



# Israel and Hungary:

Although some Jews moved to Hungary in Roman times, the first major historical communities, such as Buda (Budapest), Pressburg and Tyrnau, date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and began to play a role in the country's economic life. Subsequent expulsions, decrees and persecutions decimated the old communities, which were renewed by immigration to the Hapsburg Hungary throughout the 1700s; and many Hungarian Jews were active in the failed Revolution of 1848-49. Most discriminatory restrictions were abolished in 1867, by which time Hungary's Jewish population totaled about a half-million. Hungary's Jews subsequently made major contributions to the economic and cultural life of the country, and many entered the liberal professions, including literature and journalism, in large numbers. Over 900,000 Jews lived in Hungary by 1910.

By World War I, about half of Hungary's merchants, lawyers and doctors were Jews, and they also played important roles in agriculture and agribusiness. Many, particularly in the cosmopolitan cities, were highly identified with the national culture. Although many of Hungary's Jews perished in the Holocaust, or left thereafter, there have been particularly close personal, cultural and economic ties between Israel, with its large Hungarian-descended community, and Hungary throughout the 53 years of Israel's existence.

Joined by a deep mutual interest in, and respect for culture, literature, history and science, Hungarian-Israeli contact and cooperation in these fields has long been particularly intense. In 1990, the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities signed a highly active Agreement for Scientific Cooperation with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. For example, 16 Hungarian researchers visited Israel in Academic Year 2000/01, while 12 Israeli researchers visited Hungary. In addition to scientist exchanges and joint activities, the Agreement also allows outstanding graduates of the Central European University to study for one year at an outstanding Israeli university. XX students have taken advantage of this opportunity since 19XX.

Perhaps one of the most successful activities under the Agreement has been a highly popular series of Rosenfeld Conferences on Hungarian Jewry (five to date) and other binationally sponsored meetings. For example, the June 1998 Rosenfeld Conference on "The 1848/49 Hungarian Revolution and the Jews," was held on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that fateful event, in which Hungary's Hungarians, Magyrs, Jews and other minorities had to decide between conflicting monarchial, nationalist and ethnic loyalties. The meeting



# Cooperation that Works

was opened by the Hungarian Ambassador to Israel, the Director of the Hungarian Institute of Historical Sciences, the Head of the Humanities Section of the Israel Academy and other dignitaries, and chaired by Israel Levine of the Hebrew University's Dinur Center.

The May 2001 Rosenfeld Conference was a double one. One part focused on early relations between "Hungary and the Holy Land," while the second, with almost 20 formal presentations, painted a vivid picture of the culture, society and politics of the "Jews in Fin-de-Siecle (End-of-the-19<sup>th</sup>-Century) Hungary." Chaired by B. Z. Kedar, Head of the Hebrew University's School of History, and addressed by dignitaries ranging from the Hungarian Ambassador to a former Chief Rabbi of Hungary, this well-attended scholarly meeting was held in honor of Prof. Nathanel Katzburg.

The Israeli and Hungarian Academies also convened a binational "Interacademy Workshop on Chemosensory Information Processing," held at the Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest in September 2000. Such processes are crucial to our sense of taste, smell and underly many important aspects of human behavior. For example, Hungarian researchers A. Bilko and V. Altbacker have shown how olfactory cues during lactation pass on dietary guidance from mother to baby rabbits, while Israeli researcher Doron Lancet has been using genome- analysis methods and data to study the several hundred human olfactory receptor genes, the so-called "olfactory subgenome.

The enduring affinity of Hungarian emigrants in Israel for their former homeland and its culture is nothing new. Over 116 years ago the surprised, but delighted, Hapsburg Crown Prince Rudolph reported, in his 1884 book *Travels ... in the Holy Land*:

*"On the road there was a great triumphal arch with a Hungarian inscription. The Jewish colony stood beside it with banners, signing the National Hymm ... These patriotic Jews surrounded us. They were genuine Israelites from the north of Hungary ... You might have supposed you were in a Carpathian village."*

Although times and modes of collaboration have changed, both sides still remain cognizant and proud of the mutually beneficial aspects of their common past.

