Meanings of Persian-Jewish Surnames
by Ephraim Dardashti

When people select a surname for the first time or change their surname, they often provide a window into their aspirations, professions, preferences and realities of their lives. We may glean such information from a list of surnames used by the Jews of Iran. Fixed, inherited family names are a relatively recent phenomenon in Iran, having been mandated for the country as a whole only in the early 1920s.

The names listed below provide hints of professions practiced or aspired to by the Jews. They are Hebrew surnames with no Persian, Turkish or Russian suffixes, thus indicating a strong Jewish/Hebrew self-image; and a list of surnames that indicate the different regions people identified as the source of their family roots. The names were taken from four sources:

• Names of individuals who were born in Iran that are Jewish and are personally known to the author
• Names found in Farsi Jewish magazines published in the United States: Shofar and Payam.
• Names of Jewish donors to Persian synagogues in Los Angeles
• Names from tombstones in Jewish cemeteries in Iran and the United States

These lists are not exhaustive. Readers with knowledge of additional names should contact the author at ephidar-dashti@gmail.com.

Professions
Almasi – Diamond seller
Ashpaz – Cook
Atarian – Son of grocers
Atighechi – Antique dealer
Ayinesazan – Glass maker
Bana – Builder
Bandandaz – Plucker of hair
Chadorchi – Tent seller
Dalazadeh – Son of deal makers
Falgir – Fortune teller
Farshforoosh – Carpet seller
Ghalichi – Carpet seller
Ghassab – Butcher
Ghassabian – Son of butchers
Hakhamzadeh – Son of rabbi
Hakim – Physician
Hakimfar, Hakimi, Hakimian, Hakimianpour – All allude to being related in some way to the field of medicine
Halimi – Halim maker (halim is a porridge)
Hanassab – Scrubber of henna
Javaheri, Jahaverian – Jeweler
Jourabchi – Sock seller
Kadkhoda, Kadkhodazadeh – Ruler of a village
Kafash, Kafashian—Shoemaker

Khakshouri, Khakshouyi – purchaser of dirt from jewelry stores who rinses the dirt to retrieve fragments of precious metal
Kamounchekesh – Player of the kamanche (a stringed instrument)
Lahafdooz – Sewer of bedspreads
Massachi – Seller of matzah
Moalem – Teacher
Najad – Carpenter
Neyzan – Player of the flute
Ostad – Teacher, master of a craft
Panirian – Son of cheese sellers
Pezeshk, Pezeshki, Pezeshkifar – Related to medicine
Pinedooz – Cobbler
Ravanshenas – Psychologist
Saraf – Moneychanger
Shaer – Poet
Shofet – Judge
Simozar – Hinting at being jewelers
Shokhet – Ritual slaughterer
Sormeforoush – Seller of kohl
Tabibi – Physician
Talasazan - Goldsmith
Tootoomi – Tobacco
Zahabian – Goldsmith
Zargari, Zargarian – Jewelers

Unadulterated Hebrew Names
Abir – אביר Knight
Afar – 엑פר Dust
Ahdoth – אהדוות Unity, comradely
Ahoubim – אהובים Lovers
Aryeh – אריה Lion
Azhkenazi – אשכנזי Ashkenazi
Baalhaness – בעל הנפש Miracle worker
Bakhour – ברוך Young man
Barouk – ברוך Blessed
Beneliyahu – בן אליהו Son of Eliyahou
Benhuri – בן חור Son of Huri
Benporat – בן פרת Son of Porat
Bensadigh – בן צדיק Son of a tsadik
Bension – בן ציון Son of Zion
Beroukha – ברוקה Blessed
Beroukhim – ברוקים Blessed (plural)
Davidi – דודי of David
Dayanimm – דיאניים Rabbinical judges
Eldad – אלד Blessed
Eli – אל God is with us
Emanouel – עמנואל God is with us
Emouna – אמונה Faith
Gabbay – גבאי W
Gabriel – גבריאל
Gad – גד
Geula – גולדה Redemption
Ghassab – בשר
Ghadishah – גדיש
Ghadosh – גדוש Holy
Goyqadosh – A holy nation (Name chosen by Cohens)

Hai – חי Living
Haim – חיים Life
Haleluya – הללות
Halousim – לוזים Pioneers
Hassid – חסיד Righteous
Hassidim – חסידים Righteous ones
Haverim – חברים Friends, comrades
Hebron – חברון
Hebroni – חברוני from Hebron
Herout – חרות Freedom
Kabououd – מבוגר Respect, honor
Kasher – כשר Kosher
Kohanim – כוהנים Priests
Kohengadosh – Holy priest
Kohansedgh – צדק Just priest
Kohanim – חסידים Priests
Kohansedgh – חסידים Holy priest

Lavi – לביא Lion
Levi – לוי Levite
Leviim – לויים Levites
Limoudim – למידים Studies
Maccabee – מכאבי
 Mashiah – משיח Messiah
Mataniyahu – מתניאו
Meborakh – المملיך Blessed
Melamed – מלמד Teacher
Moreh – מורה Teacher
Moshe – משה

Najar – נזר Carpenter
Naaim – נאון Pleasant
Naqi – נכי Pure
Nasi – נשא Head of
Natanieli – נתניאלי
Navi – נביא Prophet
Nehama – נחמה Consolation
Nehorai – נטוראי
Neman – נאמן Faithful
Netzer – ציר Descendent
Oheb – אוב Lover of
Ohebsalom – אוב שלום Lover of peace
Ohebsion – אוב סון Lover of Zion

Pedouim – פדוים
Penhasi – פנשי
Pertieli – פטלי
Pessach – פסח Passover
Pourat – פרת Prolific
Rason – רזון Grace
Roubeni – רובני
Sapir – ספיר Sapphire

Saraf – סראפ Moneychanger
Sasooun – ססן Joy
Sefaradi – ספורדי
Shabtai – שבטי
Shalem – שלם Complete
Shalom – שלום Peace
Shaoul – שאול shoot Good name
Shimoni – שומני
Shofet – שופט Judge
Shokhet – חוטה Ritual slaughterer
Shmouel – שמואל
Shomroni – שומני from Samaria
Shoshani – שושן from Shoushan
Siman – סמין Omen
Simantob – סמće טוב good omen
Sion – שון Zionist
Soofer – סופר Scribe
Soomekh – סמך Trust
Talmud – תלמוד
Tefillen – תפילה Hope
Tighva – תigham Hope
Tishbi – תישבי
Toub – גוב Good
Yahid – יחיד Unique
Yedisdion – יחידי צוイ Friend of Zion
Yeranen – ירני He will sing
Yeroushalmi – ירושלמי Jerusalemite
Yodim – יודים In the know
Yomtoub – יום טוב Good day
Yehasqel – ישבץ
Zahir – זאיר Careful
Zeroubaveli – זרובבל

Geographical Names
Aghalorian, Aghalorpour, Aghalorpouri – From the village of Aghalor in the Mazanderan region
Ardebilichi – From the region of Ardebil in the Azerbaijan region of northwest Iran
Arghavani – From the village of Arghavan in the Kerman region
Baghdadi – From Baghdad, Iraq
Damavandi – From the ancient city of Damavand, east of Tehran
Dardashi, Dardashian – From the Dardasht section of Isphahan
Delijani – City south of Qom
Esfahani – City in central Iran reputedly built by Jews after the destruction of the first temple. Originally named Yahudiyyeh, the place of the Jews.
Esraili – From Israel
Falesteeni – From Palestine
Gharebghi – Village in Western Azerbaijan
Gilani – Northern luscious section of Iran
Giliyardi – Jewish village within Damavand, a village that was historically Jewish
Golpayegani – Area of Jewish settlement northeast of Isphahan
Gorji – Village southeast of Babolsar in the region of Mazanderan
Goudarzi – Village south of Babolsar in the region of Mazanderan
Hamedani – City located in the foothills of the Alvand mountains in Midwest Iran, the traditional burial ground of Esther and Mordechai
Hebron – From Hebron in Israel
Kashani, Kashanian, Kashi, Kashinejad – City in the province of Isphahan. The Jewish population has a tradition that they are descendants of the expulsion from Spain in 1492.
Kermian, Kermanian, Kermanshachi, Kermanshah – City in southeastern Iran
Kordestani – From Kurdistan in Western Iran
Lahijani – From the village of Lahijan in the Caspian region of Iran
Sabzevari – From the village of Sazevar located in northeastern Iran
Sanandaji – From Sanandaj, the capital city of Iranian Kurdistan
Sanani – From the village of Senan in southern Iran
Shirazi, Shirazipour – From the city of Shiraz in southern Iran
Shomroni – From Samaria in Israel
Shoushani – From the city of Shoushan, the site of the Queen Esther Purim story
Tehrani – From the capital of Iran, Teheran
Torbati – From a village in the Khorasan region of Iran, in northeast Iran
Touserkan – From the city of Touserkan in the Hamedan province
Yazdi – From the city of Yazd, located southeast of Isphahan

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Ephraim Dardashti was born in Iran to a Jewish family that embodied Jewish strands from the communities of Isphahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Teheran and Tsarist Russia. Dardashti studied Middle-Eastern history in college with an emphasis on Persian, Arabic and Hebrew. As a historian, he has published pieces on the use of Arabic in the war against terror and on better understanding the actions of the Islamic Republic within the Persian cultural context. Dardashti lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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