

## Proposing a New Perspective of Disability:

### Approaching the Persian Jewish Community from a Jewish Lens

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Persian Jews fled Iran in 1979 during the Iranian Revolution due to religious oppression. Many Persian Jews now reside in Los Angeles and identify first and foremost with their religion, Judaism, and then with their nationality, Iranian. Yet, many Persian Jews continue to embody ideas held in Iran back then, including a not-so-positive view of people with disabilities. Considering Persian Jews attribute a lot of respect to the Jewish religion, it is tangible to use the accepting view of disabilities offered by Judaism as a source for introducing a new model, of acceptance of differences, to the Persian Jewish community. The Jewish view on disability puts responsibility on the society to integrate members of the community with special needs and the disability studies perspective of the social model of disability also addresses the role of members of society in the treatment of individuals with disabilities.

The specific aims of this capstone project are: (1) Examine the Persian Jewish historical view on disability, particularly during the time that Persian Jews lived in Iran; (2) Present how this view continues to translate into practice; (3) Explore the importance of Judaism in the Persian Jewish identity; (4) Describe the Jewish religious and cultural perspectives towards disability from the understanding of the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox denominations; and (5) Develop an academic curriculum for Jewish day schools that explores the social model of disability with anecdotal and biblical Jewish perspectives of disability leading to experiential and direct learning within the disability community.

Considering the large number of Persian Jews in Los Angeles who attend Jewish day schools, the goal is that the future generations of Persian Jewish students will learn to accept a different perspective of disability, and ultimately practice acceptance and inclusion, which is different than their community's historical customs. With positive reappraisal of people with different abilities, and an understanding of the potential for their contributions to the community, the curriculum will instigate a transformative mindset in which Persian Jews will begin to align with the rest of the Jewish community in an effort to create an inclusive environment for people with a variety of abilities.