

Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS)

Jews and the Persianate World: Politics, Culture, and Historical Ties

Georgetown University
September 29, 2025

Conference Report



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Introduction

On September 29, 2025, the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), in collaboration with Georgetown University's Center for Jewish Civilization and with the support of the Muslim American Leadership Alliance (MALA) and the American Sephardi Federation (ASF), held the international conference “Jews and the Persianate World: Politics, Culture, and Historical Ties” at Georgetown University, followed by the cultural program “Rumi Night in Washington: Celebrating Our Shared Humanity.” The conference examined Jewish–Persian relations across different historical periods, the intersections of Judaism, Islam, and the Persianate world, current geopolitical conflicts involving Israel and Iran, and the idea of Khorasan as a framework for rethinking pluralism. Four panels structured the program, alongside testimony and welcoming remarks. The evening program, Rumi Night, presented a cultural continuation of the conference through poetry, music, and dialogue.

Welcoming Remarks — Davood Moradian



The conference opened with welcoming remarks by Davood Moradian, Director-General of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. He began by situating the gathering within a wider landscape of historical and political dislocation. His reflections drew together four reasons why such a conference is both timely and necessary. First, he recalled AISS's 2018 research project with the Universities of Sussex and Cambridge on the lived experiences of Afghanistan's religious minorities, including Sikhs and Jews in Kabul, Herat, and Bukhara. That project confirmed the deep attachment these communities felt toward their homeland, an attachment that was not diminished by exile.

Second, he marked the departure of Zebulon Simentov in September 2021, the last Jew of Afghanistan, as a symbolic moment. For Moradian, it illustrated how the fate of Afghanistan's non-Muslims cannot be separated from that of Muslims themselves. Just as militant Islamism drove Jews out of the country, it has also devastated the lives of millions of Afghans.

Third, he turned to the wider regional picture, reflecting on the simultaneity of speaking to interlocutors in Israel and Iran while missiles were being exchanged. This, he noted, underscored how the conflict between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran has ramifications that extend far beyond the battlefield, affecting displaced populations and fueling new cycles of xenophobia. The mass deportation of Afghan refugees from Iran following the war was a stark reminder of these consequences.

Finally, Dr. Moradian acknowledged the solidarity shown by Jewish humanitarian organizations during Afghanistan's recent displacement crisis, particularly in the United States, where Afghans found shelter through Jewish-sponsored programs. He recalled that AISS had recognized this legacy by awarding the Avicenna Peace Prize in 2023 to honor traditions of Afghan–Jewish cooperation.

He concluded by placing the conference in a civilizational frame, echoing President Bush's phrase about "a Europe whole, united and free" and suggesting that the Persianate world too could only be restored when all its communities—Jews, Muslims, Christians, and secular alike—come together again. His remarks provided the intellectual and moral context for the discussions that followed, linking memory and scholarship to lived questions of displacement, identity, and the conditions of pluralism

Special Opening Remarks by Jack Abraham



The day began with a moving personal testimony delivered by Jack Abraham, whose remarks set the tone for the conference. Abraham spoke of Mizrahi Jewish heritage and identity, which he emphasized was not a derivative of either Sephardi or Ashkenazi traditions but an independent and much older branch of Jewish life. In recounting his own family's history, Abraham traced the Jewish presence across Afghanistan, Iran, Bukhara, and Turkmenistan.

He recalled how Afghan Jews were once central to the civic and cultural fabric of major cities—Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Bamiyan, Balkh, and Mazar-e Sharif. They were not confined to ghettos or margins but were active participants in trade, philanthropy, education, and the life of the bazaars. Abraham's family memory included stories of caravan merchants, bankers, and communal leaders who worked across regions, binding together networks of exchange that stretched from Central Asia to India.

What stood out in his testimony was not only the geography but also the ethos. Abraham stressed that the Afghan Jewish ethic was one of gratitude, reciprocity, and resilience. Even in moments of persecution or forced migration, the community “survived because we fixed the world and moved forward.” It was a statement that encapsulated not only endurance but also a philosophy: that survival required creative contribution, rebuilding, and a refusal to let bitterness define identity. Abraham reminded participants that Afghan Jews, though now scattered, remain connected through memory and through a sense of civilizational belonging that transcends displacement.

Panel I: Ancient Wisdom & Mutuality — Jewish–Persian Relations in Antiquity



Moderated by Dr. Omar Sharifi, the first panel moved the discussion from testimony into deep historical scholarship. The aim was to examine how Jewish communities lived and flourished under Persian empires, from the Achaemenids to the Sasanians, and to ask what kinds of mutuality shaped these encounters.

Dr. Gad Barnea drew on archival material—ostraca, papyri, contracts, coins—to reconstruct Jewish life under the Achaemenids in the fifth century BCE. He cautioned against reading antiquity through the lens of later biblical narratives, noting that documentary evidence often paints a more textured picture. Among his examples was the Jewish temple at Elephantine in Egypt, where archaeologists discovered a Zoroastrian-style fire-holder. The presence of such an object suggested that Jewish communities were neither isolated nor rigidly separatist; they were willing to incorporate ritual practices from surrounding traditions, producing hybrid religious environments. Barnea also reconstructed the career of Hananiah, a Jewish–Samaritan aristocrat who exercised imperial authority in Egypt, issuing directives and negotiating with Persian officials. Hananiah’s role, Barnea suggested, may have inspired later retellings of the Joseph-in-Egypt story. Finally, he pointed to a Qumran scroll referencing the Behistun inscription as evidence that Jews were not only aware of Persian imperial culture but also engaged with it directly, internalizing its ideas of legitimacy and sovereignty.

Dr. Parvaneh Pourshariati then took the discussion eastward along what she called the “Parthian Road,” a corridor of trade, migration, and settlement stretching from Media and Hyrcania through Rayy into Afghanistan. Along this route, Jewish communities established themselves as strategic actors, linking caravan commerce with local politics. Pourshariati recounted the dramatic case of the Sasanian general Shahrbarāz, whose conquest of Jerusalem in 614 CE was supported by Jewish populations and hailed as messianic fulfillment. The long-standing maxim “If you hear Parthian hoofbeats, the Messiah nears” captured this sense of alignment between Jewish eschatological hopes and Iranian military power. At the same time, she cautioned against a simplistic narrative of harmony: there were episodes of persecution, and some Jewish communities even welcomed the Arab conquest as a reprieve. Yet even this complexity confirmed her point: Jewish experience was not marginal but deeply integrated into the social and political fabric of Iranian empires.

Dr. Michael Rubin provided a comparative modern lens, arguing that despite the erasures of the Islamic Republic, Persian–Jewish civilizational ties remain embedded in memory. He reminded the audience that Persian bureaucratic models were crucial in shaping early Islamic governance and that rabbinic and Zoroastrian debates informed the ritual practices of Muslims. While not romanticizing history—he acknowledged episodes of violence, such as Qajar-era pogroms—Rubin insisted that the deeper pattern was resilience and exchange. He suggested that this long civilizational memory could provide resources for cooperation in a future beyond the Islamic Republic, once identity politics is decoupled from sectarian antagonism.

The discussion that followed was lively. Questions were raised about the balance between Hellenistic and Persian influences in shaping Jewish intellectual life, the manipulation of ancient history by modern authoritarian regimes, and the persistence of Jewish quarters across Iranian cities as physical reminders of coexistence. Participants also brought Afghanistan into the conversation, noting that Afghan Jewish experience similarly reveals a history of pluralism that is now at risk of erasure.

Panel II: The Triangle — Islam, Judaism & the Persianate World



The second panel, moderated by Omar Sadr and featuring Professor Imanuel Rybakov, Dr. Mustafa Akyol, Alan Niku, and Mansour Aaron Karimzadeh, shifted from antiquity to theology and culture. Its focus was on the Abrahamic “triangle”—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—and the ways in which Judaism and Islam in particular developed parallel and often intertwined traditions in the Persianate world.

Dr. Mustafa Akyol situated his remarks in the intellectual history of the Judeo-Islamic encounter. He reminded the audience that nineteenth-century Jewish scholars in Europe were fascinated by Islam, often finding it closer to Judaism than Christianity because of shared principles: monotheism without trinity, aniconism, and the centrality of divine law. He emphasized that Moses appears more frequently in the Qur’an than any other prophet, and that for Muslims, Moses embodies the paradigm of leadership under persecution—an image that resonated deeply with Jewish communities. Akyol pointed to the Constitution of Medina as evidence that Islam’s earliest political experiment accepted Jews as a distinct community with protected rights, even though later politics eroded this arrangement. He concluded that present conflicts between Jews and Muslims are not theological inevitabilities but political and territorial struggles, and he urged participants to reconceptualize religion as a potential bridge rather than a battlefield.

The panel also moved into cultural terrain. Speakers traced the role of Bukharan Jewish musicians in preserving and shaping Shashmaqom, the classical music of Central Asia. Figures such as Levi Babahanov became canonical masters of this repertoire, their recordings ensuring that Jewish contributions would not be erased. Their lives reflected both persecution—some were forced to convert under pressure—and resilience, as they privately maintained Jewish

identity and found ways to resettle under Russian protection. Far from marginal participants, these musicians were foundational to Central Asia's cultural heritage.

Another presentation examined the mystical literature of Iranian Jews, who centuries before the spread of Kabbalah engaged in traditions deeply influenced by Sufism. Persian-speaking Jewish poets borrowed imagery from Rumi and Hafez, reinterpreting Hebrew liturgy in Persian idioms and producing works that blurred boundaries without erasing difference. Examples such as Shahin of Shiraz and Rabbi Simontov Melamed showed that Jewish mysticism in Iran was not derivative but original and dialogical, producing texts that spoke to both Jewish and Muslim audiences.

A personal testimony from a participant born in Mashhad traced Jewish presence in Iran back 2,500 years to the time of Cyrus the Great. He recalled both persecution and integration, pointing to biblical tombs as evidence of Jewish continuity and to Jewish physicians, poets, and lexicographers such as Suleiman Haim as examples of Jewish contribution to Persian intellectual life.

The audience discussion asked how historical memory could be mobilized to counter modern hostility. Questions were raised about whether comparative studies of scripture could be developed into educational manuals, and whether mystical frameworks such as Sufism and Kabbalah could be revived as antidotes to politicized religion. Panelists acknowledged that history was not without persecution, but they insisted that Jewish experience in Muslim lands compared favorably to Christendom and offered usable precedents for coexistence.

Panel III: Israel & the Islamic Republic of Iran — The 12-Day War



The third panel, moderated by Dr. Zainab Al Suwaij, turned to contemporary geopolitics. Featuring Ambassador Dennis Ross, Alex Vatanka, Col. Lt. Sarit Zehavi (via recorded

presentation), and Dr. Arash Azizi, it analyzed the recent 12-Day War between Israel and Iran and its implications for regional security.

Alex Vatanka and Dr. Arash Azizi began by assessing Iran's internal dynamics. They argued that despite factional disputes, core consensus persists on uranium enrichment, missile development, and regional confrontation. The Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards anchor this consensus, leaving little room for reform. Both speakers dismissed exaggerated expectations about Russian and Chinese support, noting that while Moscow and Beijing may offer diplomatic cover, they cannot decisively shield Tehran from sanctions or domestic unrest. This has left Iran isolated but determined to continue managed confrontation, calculating that Western powers will avoid full-scale ground war.

Ambassador Dennis Ross then provided a strategic assessment of Israel's strikes. He explained that Israeli intelligence had concluded Iran was nearing nuclear breakout capability, accumulating enriched uranium at 60% and dispersing missile infrastructure. Israel chose to strike preemptively, destroying 80% of missile launchers, intercepting 90% of incoming missiles, and disrupting command structures. The result, Ross argued, was a recalibration of deterrence: Iran's perception of impunity had been punctured, but the regime remained resilient. He emphasized that the true vulnerability will come during succession after Ali Khamenei, when elite competition may open cracks in the system.

Speaking from Israel, Col. Lt. Sarit Zehavi provided the operational view. She described how Israel had prepared for years, developing layered defenses that minimized casualties even as Iran launched over 500 missiles and 1,000 drones. She noted Hezbollah's surprising decision not to enter the conflict, interpreting it as Tehran's choice to preserve its most valuable proxy rather than risk destruction. Zehavi underlined the effectiveness of Israeli strikes in disrupting Iran's nuclear program, degrading air defenses, and killing senior IRGC commanders. Her conclusion was that Israel had demonstrated not only capacity but also will, opening a new phase in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

The audience discussion was probing. Participants questioned the symbolic bombing of Evin Prison and debated whether U.S. policy tacitly benefits from regime persistence by sustaining Gulf arms sales. Panelists reflected on the psychological as well as strategic dimensions of war, noting how information warfare and symbolic strikes now play a role alongside military objectives.

Panel IV: Dawn of Khorasan — Reclaiming and Reimagining the Future



The final panel, moderated by Kalid Loul and featuring Jason Guberman, Ambassador Sayed Tayeb Jawad, and Roya Hakakian, returned the conversation to culture, heritage, and identity. Its theme was Khorasan—not the dystopian construct used by ISIS-K or the Taliban, but the historic Khorasan of poets, scientists, and philosophers, which could still inspire pluralism today.

Jason Guberman argued that Mizrahi and Afghan Jewish identities must be recognized on their own terms rather than subsumed under Sephardi or Ashkenazi categories. He contrasted the extremist manipulation of Khorasan as a myth of repression and violence with the authentic Khorasan of Avicenna, Omar Khayyam, and Al-Khwarizmi—a crossroads of creativity and coexistence. He then presented the work of the Diarna digital atlas, which has documented over 2,800 Jewish heritage sites across the Middle East and Central Asia. In places where physical restoration is impossible due to war, displacement, or politicization, digital preservation ensures continuity of memory.

Ambassador Sayed Tayeb Jawad spoke from both personal memory and political experience. He recalled Kabul in the 1960s and 1970s as a cosmopolitan city with Jewish classmates, synagogues, and businesses integrated into daily life. He also analyzed how politics later erased such narratives, even though Afghan historiography had once embraced claims of Pashtun descent from Israelite tribes. Jawad emphasized that pluralism collapses when religion is politicized and citizenship undermined. To rebuild, he argued, Afghanistan needs constitutional frameworks that depoliticize religion and secure equal rights for all citizens. He also stressed that intra-faith dialogue is crucial: extremism must be challenged within traditions themselves. As an example of politics transcended by humanity, he pointed to Afghan children receiving life-saving surgeries in Israel.

Roya Hakakian offered a literary and political reflection on the Iranian Jewish experience. She described the 1960s–70s as a golden era when Jews, women, and minorities thrived under expanding citizenship. Jewish prosperity, she argued, was not unique but tied to broader democratic reforms. Hakakian critiqued inclusion models that erased difference, whether by celebrating Jews as “excellent Iranians” whose Jewishness was invisible or by demanding ideological absorption in Marxist movements. True equality, she concluded, requires both equal rights and the preservation of distinctiveness.

The audience discussion extended these themes. Questions asked whether a new golden era of pluralism could return, how mahalla (Jewish quarters) might inform identity politics, and what lessons could be drawn from the rediscovery of the Afghan Geniza manuscripts. The discussion emphasized that Jewish experience in Afghanistan is part of a broader mosaic of pluralism in Central Asia, one that can still be recovered.

Professor Ori Z. Soltes concluded the day by invoking Rumi’s metaphor: “The lamps are different, but the light is the same.” For him, pluralism requires more than tolerance; it requires the embrace of difference within a shared civic ethic. Mystical traditions, whether Jewish or Muslim, demonstrate that one can sustain a particular identity while affirming universal values of compassion and justice.

Conclusion



The discussions across the four panels revealed how easily histories of coexistence can be obscured and how quickly traditions of pluralism can collapse when political systems instrumentalize religion and erase citizenship. What emerged repeatedly was not a celebration of harmony but a recognition of fragility: Jewish communities flourished when law provided

predictability and when identity was not weaponized, and they suffered erasure whenever regimes placed ideology above inclusion.

Speakers stressed that these patterns are not confined to the distant past. The instrumentalization of Khorasan by extremist groups, the state-driven denial of Iranian pluralist traditions, and the reduction of religion to political identity in Afghanistan are contemporary continuities of the same logic that once dismantled cosmopolitan societies. If there is a lesson, it is that pluralism cannot be assumed as a natural condition; it must be defended through institutions, protected by law, and sustained by a conscious effort to preserve memory against erasure.

The conference did not offer easy remedies, but it did frame the scale of the challenge. From archives in Elephantine and Bamiyan to the fragile synagogues of Herat and the contested tombs of Iran, the region's history demonstrates that memory and heritage remain both resources and battlegrounds. What comes next will depend less on rhetorical commitments to tolerance than on practical measures: safeguarding heritage, fostering intra-faith accountability, and resisting the manipulation of history for political ends.

In this sense, the conversations held at Georgetown were not a closing statement but an opening reminder. Pluralism in the Persianate world has always been conditional, contingent, and contested. Whether it can be reconstituted in Afghanistan, Iran, or Central Asia today will depend on whether those conditions can be secured again.

Rumi Night in Washington



On September 29, 2025, following the international conference “Jews and the Persianate World: Politics, Culture, and Historical Ties”, the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), in collaboration with Georgetown University’s Center for Jewish Civilization, and supported by the Muslim American Leadership Alliance (MALA) and the American Sephardi Federation (ASF), hosted Rumi Night in Washington: Celebrating Our Shared Humanity at the Museum of the Bible. The evening gathered scholars, artists, and spiritual figures from different faiths to mark the convergence of memory and art, intellect and devotion. It was not a formal closing of the day’s academic discussions, but rather their emotional continuation—a return to the essence of culture, where prayer, poetry, and song meet beyond politics and geography.

In his welcoming remarks, AISS Director-General Dr. Davood Moradian described the evening as a gathering of three civilizational virtues: forgiveness, perseverance, and love. He called forgiveness the essence of Christianity, embodied in the figure of Christ; perseverance, the core of Jewish endurance through centuries of exile; and love, the defining spirit of Persian civilization.

Dr. Moradian spoke without ornament, yet the substance of his reflection was deeply moral. He noted that none of these virtues hold meaning when confined to one’s own kind. Forgiveness, he said, must extend to the enemy, not only the friend. Perseverance, to be genuine, must also recognize the suffering of others. And love, the Persian inheritance, must remain unconditional, or it ceases to be love at all.

The night’s first conversation brought together author Sara Y. Aharon and filmmaker Dr. Sahraa Karimi for a discussion of Aharon’s book *From Kabul to Queens: The Jews of*

Afghanistan and Their Move to the United States. Aharon spoke about her motivation to recover a history that had nearly vanished—one not found in libraries, but in family memories, oral traditions, and the fading recollections of an older generation. The discussion coincided with the launch of the Persian translation of the book, published by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS).



She recounted her grandparents' life in Herat, her father's early years in Kabul, and the loss of an entire cultural world when Afghan Jews emigrated to Israel and the United States. Her book, she explained, is both a historical study and an act of remembrance—an effort to reassemble fragments of belonging.

Aharon spoke of Jewish coexistence with Muslims in Afghanistan, noting that, while inequality existed, relations were largely functional and often affectionate. She cited examples of shared languages, customs, and trade. Her use of Afghan folktales within a historical narrative, she explained, was deliberate: stories, more than data, preserve the emotional truth of a people.

Following the literary segment, Reuben Shimonov, a Bukharian Jewish artist and educator from Uzbekistan, took the stage to present his work at the intersection of Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian calligraphy. Through his slides, he reconstructed a visual language of coexistence. Each artwork merged sacred scripts without hierarchy—letters from different faiths flowing into one another like rivers meeting at a delta. Shimonov described his calligraphy as an embodiment of both personal and historical hybridity. His ancestors had lived in Central Asia for centuries, interacting daily with Islamic art, Persian poetry, and Jewish liturgy. For him, the artistic act was not aesthetic alone—it was a recovery of historical truth. “Our ancestors,” he said, “did not live in sealed traditions. They breathed in shared air—language, art, melody, and architecture.”

He showed photographs of Bukhara's mosques and synagogues, pointing out how Jewish houses of worship had borrowed the geometric and floral motifs of Islamic design. He also displayed his calligraphic works inscribed with phrases like *Gam zeh ya'avor* "This too shall pass" written in Hebrew, and *In ham migzarad* in Persian. One of his final pieces read *Shalom* - Salam under a shared dome, symbolizing the unity of sacred tongues. Shimonov concluded by dedicating his presentation to "the women of Afghanistan and their struggle for equality," linking his art of language to their struggle for voice. His presentation was quiet but piercing—a visual theology of coexistence, rendered through the ink of memory.



Hershel Hepler, Associate Curator of Hebrew Manuscripts at the Museum of the Bible, delivered an absorbing lecture on the discovery and preservation of the Afghan Liturgical Choir—a Hebrew manuscript dating to the eighth century. Hepler's tone was scholarly yet deeply human, for his story was not merely about a book, but about the Afghan villagers who had protected it. He traced the manuscript's origins to a cave near Bamiyan, the same valley where the great Buddhas once stood before their destruction. Inside that cave, alongside remnants of Buddhist and Islamic texts, a bundle of parchment had survived more than a millennium. Written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Judeo-Persian, the codex contained prayers, psalms, and poems—proof that Afghanistan had once been home to a vibrant Jewish spiritual tradition.

Hepler explained that the manuscript's structure—a single choir of fifteen sheets—revealed its antiquity, older than any other known Hebrew codex. It was, he said, the oldest complete Hebrew book ever found. Yet what made its story remarkable was not its age but its journey: how it was preserved by a Hazara man during the civil war, how it passed through local hands, and how Afghan officials later supported its international preservation rather than claiming

ownership. “This act,” Hepler said, “was not political but moral. Afghanistan chose dignity over possession.” He called it one of the rare examples of a human-rights approach to cultural heritage-prioritizing access for a displaced community over the prestige of national ownership. He ended by recalling the moment when Jack Abraham, an Afghan-born Jew, read aloud from the manuscript without any glass barrier between him and the text. “Thirteen centuries after it was written,” Hepler said, “its voice returned to the living. That is not archaeology. That is restoration of soul.”



The evening reached its moral and emotional height with an address by Pastor Dr. Mark Burns, a Christian leader known for his global interfaith outreach. Burns began by recalling his encounters with religious leaders across continents: “I have prayed with Jews in Ukraine, shared bread with Muslims in Eswatini, and stood with Hindu gurus in India.” Through these experiences, he said, one truth had become clear—human beings share more than they divide. He rejected what he called “the destructive lie that Islam is inherently violent,” condemning the use of religion as an instrument of fear. “Muslims are not the enemy,” he declared. “No faith is immune from corruption, but faith itself is not the problem—fear is.” He recounted how Christianity, too, had been distorted by power, used to justify slavery and violence, and warned against letting holy words become tools of domination.

Burns’s message was not political, though he spoke as a Republican pastor and former spiritual adviser to President Donald Trump. It was moral. “We cannot bomb our way to peace,” he said. “Every strike that misses its target plants a new seed of hatred.” His critique was both theological and humanistic: that power without empathy desecrates all faiths. He drew the audience’s attention to Gaza and Ukraine, speaking of civilians dying under bombardment. Quoting Martin Luther King Jr., he reminded the audience that history judges not by “the cries

of our enemies but by the silence of our friends.” His voice, alternately rising and breaking, turned the hall into a listening chamber. “We may not agree on everything,” he said, “but we can agree that bombs will never bring peace.” He ended by calling for “a global fellowship of conscience,” where Jews, Christians, and Muslims defend each other’s right to worship without fear. His last words, echoing Dr. King, were both prayer and challenge: “Free at last, free at last—thank God Almighty, we are free at last.



The night closed with a performance by the Yuval Ensemble, Sufi songs by Khwaja Ehrari and Samaa Dance by Elhma Delaveri, whose music fused Persian mysticism with Jewish liturgical chant. Their melodies-layered with traditional instruments and Hebrew-Persian verses-carried the room into a contemplative silence.



Annex 1: Agenda

Monday, September 29, 2025

09:00-9:30 **Guests' Arrival & Registration**

09:30-10:00 **Opening Session**

Welcoming Remarks by **Professor ORI Z. SOLTES**, Teaching Professor at the Center for Jewish Civilization of Georgetown University.

Introductory Remarks by **Dr Davood Moradian**, Director of Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS).

Special Opening remarks by **Mr. Jack S. D .Abraham**, Past President of Congregation Anshei Shalom, Chairman of Afghan Jewish Heritage Committee, Member of Mashadi Heritage Committee & Member of Bukharian Jewish Congress.

10:00-11:30 **Panel I: Ancient Wisdom & Mutuality: Jewish-Persian Relations in Antiquity**

Moderator: **Dr. Omar Sharifi**, Assistant Professor of Social Sciences and Humanities, American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) / Country Director, American Institute of Afghanistan Studies.

Panelists:

- **Dr. Parvaneh Pourshariati**, Associate Professor of History, NYC College of Technology.
- **Dr. Gad Barnea**, Lecturer, Department of Jewish History & Biblical Studies, University of Haifa, Israel & Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland.
- **Dr. Michael Rubin**, Senior Fellow, the American Enterprise Institute.

Open Discussion

11:30-11:45 **Tea Break**

11:45-13:00 **Panel II: The Triangle: Islam, Judaism & the Persianate World**

Moderator: **Dr. Omar Sadr**, Founder & Editor in-chief, Negotiating Ideas Society &. Research Fellow at AISS.

Panelists:

- **Professor Imanuel Rybakov**, Professor of Jewish Studies, Queens College of New York.
- **Dr. Mustafa Akyol**, Senior Fellow, the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty & Prosperity.

- **Mr. Alan Niku**, Filmmaker, Writer & Scholar of Mizrahi Culture.
- **Mr. Mansour Aaron Karimzadeh**, Chairman, History & Heritage Committee, United Mashadi Jewish Community.

Open Discussion

13:00-13:30 **Lunch**

13:30-15:15 **Panel III: Israel & the I. R. Iran: Unpacking the Implications of the 12 Day War**

Moderator: **Ms. Zainab Al Suwaij**, Co-founder & Executive Director, The American Islamic Congress (AIC).

Panelists:

- **Ambassador Dennis Ross**, the Dermont Family Distinguished Professor of the Practice at Georgetown's Center for Jewish Civilization.
- **Mr. Alex Vatanka**, Senior Fellow, the Middle East Institute.
- **Dr. Arash Azizi**, Author, Historian & Postdoctoral Associate & lecturer, Yale University.
- **Lieutenant Colonel Sarit Zehavi**, Founder & Director, the Alma Research & Education Center. (Recorded)

Open Discussion

15:15-15:30 **Tea Break**

15:30-16:45 **Panel IV: Dawn of Khorasan: Reclaiming & Reimagining the Future**

Moderator: **Mr. Kalid Loul**, Managing Director & co-founder of the Muslim-American Leadership Alliance (MALA)

Panelists:

- **Mr. Jason Guberman**, Executive Director, the American Sephardi Federation.
- **Ambassador Sayed Tayeb Jawad**, Chairman, American University of Afghanistan/AISS.
- **Ms. Roya Hakakian**, Author, Lecturer & Journalist.

Open Discussion

Rumi Night

- 18:00-18:30 **Guests' Arrival & Registration**
- 18:30-18:35 Welcoming Remarks by Director of Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), **Dr Davood Moradian**.
- 18:35-19:00 Launch of Persian translation of the book, "**From Kabul to Queens: The Jews of Afghanistan and Their Move to the United States**", by **Sara Y. Aharon**. / Moderator: **Dr. Sahraa Karimi**, Film Director & University Lecturer.
- 19:00-19:20 “**Convergence: At the Intersection of Hebrew & Persian Calligraphy**” by **Mr. Ruben Shimonov**, National Director of Sephardi House & Education, American Sephardi Federation.
- 19:20-19:40 Special Lecture, “The Story of the Afghan Liturgical Quire”, by **Mr. Herschel Hepler**, Associate Curator of Hebrew Manuscripts, Museum of the Bible, Washington, D.C.
- 19:40-20:10 **Special Conversation** with **Pastor Dr. Mark Burns**, Multicultural Policy & Political Action Conference Chairman, MPAC. / Moderator: **Ms. Nazila Jamshidi**, Gender and Social Justice Professional.
- 20:10-21:00 Music Performance by **Yuval Ensemble**.
- 21:00-21:30 **Dinner**

Annex 2: Photos























[More Photos](#)

THE END

