

THE JEWISH JOURNAL

February 24, 2009

Iranian Jewish historical lecture event draws crowds at Nessah

BY KARMEL MELAMED

http://www.jewishjournal.com/iranianamericanjews/item/iranian_jewish_historical_lecture_event_draws_crowds_at_nessah/



(left to right; Dr. Daniel Tsadik, Dr. Nahid Pirnazar, and George Haroonian, photo by Karmel Melamed)

Nearly 150 local young and older Iranian Jews as well as a handful of other Jews packed the Nessah Synagogue's main sanctuary hall in Beverly Hills on February 5, 2009 for a unique lecture event on the largely unstudied 2,700 year history of Iran's Jews. The gathering was the first of its kind in English language and organized by the L.A.-based **Iranian Jewish Cultural Organization of California** to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of Professor **Amnon Netzer**. "Tonight, we are doing what Professor Netzer loved the most— sharing the long and rich history of Iranian Jews

with the community and with the young generation living here in Los Angeles who may not be aware of their heritage," said George Haroonian, one of the event's organizers. Netzer who died last year of cancer, was a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem as well as one of the world's foremost experts on Iranian Jews, Judeo-Persian language and literature and Iranian studies.

The event featured lectures about the secrets behind Jewish survival in Iran for more than two millennium and was given by two of Netzer's long time protégés, UCLA professor of Iranian Jewish studies **Dr. Nahid Pirnazar** and **Dr. Daniel Tsadik**, assistant professor of Sephardic studies at Yeshiva University in New York. The gathering was also unique as it was one of the few in recent years where local Iranian Jews have openly discussed the forced conversions, public humiliations, persecutions and murders their ancestors experienced for 27 centuries at the hands of Iran's clerics, kings and other Muslim authorities. "I was very pleased with the turn-out of this event, it's always great to see members of the community taking an interest in their history and origins," said Tsadik. Young Iranian Jews in their teens and 20's said the event was eye-opening because they were unfamiliar with the hardships their ancestors had face for hundreds of years in Iran. Haroonian said his group plans to organized additional similar Iranian Jewish historical lecture series in the coming months. The evening's event was also sponsored by Nessah's Young Professional group and the L.A.-based 30 Years After organization.

My podcast last year regarding Netzer's passing can be found [here](#)

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