

Professor Weiss, Visiting Professor of Neoplastic Diseases at the Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York, gives his reflections on his experiences at a religious moshav on the Golan.

## PLANTING CHERRIES AT KESHET

The driver of the small pick-up which had brought us from the bus stop at Rosh Pinah reverses, waves, and makes his way through the pond-sized puddle between the barbed wire rolls at the entrance, on the way north to his kibbutz where the remainder of our group will work and guard. The three of us are left at Keshet. It is still an hour before the noon meal and except for six or seven toddlers in the care of two young women, playing in the tiny gravelled courtyard fronting one of the barracks, we see no one. The people are at their work. We have a few minutes to look about before the secretary of the moshav arrives to give us our orientation.

We are at an abandoned Syrian army camp, the stone and plaster barracks disfigured by heavy shells and lighter gunfire. Some attempt has been directed at making the low rectangular buildings liveable. Here and there are fresh paint, new water pipes and electricity lines, and the beginnings of small plots decorated with stones and some plants at the entrances to the caserns which we learn are now divided into apartments. But palpable evidence of a vital human presence seems sparse under the low racing clouds and the cold rain, which ripples the mire of nearly frozen mud that makes up the matrix of the compound, interrupted only incidentally by the torn structures, heaps of rubble, and dark basaltic outcroppings. The strong wind from the Syrian frontier only three kilometers away forces us deep into our hooded parkas. My first impression of this border settlement is one of void and desolation.

We have only a few moments for this first sensation of emptiness and bleak cold. The appearance of the secretary is strangely incongruous. On this very old plateau — the black dolmen mark-

ing the graves of warriors and priests from the early Stone Age—youth is antithesis and challenge. A little later, I find out that they are all young, the people of Keshet, but when the secretary appears, there is the instinctive flush of pleasure at seeing a child emerging cheerfully from a gloomy void and inviting one to the thought that gloom lies much in the eye of a chilled beholder.

We climb the “beehive” with him, to obtain a wider view of what will be home for a week. It is an enormous pile of nigrous rocks, huge basaltic slabs and boulders, pyramided some twenty feet high, the ascending layers demarkated by strong wire mesh. This is a shelter, above-ground. Inside the pyramidal hive are chambers, protected by many tons of the hard stone, where one sits out bombardments from the other side when these come. It is apparently easier, or more economical, to erect such shelters on the Heights than to dig deep beneath the ground. From the top we see that the settlement is laid out in several squares; adjacent is a small armored corps garrison. Each quadrangle has its dusky pyramid, its own gal-ed, a cairn of memory. The surface of the Golan, like so much of what makes up modern Israel, is only feet or inches above the remnants of earlier Jewish settlements, synagogues of fifteen, twenty, or more centuries ago, cemeteries, market places. The galei-ed of Keshet seem to rise up as witnesses of ancient roots and new-old covenants through the litter and soil of the long centuries of exile. They are foreboding and lifeless at first, like the keeps of fierce abandoned castles that now must once more be fought over, but later I note the sudden tags of color of children’s clothing hanging to dry near the cave-like entrances, and the loud chatter of the very small children makes the tower-caves come alive and strangely gay. I am reminded of the clumps of early cyclamen already assertive in fissures of the jagged weathered stones in the fields.

The secretary gives us our briefing. He is both part of the hard landscape to which he now points, delimiting the area before us with rapid gestures, and also a new element from outside and in control. He is in his early to middle twenties, with the easy, taciturn self-reliance of the native Israeli of the villages and kibbutzim. The intelligence and good nature are at the surface but are carefully hedged with the sparse indifference of talk

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which reveals little beyond the facts of a matter, and which shields the speaker from any suspicion of making too much of a thing.

We are at the soft underbelly of the Golan. This is where the Syrians flooded in on Yom Kippur of 1973, between the conical extinct volcanic peaks. This is where the Keshet group felt a settlement had to be created after the war, to make the ground less expendable and less vulnerable next time. Beyond the nearest volcanic heap, the tel, is Syria; to the south and north are other settlements, twenty or more kilometers away. Behind us, below the horizon, the escarpment drops steeply to the Kinnereth. Within each of the quadrangles of barracks now become family dwellings, there are other barracks, serving as prayer-study house — the Bet Midrash — kitchen and dining room, office, infirmary, a cement arc housing an ambulance, a mikveh. Around it all a perimeter of barbed wire and guard emplacements, a burnt-out half-track near the wire, and a larger building which houses the carpentry shop, one of Keshet's industries.

We are given a short history of Keshet, and at moments the sense of pride and determination escapes between the inelegant, truncated sentences. They came to Kuneitra about two years ago, a mixed group of religious and secular young people, to protest the return to the Syrians of land so dearly bought, on terms so far short of peace that retreat seemed a capricious sacrifice of security. They refused to leave Kuneitra. Not evicted by force, they found themselves unexpectedly settlers rather than protestors. When the town was eventually relinquished, the group split, the larger and non-observant forming Merom Hagolan, a kibbutz on the northern Golan, while the nucleus of the religious activists came to make Keshet.

The conciseness of his description, his grasp of the scope of events, his idiom betray a recent city past and the classroom of the university. Indeed, we learn that most of the fifteen young families and the thirty or so single young men and women who today make up the moshav come from cities, from universities and *yeshivot*. Here, they have started with orchards, vegetable gardens, an apiary, cattle, a sowing shop, a carpentry equipped with all the heavy machinery needed for efficient production

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of furniture, and I marvel at the adaptability of this group which so quickly learned to strip off urbanization and succeed against the hostilities of climate, enemy, emptiness, and inexperience for this work. This place is not their final destination, he tells us. In two years they are to move to a tel surrounded by richer land and build from the beginning — and one is glad, because it seems inconceivable that this present place can ever be rid of its litter of war and its desolation.

It is still half an hour before the noon meal. The doctoral student and I who will share a room are taken to the family next door, the girl Master's candidate who came with us to her neighbors for the week. We are offered tea, and it takes a few minutes to establish just what our intentions are. Are we here as visitors or did we come to be part of the group, as workers and guards? We explain the circumstances of our arrival.

Two months earlier, there was disaster at another settlement on the Golan border. Infiltrators made their way in, entered a room where three students at the settlement's yeshivah were resting, gunned and axed them down, and escaped. The following day a graduate student in my University department, a boy from a far-left kibbutz in the Hule Valley, decided that people like ourselves, pursuing our tasks and studies undisturbed in the safety of cities in the rear, must act to express tangibly our concern and our being at one with the border settlements under fire. The student knew people at Merom Hagolan, and learned that we could be used for something more than purely symbolic action. The tragedy at Ramat Hamagshimim had shown that each settlement had to see to its own uninterrupted security, that our Army and the UN forces were not enough of a shield. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the smaller settlements to work and guard and also maintain a semblance of communal existence without volunteer help. A plan crystallized. Early in January, between semesters, when few of us had direct teaching responsibilities at the University, fourteen from our department, teachers, students, technicians, went as a group to two Golan settlements, eleven to Merom Hagolan, and the three of us to Keshet.

We left Jerusalem at six on a Sunday morning, by bus to Rosh

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Pinnah, and there were picked up by a member of Merom Hagan, who dropped off the three Keshet volunteers on the way to his kibbutz. We made it clear that we didn't come to visit or to analyze, but to try to be part of Keshet for a week. Now, the relationship is clear and the formalities are over. We are entered on the work and guard rosters, and are taken to lunch.

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Even in those first hours, the differences of Keshet strikes me, the dignity. Yes, they are all young (I don't believe any one is over thirty) and the spontaneity and gaiety are not denied by the automatic weapons which the men carry wherever they go. But there is also an unusual self-respect and gravity; these people are serious with themselves and are looking inward as well as out. The mitzvot surrounding the meal are not perfunctory ritual. The washing of hands, breaking of bread, blessing, the invitation afterwards to grace from one another around the tables — all that is intended to make of a meal a service and of the partakers a community at one with the presence of God — they are carried out here with the sense of great significance with which they are meant to be endowed.

Keshet is organized as a *moshav shitufi*, a settlement of partners, but it cannot yet afford many of the luxuries of private households, so the dining room and meals are communal. We each receive only one plastic bowl and one or two utensils which serve for all courses, but the food is surprisingly well prepared and ample. The platters are brought from the kitchen by those on duty, rapidly; although this is the main repast of the day, there are still hours of work ahead. When each small group has finished and said grace, we check the bulletin board for our work assignment. Next to the list of names and tasks is pinned a 50 pound note which someone lost and is there to be claimed.

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With eight others I am at work in the "orchards" on this first afternoon. A small truck takes us seven or eight kilometers away,

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always parallel to the border, to the tel where the permanent moshav will one day go up, and where the soil, except for seemingly endless numbers of rocks and small boulders, is very black and pungent and yields sensuously to the Arab hoe, the turiyah, and the heavy digging forks which are our tools.

It isn't much of an orchard, only a bare slope of some twenty dunams, with small wooden markers in long rows indicating where holes must be dug. Hundreds of holes 60 centimeters deep and 40 centimeters in diameter were ready for planting cherry saplings. One day this will be a cherry orchard but now it is only ground to be worked. A machine attached to the one tractor owned by the settlement began the job but was soon needed elsewhere. The season is late for planting and the saplings already lie waiting in wet-swathed auburn bundles on the edges of the field; so the digging must be done by hand.

It is physically hard work. I am middle-aged and my life is largely sedentary. As I try to compete with the youngsters and strive not to be left too far behind in my row, I am grateful that I have kept for many years to the habit of a daily run of several miles. My muscles ache, and I am clumsy, but the breath is still there.

It is still very raw, but as we labor we become heated and remove outer garments. We work at a fast pace with little talk against the deadline of the advancing afternoon. The *tsitsiot* of the men's *Arbah Kanfot* fly in the wind. When the sun appears for a few moments here and there, the air is sweet with the advent of spring and the coming of *Tu B'shvat*. As a few craters are dug, the automatic rifles are moved to the next stretch, and one of us is always in radio contact with the base. I have not yet been issued my weapon, so I carry the Colt revolver which I own and brought with me. It was acquired years earlier, when I taught at Berkeley, and was much involved with the free speech and civil rights movements. One day there was an altercation on the steps of Sproul Hall, and a hoodlum suddenly leered at me with an ancient knowing smile, mirror of the grins of the young Nazis when they had cornered a lone Jew in the school courtyard of my town in Austria after the Anschluss. I was not surprised when the calls began that night and continued for

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weeks, at 2 or 3 a.m. "Watch it, mockey!" (I heard "Hep, hep, Hierusalema est perdita.") Then came the Cuban crisis, and California fascist organizations let it be known that with the beginning of war, they would clean house within the State. I remembered my father in 1938, waiting out the nights for the knock on the door that would announce Dachau. His beard turned white between March and May, when we went into hiding. So I bought the Colt, and told myself that when there would be a knock at the door for me, I would not be waiting unprepared. I slept for several months with the gun under my pillow; of course, no one came and eventually the calls ceased. Now I had the revolver strapped to my waist.

When we break for a few minutes, I find myself with an unexpected sense of satisfaction that goes beyond the thrill of physical effort in the open, the reassurance of reliable teammates, the sense of a small adventurous escape from the tilting against institutionalized pettinesses and casuistries of a great university. I am deeply content. Only a few days later do I suddenly realize why: I have completed a labor long wanting completion.

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We are brought back to the moshav at 4, leaving many holes remaining to be dug. A short afternoon service was held with the men and women sitting in parallel sections of the Beth Midrash separated by a curtain. At the conclusion of prayer the curtain is parted, and one of the men leads a *shiur*, a study session. The text this year is the writing of the great 19th century authority, the Chafetz Chaim — the Lover of Life — on *lashon harah* — slander, gossip, evil talk. There are many warnings and regulations designed to help one keep his tongue and mouth undefiled, and we study the Chafetz Chaim's compendium as a scholarly text. It is clear also that the emphasis here is on the learning of behavior. When I leave, at the end of the week, it strikes me: For six full days I've not heard a word, not even a nuance, of contempt or bitterness at any person or at any thing. For that matter, I have not heard much talk of any sort concerning other people.

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Two free hours, then I taste luxury. The apartments in which the families live (the bachelors are still in dormitory barracks and in the shelters) are splendid, and I share one with the other volunteer, its owner on leave for a few days. There is a bed for everyone, and a chair; in the tiny kitchenette there is running water, warm and cold at all times, and a stove with clear flames; there is electricity, and each unit has its own toilet! Together with the hot and plentiful meals, there is nothing lacking for the body. One can wash off the earth and mud, become warm again. And every such apartment I saw had brick-and-board bookcases, and in many the collections of Judaica would have done not badly for the departmental library of a Jewish Studies Faculty at a middle-American university.

Evening service is followed by a period of study of the writings of Rav Kook. His life and work cover and integrate every aspect of Judaism — law, philosophy, ethics, mysticism — and something unique emerges from this synthesis: The record of many encounters with the Jewish people and their God in the days and nights of the spirit, and a great love growing from these meetings with the corpus mysticum of God — Torah — Israel. The son of the Rav, Zvi Yehudah Kook, heads the yeshivah in Jerusalem known as Merkaz Harav: the Rav's Center. All, or nearly all, of Keshet's men have studied there at least for some years. It takes me some days to come to the realization: Merkaz Harav is the work-shop of a new hassidism, settlements like Keshet its field of action.

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One passes quickly through the Book of Hours of Keshet days. The hours illuminate the bleak, low skied winter month, and the rhythm in which one is caught is at once archetypical and comforting. The beat says: "Am kadosh . . . eretz k'dosha . . . holy nation, holy land . . . and you, and you?" It begins when it is still dark. One of the perimeter guards walks through the quadrangles at 5:15 and calls out. Precisely what he calls, I can't make out, but memory is awakened together with the sleeper. In the town in which I grew up, the *shamess* would walk from house to



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house in the Jewish quarter at the same time of morning, knocking on windows and doors, and singing: "A holy people! Rise and get yourself to the work of your Maker!" In the Nachlaoth quarter of Jerusalem, my friend Yaakov who comes from Marrakesh takes the same walk in and out of alleyways, and sings the same song, though in a different accent. When I am on Civic Guard duty there, my partner and I stop to chat with him as he begins his rounds at 4 A.M., and if it is cold, he insists we drink a cup of mint tea with him in the Beth Knesset on Bezalel Street, as the first men and boys come in, wrapped in their *tallitot*, and begin the day with Perek Shira — the Chapter of Song — "The heavens say: The firmament declares the glory of the Lord . . . Earth says: The earth is the Lord's . . . the desert says . . . the fields declare . . ."

The men of Keshet rise to the call. A few go to the mikveh daily, many on Fridays, and then to the Beth Midrash for study of gemara and the commentaries until it is light, around six, and one begins shaharith: "How beautiful are your tents, Yaakov . . ." I wonder if the saintly and somewhat ponderous authors of "The Edge of the Breastplate," and its commentary, the "Shield of Judgment," and the commentaries on that, could have quite imagined their works being studied with so much enthusiasm in the dawn of a winter morning in the face of Syrian artillery on the Golan? But, then, Moses hardly recognized his Torah as it was learned in the schoolhouse of Akivah!

Breakfast, and then work. Lunch in the orchard, brought out steaming in cauldrons by the little truck, when the days for field work are good and there isn't time to ride back to the moshav for the meal. But now we have several days of rain, and there can be no digging of pits for saplings. I am assigned to the carpentry shop, and I learn how to handle wood — to cut with power saws, to glue and nail and press boards together, to polish by machine and by hand, to lacquer and to polish again. As we move from one machine to another, the weapons we carry must be taken along; guardedness can never be dropped. I am proud of the kitchen cabinets, made for the moshav itself and for sale, that emerge from all this, but the overseer is not. I am usually off by at least half a millimeter, and often by much more, at the

seams, and the "lacka" is smeared. He hopes that I am a better mouse doctor than I am a carpenter. He has a reputation for finding flaws, this man, who was once in charge of carpentry at Boys Town, the vocational school yeshivah in Jerusalem, where the twelve hour high school day is made up of a very compatible, though perhaps unusual, curriculum: Just what do the Ba'ale Tosefot hold against Rashi on the question of compensation for a gored cow by the owner of a twice-goring bull, and how can the latest machine from France in the carpentry shop — or printing room, or machine room, or electronics laboratory — be made to perform at its best if properly loved? Most of the people of Keshet seem a bit afraid of this work boss and his fault finding, but then, carpentry is becoming a rather competitive business in Israel, and Keshet competes.

Work, prayer, study, light hours, in a continuous cycle. Between the *Minhah* of late afternoon and *Ma'ariv* of the evening, there are nearly two hours wholly free from routine. I am exhausted, and still covered with lacquer. I sleep. So do some of those who had the long, 12 to 4, night shift of guarding. But there is also time to visit, to make coffee in the tiny kitchenettes, or for a short tour. The sanctity of Keshet has an earthy quality, not palefaced as in some study houses. There is no doubt to the observer that the young couples of Keshet are in love and are young, or that there is special affection in the easy talk between some of the unmarried boys and girls. There is banter, at work and in the dining room, but the banter, too, is dignified and never seems to go beyond the four ells of the law which are all that is left us since the Temple was burnt and the Romans walked into a Massada still with the bodies of its last defenders.

Are the women of Keshet, sitting parted from the men by the *Mehitzah* of curtain during prayers, liberated? Watching them live and work at Keshet, I decide not to pose the question: it seems, if not outrightly silly, somehow out of place. At any rate, I had my answer already some months ago, such as it was, from a young woman with whom I was assigned to a four hour Civil Guard tour in Jerusalem and who is now raising her family on another outpost settlement of the Bnei Akivah. I had asked whether she didn't feel disadvantaged as a woman living strictly

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within Halakhah? It took her a few minutes to ponder the question, and then she replied somewhat confusedly, as one does to a query valid enough in the abstract but of no real pertinence to one's life. She said that when she was a child, she had indeed been troubled by this problem. When she had once complained that a girl's coming of age passed unnoticed while the boys' Bar Mitzvah was a great event, her mother had pointed out that though boys were made much of at thirteen, the focus was on girls under the wedding canopy. My companion of the guard wasn't sure that this was a wholly satisfactory answer, but then in the ensuing years there was so much for her to do — youth leader responsibilities in the Bnei Akivah, shiurim, training and working in Nahal, leading courses on Judaism in a development town, officer's training in the Army, preparation for life on a kibbutz — that she just hadn't time to pursue the matter. She promised on some occasion in the future to give it new thought.

I found the attempt to talk politics equally irrelevant within the quads of Keshet. These people are ardent adherents of Gush Emmunim, and I don't much care for the advertisements the Gush takes out in the press ever so often, nor am I at ease with politicized Messianism. More than anything else, I can't quite grasp how the Gush proposes to solve a Greater Israel's demographic dilemmas within the limits of their adherence to Halakhah and Jewish ethics. But at Keshet itself, the subject did not come up, I was never witness to an abstract political argument. The geopolitics of Keshet are too immediate for that: We are here; the lives lost on this strip of ground add to those lost in earlier times on the same land; how do we set the cherry saplings into the ground in time?

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One afternoon, we three volunteers are given a treat. When the last layers of lacquer have defaced the last panel of plywood to be done that day, we are taken along on a trip to help lay out a new forestation project which Keshet has undertaken at Gamlah. It is difficult to describe Gamlah without falling into a trap of kitsch. The escarpment of the Golan rises steeply there

from the narrow ribbon of flatland east and north of the Kinnereth below one's feet. A broad wedge cuts into the escarpment for some kilometers, forming a sheer-walled wadi, at the head of which a waterfall drops down during the season of rains. It is the only place left in Israel where an appreciable number of eagles are to be found. One of the young women with us is a naturalist, and her job at Keshet is to develop a Field School which will offer instruction and field trips on the geology, history, and ecology of the area. She tells us that some 40 eagles have been identified. As one stands on the edge of the cliffs, one looks down into the nests, and the great birds are at once above and below, riding the currents of air almost at a standstill, and there seem to be more than 40.

At the rim of the escarpment are the remains of a Byzantine village. We step over the large round stone trough and millstone at which oil was once ground from olives, on our way to a promontory jutting outwards and affording an unimpeded view of the wadi, the nests, the Kinnereth and Hule Valley, and the cone-shaped mount breaking upwards from the thin plain at the wadi's entrance. At its top, ruins of large cut boulders are visible. This was one of the fortifications to hold out against Rome after the fall of Jerusalem, and here, as at Massada, the defenders at the end chose death by their own hand to Roman slavery.

The new tree planting site is on the edge of the promontory, facing the ruins of the stronghold, and enclosing a memorial to the recent fallen of the Golan. Into the stone face of a recess in the cliff are graven the names of settlements of the Heights, and under each the names of the dead. A woman killed by shrapnel running to the shelter at Ramat Hamagshimim; four scouts in a jeep running over a mine on the way to a sprinkler station in the fields; soldiers . . . Avramele, Ilana, Yankel . . . the names by which they were called. It is late afternoon, and someone announces "Minhah!", and before we return we stand individually scattered about the escarpment, and facing in the direction of Jerusalem say, bowing, "Blessed be you, Lord our God and God of our fathers . . .", each one by himself, the men and women slightly apart. Dark then comes very fast, the birds are suddenly gone, and with a tremendous roar a Skyhawk on patrol comes in

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from the west of the Kinnereth, dips to less than a hundred feet above us, and disappears with a wave of the wings towards the Hermon. We return to Keshet.

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That night, I am to give a lecture, and the following evening one at Merom Hagolan. There, in the secular kibbutz, I am to talk on basic Jewish values. At Keshet, they want a seminar on the immunology of host-tumor interactions; a number of the people were biology students at Hebrew University, several taught the subject in high schools, until they found themselves at a point of no return in Kuneitra. It's a good evening, they listen with intent, and as the discussion begins, it is obvious that I have a bright and critical audience. We are sitting in the dining room, and just as the back-and-forth becomes intense, Gilad walks in and says, "Sorry, but there is a state of alert." We disperse, according to protocol. The women with their children to their own apartments, lights out, doors locked; there must not be too many people in any one unit. The radar has apparently picked up coming across the border a body of — what? It could be wild boar, or Fatah with kaltachnikovs and hatchets. The men are strung out along the perimeter, just inside the wire. The perimeter lights are on, as every night, but the fog and drizzle are so thick that visibility is no more than a few feet.

I crouch with a cheerful red-headed lad in the wreckage of the half-track. We are positioned to face each other at an angle, so that as we talk, we do not take our eyes off the stretches of fog behind each other which are ours to observe intensively for what might materialize from outside the line. The instructions I am given are difficult, and their difficulty is not glossed over in the transmitting: If you perceive movement outside the perimeter, call out and attempt to identify what moves — it may be one of our Army's interception patrols; but if there is suspicious movement in the mists within the camp, fire. Yes, but just what is suspicious? And could such movement not be that of reserve soldiers attached to the adjoining base, unexpectedly coming to strengthen our guard? Yes, that is the question, and I am told

that no one but the person directly confronted with the problem can make the choice — to wait and identify and take the risk of being attacked first, or to fire and risk hitting our own. So the two of us in the half-track lie and wait and continue the interrupted discussion on tumor immunology. After a while, a command car appears from the post, and begins making slow rounds inside the wire, casting as much light as possible, and adding with its machine gun to the available fire power.

Like on almost every such occasion of alert — the following night it happened at Merom Hagolan, and I never did get to give my talk there that week — it all passes uneventfully. After three and a half hours, the alarm is called off — was it only pigs, or did the hatchet-men turn back? I go to bed, am awakened an hour later when the state of emergency is declared on again, after all, but after forty minutes it's finally over for the night. At 5:15 I am too deeply asleep to respond to the wake-up call, and when I do get to the Beth Midrash, fifteen minutes late for Shaharith, I see by the books still about the tables that at least some of the men of Keshet had managed to arise in time for the morning period of Talmud.

On "regular" nights, guard duty is more comfortable. We are assigned to the fixed positions. These are pits spacious enough for two men and a little wood-burning stove, where one can be comfortable in-between scouting along the fence. I am free the night after the alarm, but on the regular duty assignment the following late evening, my partner, a combat officer, confesses that he sometimes finds it a bit difficult to keep up with the most ambitious: They rise at midnight on Thursdays and study Talmud until the sun signals the Sh'ma at six; it is the mishmar, the Watch. Guardian of Israel, not only You do not slumber; there are those over whom You keep ward who also maintain their vigil for You!

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On my last day at Keshet, Thursday, the skies clear, and we are back again on the slope with turiah and fork, making place for the last of the cherries. Because it is my last day, and because

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I know that I shall be able to ease off on *Shabbat* in my apartment in the heart of Rehavia, in Jerusalem, I work with extra energy. And again there is this strange sense of satisfaction with the work, and again the sense of once, very long ago, having already done this, and then it comes to me, very sharply: It is 1936, and I stand next to my father on a field in front of our summer cottage on the dirt road from Sauerbrunn to Wiesen, in Burgenland, the area of the Seven Communities, where Jews had been settled uninterruptedly for several hundred years in small islands among a fiercely anti-Semitic Catholic peasantry. Somehow, the Jews of the Seven Communities had developed a style of passionate allegiance to Halakhah all of their own; one is proud to come from the Shevah Kehilloth. My father is Rabbi of Wr. Neustadt and Ueunkirchen, nearby, and he is a big man who loves to wield a garden tool in his large hands. It is a blustery day in early Spring, and he is planting cherry saplings. I am a child helping him, and I am called Walter — to be the only Jew in one's class and to have a biblical name as well is too much of a burden to carry. My Arba Kanfoth have a rubber band sewn inside and are worn around the waist, so that they and the *tsitsiot* attached to the fringes need not be shown openly; that, too, would be too much. On the fence separating our garden from the adjoining farm, three peasant louts are disposed and entertain themselves with an occasional gibe, mild enough for a Jew of the Seven Communities to take quite in his stride.

My father sets the last of the twenty saplings into the ground, and as he rises, I see, shocked, that there are tears in his eyes. He doesn't answer my question directly, but turning half away speaks to himself more than to me: "What is a Jew like me doing planting a tree *al admath nekhar* . . . on alien land?" And then, in Hebrew which I did not yet understand, but whose words I remembered until I could: "*Eik nashir eth shir hashem al admath nekhar* — how to sing the song of the Lord on alien land?"

My father was right. Ten of the trees were pulled out and taken one night the following autumn, and before we could taste the beautiful, tempting fruit of the others, before the years of *orlah* were over, the Nazis had come and we had fled. My father died in exile, on the Lower East Side of New York where he

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had founded and led a metiftah — an advanced talmudic academy. At the graveside in Brooklyn I sprinkled a little cachet of soil from Eretz Israel over his dead eyes. So now I, too, cry, and I say into the wind: "*Abba, tam ve'nishlam* — it is completed."

I don't know whether we shall keep this patch of land under Syrian guns. Political morality can be interpreted in strange ways. But as I plant my last seedling that early evening of the weekly Mishmar, I stand on *my* land, and if it be wrested from me, I shall defend it, and the grinning oafs will have to reckon with me and with the boy Davidi in the next row and with Sarit in the one after, who have no *galut* history and who know only that the soil of Eretz Israel is not to be abandoned wantonly.

\* \* \* \*

I have a cup of coffee in the dark on Friday morning, before I am taken to a crossroads where a bus will bring me to Rosh Pinnah, and on to Tiberias, Beit Shean and home. The 50 pound bill is still tacked to the bulletin board, waiting its claimant, and in the Beth Midrash they are just about to recite the beginning of the Shaharith, the order of worship as it was at the destroyed Temple: ". . . and on the altar was prepared the daily offering and its fat consumed, and on the altar were thus completed all the sacrifices, all of them."

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The word Keshet means "bow." It also is an acronym of three words in Hebrew: *Kevutsah shelo tikonah* — the group that shall not give up."