Mid-size business owners, execs.	8	5.6
Small business owners	66	46.5
Sales, technicians	13	9.2
Clerical	1	.7
Skilled workers	1	.7
Unskilled workers	1	.7
Homemaker, student, other	27	19.0
Response omitted	15	10.6
Type of Jewish Education		
Jewish School	73	51.4
Talmud-Torah	27	19.0
Both	4	2.8
Other	35	24.6
None	2	1.4
Response omitted	1	.7
People I date, I've met through		
Friends	25	17.6
Parties	18	12.7
Parents	14	9.9
Work	8	5.6
School	1	.7
Other	15	10.6
More than one way	49	34.5
Response omitted	12	8.5
Speak Farsi		
Yes	138	97.2
No	2	1.4
Response omitted	2	1.4
Rabbi Speak Farsi		
Yes	98	69.0
No	37	37.0
Response omitted	7	4.9

Language spoken at home		
Farsi	60	42.3
English	33	23.2
Hebrew	2	1.4
More than one	45	31.7
Response omitted	2	1.4

* Occupational status was based on a listing and scale of occupations in the A.B. Hollingshead four factor index of social economic status (Hollingshead, 1975)

Table 2

Demographic and Educational Background Characteristics of Respondents' Parents (N=142)

Characteristic	Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
School Attended-Mother		
Alliance	29	20.4
Otzar-Ha-Torah	4	2.8
Coresh	9	6.3
Did not attend	96	67.6
Response omitted	4	2.8
School Attended-Father		
Alliance	37	26.1
Otzar Ha-Torah	3	2.1
Coresh	8	5.6
Did not attend	88	62.0
Response omitted	6	4.2
Father's Occupation *		
Retired	2	1.4
Executives, Professionals	8	5.6
Mid-size bus. owners	5	3.5
Small bus. Owners	80	56.3
Sales, technicians	25	17.6
Clerical	1	.7
Semi-skilled	1	.7
Response omitted	20	14.1
Mother's Occupation *		
Homemaker	100	70.4
Executives, professionals	2	1.4

Mid-size bus. owners	3	2.1
Small bus. owners	10	7.0
Sales, technicians	4	2.8
Response omitted	23	16.2
Educational Level-Father		
Elementary School	39	27.5
Junior High School	21	14.8
High School	30	21.1
Some college	13	9.2
College Graduate	12	8.5
Grad. or Prof. School	14	9.9
Response omitted	13	9.2
Educational Level-Mother		
Elementary School	57	40.1
Junior High School	19	13.4
High School	34	23.9
Some College	8	5.6
Grad. or Prof. School	5	3.5
Response omitted	14	9.9
Observe Kashrut-Parents		
Strictly	98	69.0
Moderately	42	29.6
Not at all	1	.7
Response omitted	1	.7
Observe Kashrut-Mother		
Strictly	95	66.9
Moderately	43	30.3
Not at all	3	2.1
Response omitted	1	.7
Observe Kashrut-Father		
Strictly	75	52.8
Moderately	53	37.3
Not at all	9	6.3
Response omitted	5	3.5
Observe Shabbat-Mother		
Strictly	66	46.5
Moderately	75	52.8
Not at all	1	.7
Observe Shabbat-Father		
Strictly	60	42.3
Moderately	70	49.3

Not at all	9	6.3
Response omitted	3	2.1
Influence of Religion-Father		
None	6	4.2
Small	14	9.9
Some	28	19.7
Fair	47	33.1
Large	38	26.8
Response omitted	9	6.3
Influence of Religion-Mother		
None	1	.7
Small	11	7.7
Some	30	21.1
Fair	55	38.7
Large	39	27.5
Response omitted	6	4.2

* Occupational status was based on a listing and scale of occupations in the A.B. Hollingshead four factor index of social economic status (Hollingshead, 1975)

Table 3

Selected Attitudes About Jewish Communal Life
(N=139)

Attitude	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f (%)
Living near a Jewish school		
Not Important	8 (13.8)	11 (13.6)
Somewhat Important	14 (24.1)	38 (46.9)
Very Important	36 (62.1)	32 (39.5)
Receiving a Jewish education		
Not Important	2 (3.4)	0 (0.0)
Somewhat Important	10 (16.9)	17 (21.3)
Very Important	47 (79.7)	63 (78.8)
Living near other Jews		
Not Important	1 (1.7)	2 (2.5)
Somewhat Important	4 (6.8)	18 (22.5)
Very Important	54 (91.5)	60 (75.0)
Living near a synagogue		

Not Important	2 (3.4)	5 (6.2)
Somewhat Important	9 (15.3)	34 (42.0)
Very Important	48 (81.4)	42 (51.9)

Table 4

Distribution of Responses to Selected Religious Observances and Attitudes Toward Religious Precepts
(N=130)

Observance/Attitude	Meshedi f(%)	Teherani f(%)
Attend Synagogue		
Not at all	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)
Special occasions	2 (3.4)	1 (1.3)
High Holy Day services	1 (1.7)	4 (5.1)
Few times a year	1 (1.7)	11 (13.9)
Once a month	4 (6.8)	9 (11.4)
Few times a month	6 (10.2)	14 (17.7)
Once a week	31 (52.5)	28 (35.4)
Few times a week	7 (11.9)	2 (2.5)
Daily	6 (10.2)	9 (11.4)
Special occasions, High Holy days	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Passover seder attendance		
Usually	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
All the time	59 (100.0)	77 (98.7)
Light Friday night candles		
Never	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Sometimes	0 (0.0)	7 (8.9)
Usually	0 (0.0)	14 (17.7)
All the time	59 (100.0)	57 (72.2)
Light Chanukah candles		
Never	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Sometimes	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)
Usually	0 (0.0)	9 (11.4)
All the time	58 (98.3)	69 (87.3)
Separate meat and dairy dishes		
Yes	59 (100.0)	27 (34.6)
No	0 (0.0)	51 (65.4)

Attend Purim celebrations		
Yes	48 (81.4)	57 (72.2)
No	2 (3.4)	4 (5.1)
Sometimes	9 (15.3)	18 (22.8)
Fast on Yom Kippur		
Yes	58 (98.3)	77 (97.5)
No	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
No: Health problems	1 (.7)	1 (1.3)
Fast on Tisha b'Ab		
Yes	28 (48.3)	33 (42.9)
No	26 (44.8)	40 (51.9)
No: Health problems	4 (6.9)	4 (5.2)
Understand Siddur		
Very well	10 (16.9)	14 (17.7)
Moderately well	13 (22.0)	10(12.7)
Somewhat	20 (33.9)	33 (41.8)
Not at all	16 (27.1)	22 (27.8)
Read Hebrew newspaper		
Yes, a lot	8 (13.8)	12.0(15.2)
Yes, a little	20 (34.5)	21 (26.6)
No	30 (51.7)	46 (58.2)
Closest friends		
Few are Jewish	0 (0.0)	4 (5.1)
Some are Jewish	2 (3.4)	4 (5.1)
Most are Jewish	14 (23.7)	42 (53.2)
All are Jewish	43 (72.9)	29 (36.7)
Yourself		
Not religious	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)
A little religious	8 (13.6)	15 (19.2)
Somewhat religious	36 (61.0)	56 (71.8)
Very religious	14 (23.7)	7 (9.0)
Lack of funds educate son only		
Strongly disagree	12 (21.8)	20 (26.7)
Disagree	19 (34.5)	29 (38.7)
Agree	21 (38.2)	18 (24.0)
Strongly agree	3 (5.5)	8 (10.7)

Table 5

Shabbat Observance Among Meshedi and Teherani Respondents
(N=140)

Observance	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f(%)
Do not observe	2 (3.4)	5 (6.2)
Kiddush on Fri. night	56 (94.9)	63 (77.8)
Kiddush on Sat.	43 (72.9)	36 (44.4)
Light candles on Fri. evening	58 (98.3)	60 (74.1)
Synagogue Fri. evening	17 (28.8)	12 (14.8)
Synagogue Sat. morning	54 (91.5)	59 (72.8)
Synagogue Sat. afternoon	11 (18.6)	14 (17.3)
Invite guest home	42 (71.2)	50 (61.7)
Wear special clothing	40 (67.8)	38 (46.9)
Buy, prepare special foods	48 (81.4)	56 (69.1)
Pray at home	23 (39.0)	21 (25.9)
Do not handle money	34 (57.6)	24 (29.6)
Study Parashah	22 (37.3)	24 (29.6)
Study Jewish texts	13 (22.0)	10 (12.3)
Do not travel	45 (76.3)	28 (34.6)
Visit friends/relatives	45 (76.3)	42 (51.9)
Do not smoke	55 (93.2)	51 (63.0)
Do not do laundry/clean	56 (94.9)	57 (70.4)
Do not sew	55 (93.2)	54 (66.7)
Visit grandparents	36 (61.0)	25 (30.9)

Table 6

Extent of Agreement with the Maimonidean Principles
(N=121)

Principle	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f (%)	Principle	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f (%)
G-d created the world			Torah same today		
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.7)	5 (6.5)	Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Disagree	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)	Disagree	4 (7.1)	10 (13.8)
Agree	8 (14.0)	20 (26.0)	Agree	16 (28.6)	27 (36.0)
Strongly Agree	49 (84.5)	50 (64.9)	Strongly Agree	36 (64.3)	37 (49.3)

One G-d only		
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.7)	3 (3.8)
Disagree	0 (0.0)	2 (2.5)
Agree	1 (1.7)	7 (8.9)
Strongly Agree	57 (96.6)	67 (84.8)

G-d not in pictures		
Strongly Disagree	2 (3.4)	1 (1.3)
Disagree	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Agree	55 (8.6)	14 (17.9)
Strongly Agree	51 (87.9)	62 (79.5)

G-d created people		
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.7)	3 (3.8)
Disagree	0 (0.0)	3 (3.8)
Agree	6 (10.2)	16 (20.3)
Strongly Agree	52 (89.7)	57 (72.2)

Pray only to G-d		
Strongly Disagree	2 (3.4)	4 (5.1)
Disagree	0 (0.0)	3 (3.5)
Agree	3 (5.2)	11 (14.1)
Strongly Agree	53 (91.4)	60 (76.9)

Torah is true		
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.8)	3 (3.8)
Disagree	2 (3.5)	6 (7.6)
Agree	12 (21.1)	32 (40.5)
Strongly Agree	42 (73.7)	38 (48.1)

Torah never changes		
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Disagree	3 (5.2)	5 (6.4)
Agree	10 (17.2)	29 (37.2)
Strongly Agree	45 (57.7)	43 (55.1)

G-d knows all		
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)
Disagree	1 (1.8)	3 (3.8)
Agree	12 (21.1)	31 (39.7)
Strongly agree	44 (75.9)	44 (56.4)

G-d rewards righteous		
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)
Disagree	6 (10.3)	5 (6.4)
Agree	13 (22.8)	33 (42.3)
Strongly Agree	38 (65.5)	35 (44.9)

G-d punishes evil		
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	3 (3.8)
Disagree	6 (12.0)	7 (89.7)
Agree	14 (24.1)	33 (42.3)
Strongly Agree	38 (65.5)	35 (44.9)

Messiah exists		
Strongly Disagree	2 (4.0)	1 (1.4)
Disagree	6 (12.0)	12 (16.7)
Agree	18 (34.0)	35 (48.6)
Strongly Agree	26 (52.0)	24 (33.3)

Moses is greatest prophet			Messiah will come		
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)	Strongly Disagree	1 (1.9)	3 (4.1)
Disagree	2 (3.6)	2 (2.5)	Disagree	9 (17.0)	10 (13.7)
Agree	15 (26.8)	21 (26.6)	Agree	18 (34.0)	37 (50.7)
Strongly Agree	39 (69.6)	55 (69.6)	Strongly Agree	25 (47.2)	23 (31.5)
Resurrection is possible					
Strongly Disagree	5 (10.2)	10 (13.9)			
Disagree	7 (14.3)	15 (20.8)			
Agree	21 (42.9)	30 (41.7)			
Strongly Agree	16 (32.7)	17 (23.6)			

Table 7

Importance of Textual Issues
(N =130)

Textual Issues	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f(%)	Textual Issues	Meshedi f(%)	Teherani F(%)
Chumash			*Navi*-Prophets		
1 Most important	34 (60.7)	30 (40.0)	1 Most important	10 (17.9)	9 (12.2)
2	6 (10.7)	17 (22.7)	2	12 (21.4)	22 (29.7)
3	11 (19.6)	13 (17.3)	3	18 (32.1)	21 (28.4)
4	0 (0.0)	4 (5.3)	4	9 (26.1)	17 (23.0)
5 Least important	5 (8.9)	11 (14.7)	5 Least important	7 (12.5)	5 (6.8)
Hebrew language			Hebrew literature		
1 Most important	26 (45.6)	30 (40.0)	1 Most important	7 (12.3)	14 (18.9)
2	9 (15.8)	15 (20.0)	2	10(17.5)	17 (23.0)
3	9 (15.8)	12 (16.0)	3	14 (24.6)	18 (24.3)
4	4 (7.0)	9 (12.0)	4	7 (12.3)	8 (10.85)

5 Least important	9 (15.8)	9 (12.0)	5 Least important	19 (33.3)	17 (23.0)
Talmud					
1 Most important	15 (26.8)	15 (20.0)			
2	10 (17.9)	18 (24.0)			
3	15 (26.8)	26 (34.7)			
4	8 (14.3)	11 (14.7)			
5 Least important	8 (14.3)	5 (6.7)			

*Note: Point scale in analysis was reversed from least to most

Table 8

Attitudes About Formal Jewish Education
(N =132)

Educational Importance	Meshedi f (%)	Teherani f (%)
Tuition- Yeshiva pre-school		
Strongly Disagree	9 (15.8)	10 (13.3)
Disagree	11 (19.3)	24 (32.0)
Agree	20 (35.1)	27 (36.0)
Strongly Agree	17 (29.8)	14 (18.7)
Tuition- Yeshiva elementary school		
Strongly Disagree	6 (10.5)	12 (16.0)
Disagree	17 (29.8)	27 (36.0)
Agree	19 (33.3)	19 (25.3)
Strongly Agree	15 (26.3)	17 (22.7)
Tuition- Yeshiva middle school		
Strongly Disagree	7 (12.3)	13 (17.3)
Disagree	16 (28.1)	23 (30.7)
Agree	16 (28.1)	23 (30.7)
Strongly Agree	18 (31.0)	16 (21.3)
Tuition- Yeshiva high school		
Strongly Disagree	6 (10.3)	12 (15.8)
Disagree	14 (24.1)	23 (30.3)
Agree	20 (34.5)	24 (31.6)
Strongly Agree	18 (31.0)	17 (22.4)

Table 9
ANOVA for Mean Maimonidean Principles Scores by Groups of Persian Jews and Gender
(N = 138)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Group	202.96	1	202.96	2.71
Gender	125.25	1	125.25	1.67
Group x Gender	324.79	1	324.79	4.34 *
Residual	10034.56	134	74.89	
Total	10716.50	137		

*p <.05

Appendix C

Dinim curricula of NSHA Middle School

ישיבת חוף הצפון
חטיבת הביניים

תכנית הלימודים בדינים

ספר הלימוד: "שערי הלכה" קיצור ההלכות המעשיות בעריכת זאב גרינוולד.

כיתה ו'- : חלק א'

חגי תשרי, לפי הרמות של הילדים.

כיתה ו': חלק ב' "הברכות" (עמודים 87-110)

פרק י' דיני ברכות כלליים
פרק י"א נטילת ידים וברכת המוציא
פרק י"ב נוסח ברכת המזון, ברכות שונות.
פרק י"ג ברכות הנהנין
פרק י"ד ברכות אחרונות
פרק ט"ו ברכות שונות

כיתה ז': חלק ג' "שבת" (עמודים 114-165)

פרק ט"ז: הכנות לשבת הדלקת נרות.
פרק י"ז : ליל שבת
פרק י"ח : סדר יום שבת
פרק י"ט : מוצאי שבת
פרק כ': מלאכות שבת
פרק כ"א: פרטים שרצוי להכינם לפני שבת

כיתה ח': חלק ה' נושאים בהלכה עמודים(259-279)

פרק ל"ו:כשרות. אם הזמן יאפשר פרק ל"ח: "נושאים שונים" (עמודים 296-310)

ישיבת חוף הצפון
חטיבת הביניים

כנית הלכות לימים נוראים

דיני חדש אלול פרק ל"ה

סעיף ל"ד, ל"ו, ל"ז, ל"ח

דיני ראש השנה פרק כ"ד

סעיף ב', ג', ד', ה', ו', ט', (קטע ראשון), י"ב, ט"ז, י"ז, י"ח, י"ט, כ"א, כ"ב, כ"ד, כ"ה

מפרק כ"ה דין צום גדליה
סעיף י'

פרק כ"ו

סעיף ד', ה', ז' (טבלה), ח', ט', י', י"א, י"ב

מפרק כ"ז - דיני ערב יום הכפורים

סעיף א', ב', ג', ד', ה', ז', י'

מפרק כ"ח דיני יום הכפורים

סעיף ב', ג', ד', ה', ו', ז', ט', י"ג,י"ד, ט"ו, ט"ז, י"ח (קטע הארון)

מפרק כ"ט דיני סוכות, שמיני עצרת ושמחת תורה

סעיף א', ה', ו', ז', ח', ט', י"ג, י"ד, ט"ו, ט"ז, י"ח, כ"א, כ"ב, כ"ג, כ"ד, ל"ו, ל"ז, ל"ח, ל"ט (קטע ראשון) מ', מ"ו, מ"ז, נ', נ"א, נ"ב, נ"ג, נ"ד, נ"ו, נ"ט, ס"א, ס"ג, ס"ד, ס"ה, ס"ו, ס"ז, ס"ח, ס"ט.

לכתה ז'

נוסף על מה שנזכר לכתה ו'

מפרק ל"ה

סעיף ל"ה

מפרק כ"ד
סעיף א', ז', י' (כל הסעיף), ט"ו

מפרק כ"ו
סעיף א', ב'

מפרק כ"ז
סעיף ח'

מפרק כ"ח
סעיף ח', י', י"א, י"ח (כל הקטע).

מפרק כ"ט
סעיף ב', י"ב, י"ט, כ', ל"ה, מ"ה, מ"ט, נ"ה

כתה ח'

נוסף על מה שנזכר לכתות ז' וח'

מפרק כ"ד
סעיף ח', י"א, י"ג, י"ד, כ', כ"ג

מפרק כ"ה
סעיף ג', ד', ה', ז', ח'

מפרק כ"ו
סעיף ג', ו'.

מפרק כ"ז
סעיף ו', ט', י"א, י"ב

מפרק כ"ח
סעיף א', י"ב, י"ז
מפרק כ"ט
סעיף ג', ד', י', י"א, כ"ה, כ"ו, כ"ח, מ"א, מ"ב, מ"ג, מ"ח, נ"ז, ס', ס"ב

תכנית לימודים בדינים לכתות ו-ח

<u>תכנית הלכות לחגי השנה</u>

<u>דיני חנוכה</u> - עמוד 219 עד עמוד 223 - כל ההלכות.

<u>דיני עשרה בטבת</u> - עמוד 223-224 - כל ההלכות.

<u>דיני ט״ו בשבט</u> - עמוד 224

<u>דיני חודש אדר וארבע פרשיות</u> - עמוד 225

<u>דיני תענית אסתר ופורים</u> - עמוד 226,227,228,230

<u>דיני פסח</u> - פרק ל״ב [illegible] ד י״ח

(לכתה ו׳ לדלג י״ט עד כ״ב) כ״ג,כ״ה,כ״ח,כ״ט, ל״ג,ל״ד
לכתות ז׳ - ח׳ להוסיף את מה שדלגנו לכתה ו׳ חוץ מ- ל׳,ל״א,ל״ב

<u>פרק ל״ג</u> ג׳,ז׳,ח׳,ט׳,י׳,י״א,י״ב,י״ג,י״ד,ט״ו,ט״ז,י״ט,כ׳,כ״א,כ״ב,כ״ג.

<u>פרק ל״ד</u> א׳,ב׳,ג׳,ד׳,ה׳,ו׳

<u>דיני חג השבועות</u> - עד סוף הפרק כל ההלכות.

<u>דיני שבעה עשר בתמוז ותשעה באב</u>

<u>פרק ל״ה</u> א׳ - ח׳, י׳ - י״ד, י״ז-כ׳, כ״ג-כ״ה, כ״ח
לכתות ז׳ - ח׳ להוסיף ט״ו,כ״א,כ״ב,כ״ו,כ״ז, ל׳,ל״א,ל״ב,ל״ג

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Rabbi Dr. Michael Reichel has lived and worked in the Great Neck, New York, community as a teacher and administrator for over a decade. As the principal at the North Shore Hebrew Academy Middle School he has developed an intimate working relationship with the Persian communities in Great Neck and Queens, New York. It was through this contact with many Persian families that he decided to delve into the Persian history and culture and how it related to their attitudes toward Jewish life and education.

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This book is an outgrowth of his doctoral dissertation: "Attitudes and Experiences of Persian American Jews in Jewish Education".

Cover Photo: Tomb of Mordechai and Esther

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