During the 1950s, 123,000 Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel where they lived under very harsh conditions. These Iraqi Jews spoke Arabic in the transit camps where they were settled, and Iraqi intellectuals wrote in that language. Their shared Iraqi background united them as they organized support groups to help one another.

They also shared a history with their fellow Israeli citizens. As their opportunities for employment increased, they sought more contracts with the state. Their knowledge of Arabic was used in service of the state, helping it protect its regional and geo-strategic interests. Iraqi Jews, nonetheless, were far from satisfied with their place in Israeli society. They fought discrimination and wrote about their marginalization in a state that aimed to be secular, socialist, and Jewish. They demanded their rights as Jewish citizens in a Jewish state, rights that they were denied. This process produced individuals who loved Arab and Iraqi food, loved Iraqi culture and music, and were devoted to their new, ancestral home, Israel.

About Jeffrey Plevan
Jeffrey Plevan (z”l) graduated from the University of Arizona in 2000. The Plevan family endowed this lectureship in Jeffrey’s memory to promote his values and interests on our campus and in our community.