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**COMING OF AGE IN THE SHADOW OF A REVOLUTION**

**Roya Hakakian To Speak at the American Sephardi Federation with  
Sephardic House**

**New York, March 1, 2004.....**The transition to adulthood is always dramatic, but when one's coming of age occurs simultaneously with the violent transformation of an ancient land, it is even more so. In her humorous yet heartbreaking memoir **JOURNEY FROM THE LAND OF NO**, Roya Hakakian tells not only her own compelling story, but that of her nation. **Ms. Hakakian will discuss her book and her experiences growing up Jewish in Iran at the Center for Jewish History on October 14, 2004 at 7:00 PM.**

Haghnazar Hakakian, an esteemed poet, was overjoyed when his wife, after giving birth to three sons, finally bore him a daughter. To mark the moment he named the baby Roya, Persian for "dream." The name was fitting: Roya grew up believing she was different, special in some way; even the address of the family's home—Number Three, Alley of the Distinguished—foretold greatness. A prominent Jewish family living in Tehran, the Hakakians enjoyed the respect of their community and led an intellectual life rich with wit, spirit, and ebullient holiday gatherings. Under the Shah's rule, they led an idyllic life until the family's oldest son, Albert, held his first art exhibit, prompting a warning from

the Secret Service. Concerned for his safety, the family sent him to the United States. Only nine years old, Roya began to realize that life, despite its seeming perfection, had mysteries.

Roya was twelve when, sworn to secrecy, she was told that a holy man named Ayatollah Khomeini was an angel sent to liberate Iran from injustice. When word went out that Ayatollah Khomeini had ordered everyone to go up to their rooftops at 9 pm on a designated night to shout “Allah-o-Akbar” in protest, Roya and her family turned out to watch. With hundreds of voices chanting in unison in the dark, Roya knew that a symbolic fire had been lit. Brimming with the thrill of the unknown, she fell in love with the promise of the revolution, beginning what she describes as “the most alluring love affair of my life.” Her only misgiving was that she felt unable to join in and say the Arabic words herself. “Being with the family and among Jews was effortless, like being in my pajamas. Being among Muslims, friends or neighbors, was like being in my party dress...the fabric itched. The zipper pinched,” she writes.

**JOURNEY FROM THE LAND OF NO** focuses on the period from 1977 to 1984, the seven crucial years that transformed this girl into a woman and a modern, prosperous country into a fundamentalist pariah nation. The events of those years have been reported many times by pundits, politicians, and academics, but what has been missing is the authentic reportage of one who lived it.

While **JOURNEY FROM THE LAND OF NO** tells the story of events that happened a long time ago, it is indispensable for understanding what is going on in the Middle East today. In a region where the dream of Islamic rule is fast growing, Iran is the only country that has lived the dream, so it is essential that we study how it happened and where it ended up. Through the enthusiasm of a teenage girl, we experience the joy of the revolution and the horrors of its subsequent betrayal. In the process, a nation that once seemed obscure and even hostile becomes familiar.

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**Roya Hakakian** fled Iran in 1984 with her mother. After a year wandering through Europe as refugees, they were granted political asylum and came to New York in 1985. Since

arriving in the United States, Roya has worked as a journalist in TV, most recently at CBS's *60 Minutes*; a documentary filmmaker (her film *Armed & Innocent* was screened in a special session at the United Nations), and a writer. She is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and contributes regularly to Connecticut Public Radio. She lives in Connecticut.