

PROMISED LANDS

Where is the Promised Land – does it lie beneath
our feet, in a remote place or within our mind?

Jewish culture is based on memory,
traditions and values and can therefore
be carried from place to place
and unfold wherever necessary.

And so it has for at least the past 2,000 years.

Education has always played an important role within the Jewish community

THE PERSONAL PROMISED LAND

The Promised Land of the Books of Moses has established itself as a part of an inner world of legends and longings. Even though “Next year in Jerusalem” forms part of the traditional congratulations exchanged every year at Pesach it does not necessarily reflect a concrete wish to meet in that city, but is an expression of a bond linking Jews geographically as well as historically. It could be said that it has become the norm for Jews to live in *Diaspora*: that is to live within one’s own culture and adapt to foreign countries. In other words, Jews have found a home in homelessness.

The fact that one’s ancestors could just as well have immigrated to another country does make a difference. In this case they came to Denmark and that worked out well. However the fact that the choice was more or less fortuitous still deeply affects many Danish Jews.



The Holy Land has always played an important role in religious life as a special spiritual sphere. To visit the graves of the great rabbis or to study in Palestine was a way to create a connection to the Holy Land.

A culture in exile
Diaspora is the Greek word for “dispersal”, and is commonly used to denote cultures that flourish in another or a number of foreign countries. Other Diaspora-cultures include the Afro-American culture in the United States and the Indian culture in Great Britain.

EDUCATION AND ACCEPTANCE

Many of the restrictive rules and regulations that governed the lives of Danish Jews were somewhat mitigated under the Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century. Danish Theologians such as Nicolai Edinger Balle proclaimed that it was no longer permissible to condemn honest believers whether they were “Turks, Jews or Brahmins”. The Danish state listened to the ideas propounded by the Jewish Reform Movement and proposed its own reforms of the conditions governing the lives of Danish Jews in the late 1790s. The proposal was passed and the Decree of 1814 more or less granted the Danish Jews the same rights as their fellow Danish citizens.

One of the prime movers for reform was M.L. Nathanson who also played an active role in establishing a Jewish school for boys in 1806 and for girls in 1810. The idea was to provide Jewish children with the necessary tools to survive and establish themselves in society beyond their own closed Jewish world. Education has always been extremely important in Jewish society and



Copenhagen City Museum

Joining the Bourgeoisie

In the nineteenth century, numerous Jewish men of the bourgeoisie became members of The Royal Copenhagen Shooting Society and the Danish Brotherhood. They participated in the annual popinjay shooting and as members, had their own shooting targets.

brought respect and status. However, learning had traditionally been equated with a devotion to and understanding of the Books of Moses, the Talmud and the many interpretations of the Holy Scripture. The new decree gave Jews access to secular education. Some years earlier, in 1788, Jews were granted the right to join the craft guilds. However, the Christian masters were rarely willing to hire Jewish apprentices, who could not work on Saturdays and would not share their meals. Consequently, the Jewish community established a premium company that rewarded each Christian master with a certain sum for each Jewish apprentice he hired.

The very Jewish concept that education is of primary importance to the individual is still alive and well. Diligent students are rewarded with prizes and foundation grants. After all, an education can be brought with one if one has to move on. In the nineteenth century, Danish Jewish society could boast of numerous writers, scientists, theatre people, artists, musicians, manufacturers and traders who, motivated by their desire to achieve recognition and respect on par with their fellow citizens and to prove their patriotism the Danish Jewish community, became examples of success.



A. Brandt

Nouveau riche Jewish manufacturers such as Moses Wessely and Joseph Hambro are clearly portrayed in the company of stock-exchange magnates in this satirical drawing from 1816.

In the nineteenth century, many Danish Jews became increasingly interested in life “beyond the walls”

INTEGRATION AND ASSIMILIATION

The increased participation in and identification with Danish society understandably brought many Danish Jews into conflict with the traditional Jewish way of life. The writer Henri Nathansen describes the conflict in his popular play: *Inden for Murene* “Within the walls” from 1912. The play illustrates how traditional Jewish life met modern society with all its demands. The play is still popular and often revived.

Social or economic success often meant that old Danish Jewish families were suddenly faced with a one-way ticket out of their traditional Jewish life. Entertainment followed Danish bourgeois trends and meant a breach with traditional kosher meals – suddenly lobster and seafood were on the menu. Marriage was now a question of free choice, which meant that the number of mixed marriages sky-rocketed. Parents could send their children to public schools, schools that taught little or no Hebrew or Jewish tradition and lore. There did exist a Jewish Sunday School, though, that taught public school children religion and Hebrew.

“Within and beyond the walls” is a reference to Nathansen’s play as well as a sentence that covers the duality problems experienced by people who truly belong to two cultures. Many Jews were intensely affected by nineteenth century bourgeois norms that brought them beyond the walls – summer country residences, trips abroad, entertainment and business.

OTHER PROMISED LANDS

For a majority of Danish Jews, Denmark is where they belong – this is where their ancestors ended up. However, in the early twentieth century there was a lively discussion among most European Jews concerning adherence.

The Zionists pointed at Palestine as the only place where Jews could live a full and free life. The Jewish Socialist Parties agreed that Jews were an individual people with their own language and culture. However, they maintained that this culture existed in the Diaspora. Though the question was never important to Danish Jews, the effect of the Eastern European and International debate should not be underestimated.

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, there have been many and close ties between Israel and Danish Jews. Although a number of Danish Jews are active in the Zionist Movement that supports emigration

A celebratory song in the best Danish tradition – written in honour of Cantor Julius Kaminowitz upon his 40th birthday in 1934.

to Israel, many of the ties are personal. Many Danish Jews have family in Israel or have studied there, or have been on a Kibbutz trip. The desire to emigrate is most manifest among young orthodox Jews, who view Israel as the place where they are most likely to find an orthodox spouse and live a religious life. Major cities such as London and New York with their large Jewish communities, their promise of culture, religious diversity and dynamism also have their attractions – especially for “cultural Jews”. And yet most remain in Denmark with their dreams ...

The arrival of the Eastern European Jews in the beginning of the 20th century added new facets to the Danish Jewish discussion of national loyalty and identity. The immigrants had experienced persecution, and were in general closer to Jewish socialism and Zionism. The Jewish socialist movement never gained a real footing in Denmark, and the members were gradually absorbed into the Danish parties, while Zionist ideas thrived in the 1930s. The establishment of Danish branches of international Zionist organisations was especially supported by the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Some of these Danish organisations still exist.

Patriotism

Both Georg Brandes and Henri Nathansson participated in the debate of the times on Jewish belonging. In January 1918, Georg Brandes wrote to Nathansson: “Are you too, to be numbered among the Jewish patriots? As your friend, the idea fills me with unease.” Georg Brandes soon had a change of mind.



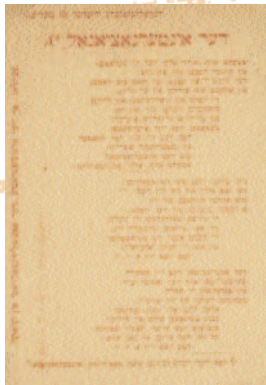
George Cohen, LLD, Minister without portfolio, upon his return from Sweden in 1945.

SOCIALISM AND ZIONISM: TWO DIFFERENT JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

By Morten Ting

Jewish Socialism has its roots in Russia while the Zionist movement developed in Western Europe. They both offered European Jewry a future but were vastly different in their outlook.

- The Jewish Social Democrats, *algemeyner judisher arbeterforbund fun poyln, lite un rusland* or *Bund*, envisaged a Jewish future hand in hand with other nations in a multicultural society based on the Soviet model. Theodor Herzl had visions of a Jewish state based on the French or German model.
- The Bundists wanted to create a Socialist society free of class differentiation. Herzl argued for Jewish Capitalism.
- The Bundists represented the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews, while the Zionists spoke on behalf of all the world's Jews.



The Internationale – in Yiddish.

Jewish socialism

Bund was established in 1897 and was one of the largest socialist parties in Eastern Europe. Bund had immense influence on the Jewish working classes, culturally as well as politically. According to Bund, Jews were an individual nation with their own culture and language.

BACKGROUND

A majority of the Russian Jews, who immigrated to Denmark at the beginning of the nineteenth century, belonged to the working classes, and most of these were Bundists. Many of the workers were tailors by profession and absolutely unused to the Danish trade union culture. The Tailors' Union was at first very sceptical of the Jewish tailors, however they later changed their viewpoint and attempted to organise them instead of rejecting them. The Tailors' Union therefore supported the Jewish Tailor Club, which had its origins in the Bund and which acted as an individual branch of the Union.

In Denmark, Zionism was a national question. It was the Danish Doctor Louis Frænkel who started a Danish Zionist movement at the beginning of the 20th century. A minority within the immigrant community supported his movement. With the advent of World War I in 1914, the International Zionist Federation moved a number of its activities to neutral Copenhagen. One of their goals was to strengthen Zionism in Scandinavia, and one of the initiatives was the publishing of a daily newspaper written in Yiddish, *yidische folks-tsaytung* 1914-15. However it was after the Balfour Declaration in 1917 that Zionism really began to establish itself in Denmark. This occurred mainly in the form of Worker Zionism or Socialist Zionism.

Socialist Zionism, just as Bundism, had its roots in Russia. The movement agreed with Herzl on the principle of a Jewish state in Palestine, however their goal was a socialist state. It was they who developed the concept of collective farming, which resulted in the Kibbutz movement. Socialist Zionism had a broad appeal among Jewish workers in particular and became the main political force in the establishment of the State of Israel. Likewise, after 1917, numerous Danish Jewish immigrants became Zionists. Others became Socialists or Social Democrats.

