

# An American in Israel

Earl Callen

**D**uring the war in Vietnam our son-in-law refused to report for induction into the U.S. Army. Now he serves in the Israeli Army. In the next war he will carry an antitank gun outside a tank to protect it from enemy fire. Our son-in-law is brave, but not exceptionally so. He is just doing what Israelis do.

For several years our children had lived at Hamra, a settlement in the occupied territories, east of Nablus overlooking Jordan. At Hamra they lived behind a floodlit, patrolled, barbed wire barricade. Each morning a convoy went out to work the fields behind an army minesweeper, to detonate antipersonnel mines planted during the night. We were therefore much relieved when our children moved to Alonei Abba, a settlement in the most peaceful and fertile part of Israel, the Jezreel Valley. At the upper end of the valley are hills that run on up to the Lebanon border thirty miles to the north. The sixty houses of Alonei Abba cluster on a low hill overlooking the farmlands of the long valley below. The first settlers were German Knights Templars. The Christian pilgrims laid out three or four streets lined with palms, oaks, and poplars. They built handsome tiled houses and, surrounded by parks like a village green, a perfect little country church. The Germans are gone now. The cross on the church bell tower has been replaced by a weather vane. Two of the parks are playgrounds and two house bomb shelters.

The Jewish settlers are mostly Rumanian farmers, but there are also Moroccans, South Africans, Germans, and a few Americans. The farm grows cotton, grapes, grapefruit, and pecans. There are 170 milk cows, fifteen thousand turkeys, and a small factory. Alonei Abba is a *moshav shitufee*; it differs from a kibbutz only in that children live with their parents, and families buy their food and eat their meals separately.

On the first day of our visit we discovered there is no escaping the hundred-year war with the Arabs. Our fourteen-year-old bent to pick up a ball-point pen from

the ground. "Don't touch it!" shrieked one of the *meshek* children. "It could be a booby trap. They leave them everywhere. You must never, never pick up anything."

Alonei Abba is a shtetl. Your affairs are everybody's business. If you belch after breakfast, folks tell you what to eat for lunch. They discuss your gas problem as they milk the cows. Chaya, a young woman born a *buba*, drops in with chicken soup, gossip, and advice. Chaya does not speak—she sings Yiddish heroic couplets, Rumanian aphorisms for all seasons: *Vie tzvay shlufen af aen keeshen/Zoll zech kein dritter mit mishen* (When two sleep on one pillow/A third shouldn't mix in). This she chants as she snoops around.

All the women snoop around Ilan, and so do the men and boys. Ilan is the pride of the *meshek*, the settlement, a pilot in the Air Force. Ilan is a hero. But a young man who fails to make it in the service is humiliated. There is at Alonei Abba such a young man. Let us call him Amiram. He is a shy, gentle boy. He was devoted to his older and only brother. The brother was killed in the 1967 war. Amiram's left arm is paralyzed from infantile paralysis. When Amiram failed the army medical examination, he suffered an emotional crisis. Amiram is a student at the Technion. He often rode to school with me. We spoke little. Amiram speaks rarely, and then quietly. Had it not been for our traveling together, I would not have known of his existence. Alonei Abba is a close-knit community, almost a family. There are community movies, sports, dances, and outings. Ilan and the soldiers come home from the camps for the fun. But Amiram comes to none of these. On a *meshek* everyone helps. In season even the youngest school children pick grapefruit and pecans four hours a week. There are joyful days of jumping up and down in the huge crates of cotton to pack it down, and days of picking olives all together. Our children loved these occasions. But Amiram stays home and studies. He has withdrawn from the life of the *meshek*. When he graduates, he will leave Alonei Abba.

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EARL CALLEN, a professor of physics at American University in Washington, D.C., recently returned from a sabbatical in Israel, where he worked at the Technion and lived on his daughter's *moshav* (collective farm). He has written for the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and *Civil Liberties Review* as well as technical journals.

**E**arly in our visit we were working hard at maintaining friendships in both camps. On a trip to Jerusalem we stayed in a small Arab hotel in East Jerusalem, the Arab part of the city. The hotel help were friendly enough, but we knew we were out of place.

In the evenings we roamed the back streets. There were few persons about. Most stores were closed. My wife, two small daughters, and I felt conspicuous, exposed, endangered. In a shoe store we sought to buy a pair of Israeli army sandals, a common and popular style. The storekeeper's eyes glinted anger: "We do not carry Israeli army sandals. It is not our army. Our army is across the Jordan." The manager of a soda fountain came and sat with us at our table. From us, the oft-repeated reassurances: We had nothing against Arabs. We like Arabs. We are all Semites. He, he assured us, had nothing against Jews: only Zionists. When his people regain Palestine all the original Jews will be allowed to remain. Only the foreigners will be expelled. But, we asked, what about the Jews from the Arab lands—the Iraqis and Moroccans and Yemenites—were they foreigners? Where would they go? And how about persons born in Israel, the children of refugees, were they foreigners? The conversation was pulling tight. We edged toward the door, our children nudging us to be quiet. Our fear and his hate showed through the smiles: "Hitler should have finished the job." We hurried back to our hotel.

Late that night we were awakened by the deep roar of explosives. We peeped through the window shutters. Nothing moved. We waited and whispered. Another boom. The streets remained empty, dark, and silent. What was going on? This was the wrong place for us. We did not belong here among Arabs. Let's get away tomorrow. Next morning we learned about Ramadan. Explosives at dawn ("when a white thread can be distinguished from a black thread") warn the Muslim that he dare not eat until sunset. But still we retreated to the Jewish sector.

Weeks later we again heard the boom of explosives. Was it a bomb? Ramadan? In the afternoon? This time it was terrorists. They had booby-trapped a can with dynamite and left it on a crowded downtown street.

Terrorism has been both a more and a less effective weapon than it seems. In the most superficial, relative sense the number of persons killed by terrorists has not been large, less than eighty in the past two years, certainly far less than the annual Highway Sacrifice (Israelis are reckless and aggressive drivers, and they incur the world's highest accident rate).

But tourism has fallen off. Jerusalem used to be jammed at Christmas; in 1974 the hotels were half empty. Some were closed. The narrow alleys of the old city seemed bare of visitors. Inflation (40 per cent annually; the pound has fallen from over \$4.00 to 10 cents in twenty-eight years), war, and terrorism have turned thousands of would-be visitors to looking for a calmer vacation elsewhere. Last December, with terrorism down somewhat, the Government reported an increase in Christmas tourism.

In an article called "The Strategy of Terrorism" in *Foreign Affairs* last year David Fromkin emphasizes that the main purpose of terrorism, the feature that distinguishes it from guerrilla warfare, is to provoke overreaction. To the extent that Israel has lost its cool—for example, bombing Palestinian camps on the eve of a U.N. vote on Zionism and racism—terrorism has been

successful. To the extent that terrorist bombs have forced the Jews to regard all their Israeli Arab fellow citizens as possible terrorists, it has made almost unattainable the onetime dream of living among the Arabs as fellow workers, friends, and neighbors. And among the Jews themselves terrorism has taken a heavy toll in civil liberties and in the quality of social life. There are guards everywhere, at movie houses, libraries, office buildings, schools. At every door one's bags are searched.

One day last fall our *meshek* went on a picnic to the upper Galilee. We swam in a small rocky waterfall, a lovely desolate place. It was a surrealistic scene. Many of the men wore pistols. Boys with uzi machine guns on their backs called happily to each other in the warm sun. A young man squatted over a heavy machine gun, munching on grapes and sunflower seeds. It was like a picture by George Grosz.

The men of Alonei Abba walk tours of guard duty. Day and night they patrol the three or four streets. One night there was a panic. The mountain silence was punctured by the staccato of machine gun fire close at hand. Doors were bolted, children pushed under beds and into protected inner corners of the little houses. Twenty-twos and .45s and uzis appeared. Some of the settlers scurried out to spread the alarm while others, an impromptu militia, crept through the night shadows to intercept the enemy. The worst had happened. Terrorists had struck Alonei Abba.

No, not the worst; it was not terrorists. It was Yitzchuk, on guard duty. He had dropped his uzi. When it hit the ground it fired off a clip of ammunition. Yitzchuk came stumbling in—his toe shot off—fortunate not to have been killed in the dark by the men of the *meshek*.

The same thing happened at Ma'alot. One night we drove our son-in-law to his guard post at Ma'alot. One does not drive there casually at night. It is near the border, and dangerous. One closes the windows, locks the doors, and drives fast. You stop for no one. Ma'alot is where the twenty-five school children were murdered. Terrorists cross from Lebanon at night. Everyone is tense and edgy.

Suddenly there was gunfire. First a few shots, and then many shots, from a number of guns. Lights went off. Troops spread out into the wadi. Armored cars patrolled the streets. Hours later someone called in to admit that he had started it. From his window he had seen a movement in the wadi and had fired. When the panic spread, he became afraid to report it. What he had shot at turned out to be a cow. But if I were an Arab in Israel, I would be afraid to walk outside at night.

Mustafa is the Arab in charge of guarding the fields of Alonei Abba, the *shomer*. Mustafa is pretty well-off. He owns a jeep, a paneled truck, and two lorries. He has just built a big, expensive house in town. But for six months of the year he, his wife, and ten children live in a compound of tents on a hill near the farm. One summer afternoon Mustafa had me to dinner. We sat on the earth in a tent under the trees. The sides of the tent were rolled up to let in the slight breeze. There sat my son-in-law, me, Mustafa, and a tough, garrulous Israeli Army special agent, a friend of Mustafa's.

We squatted around a board on the ground. Mustafa's oldest son served. We dipped potatoes in sour lemon sauce and *pita* in *tchina*. We ate roast lamb, chick-pea soup, olives, hot peppers, tomatoes, yogurt, and small roasted birds. Then while we rested over nuts, grapes, and brandy, Mustafa's son roasted coffee beans on a flat brass pan held over glowing charcoal. The roasted beans were pounded by Mustafa in a heavy, resonant wooden mortar. There is an art and ceremony to this. Mustafa bounces the heavy pestle and clatters it rhythmically in the tall drum. There is a nice sound to it. We drank the sweet, black Turkish coffee. The afternoon wore on, spaced out by brandy. The wife was brought in from her tent to be complimented on her cooking. Small children were exhibited. Mustafa's son left his charcoal fire and sat beside me. He prefers the tents in the mountains to the fancy new house in town. He wishes to become a guard like his father, or perhaps a policeman or a lawyer. He is a student at the University of Haifa. Each day he treks down through the hills to the road and rides the bus to the university.

There are times when one wakes up at Alonei Abba very early. Perhaps it is the air brakes of one of the huge motor vans on its way to market, or a tractor going to the fields, or most often a squadron of jet bombers roaring low over the houses on the way to bomb terrorist camps in Lebanon. In the dawn mist one sees a few figures in the trees behind the house. It is an Arab woman, Mustafa's wife, with one or two daughters, all swathed in dark, heavy drapes, and a donkey. They have come to pick seed pods from our charuv tree. We go out to greet them, but they seem frightened. They act like strangers; they hardly acknowledge our greetings. They will not come into the house. All day they squat in the fierce sun, slowly filling burlap bags with the dried brown pods. All day one hears not a sound from them. The donkey stands motionless, waiting. The filled bags are piled across the little donkey's back. In the evening they are gone.

More than 10 per cent of the citizenry of Israel are Arabs. Almost weekly last year (much less now) an abandoned boat or a cut security fence and footprints in the sand along the border disclosed the entry of terrorists. Road blocks are posted on the major roads, and on approaches to the cities. Cars, buses, and cabs are subject to search, but in point of fact those who appear to be Jews are waved on, while Arabs are frisked. It is understandable, but how is an Arab, born in Israel, a citizen, charged with no crime, to take this daily invidious invasion of privacy? The process is self-fulfilling. Israel boasts, properly, that those Arabs who remained in 1948 have five times the income of those who fled. But money does not buy loyalty. There is widespread hostility among the Israeli Arabs, especially the young. Over the past years a half-dozen young men from one Arab village near Zichron Ya'akov have left Israel for terrorist training, come back, and been captured or killed in terrorist raids.

The story is told in Haifa that during the 1948 war Arab workers in the oil refineries one day murdered their Jewish co-workers. Jews and Arabs had worked side by side for years; it had been a source of pride. Now in every

factory and field where Arabs are employed there is fear. On Alonei Abba there is a small sheet metal cabinet works. Jews of the *meshek* work in the shop and about twenty Arabs from neighboring villages work beside them, some for years. There are sources enough of friction without suspicion of intent to commit murder. Since the Jews are members of the collective, all have a vote in management, irrespective of the quality of their work or their judgment, while the Arab workers, no matter how capable, are excluded from decision-making. This differs from the usual owner-employee relationship in that all Jews are owners, all Arabs only workers. And workers are not usually fond of owners anywhere. But here a new and troublesome element has entered a difficult relationship. One day a Jewish worker overheard an Arab remark, "Long live Arafat." The Jew said: "If you don't like it here, why don't you leave?" The Arab replied darkly: "I'm thinking about it. I've had offers." That night there was a commune meeting. Questions were raised: "What do we know about the Arabs?" "Have we checked them out?" "Should we ask the army to investigate their backgrounds?" "Maybe we can hire a psychologist to test their loyalty." "Shouldn't we take turns doing guard duty in the factory?"

And so it runs down. One cannot really blame the Israelis. By and large they have tried to restrain themselves, although their success has been incomplete. But Arab-language newspapers in Israel regularly print attacks on the state. And openly hostile Arab leaders hold elected public offices. Such actions are heavily criticized and resented, but are tolerated. It is more than can be said of the treatment of Jews in the Arab states. But people do not measure their welfare by how badly someone else is treated someplace else. Neither Arabs nor Jews are wrong, but relations deteriorate. In time those who "test" disloyal will be fired. Will Jews stand guard over their Arab co-workers? More terrorists and more reason to guard. Fear and suspicion, provoked by terrorism, exacerbate the already difficult relationship.

It was a cold, wet December morning. I hurried out to the farm road to hitchhike to Haifa. The road ends at the next farm; it is used only by the two settlements. One waits a long time for a hop. A neatly dressed Arab girl, perhaps fifteen, huddled in the drizzle. We waited side by side. A schoolgirl from our *meshek* joined us. A half hour passed before a car swung out of our farm and stopped. The Arab girl hung back as the two of us from Alonei Abba got in. Through the window I saw her face, inquiring if she could join us. There was room in the car, but the driver pulled closed the door. "How about her? Can't she have a ride?" "No. There's no room. It would unbalance the car." As we pulled away, I tried to smile an apology through the raindrops on the window. All day I saw her there.

For the diaspora Jew—and there are nine million of us outside Eretz Israel—Israel raises profound problems. We are dedicated both on grounds of principle and self-interest (and the two are not

disconnected) to the belief that discrimination because of race, religion, color, or nationality is immoral. American Jews marched for black civil rights. We abhor racism in Rhodesia and South Africa. We rejoiced in *Brown v. Board of Education*. We know in every fiber of our bodies that "separate but equal" is not equal—everywhere but in Israel, an officially Jewish state. For the undeniable fact is that Israeli Jews are in a more hospitable environment than are their Arab co-citizens. Someday Israel must face grave problems with its rapidly growing, increasingly alienated Arab minority.

On the other hand—and this argument is not to be brushed aside by abstract principles—three million refugees from the ghettos of Poland and Russia, from Iraq, Morocco, and Yemen, from Auschwitz, Dachau, and the persecutions of the whole world owe their lives to Israel.

Israel was brought into being by Zionism. If it were secularized, as the Arab governments demand (in Israel, not in their own states), if it belonged to its Arab citizens to the same extent that it belongs to its Jews, would there be the same fervor to sustain it? Would it not be engulfed by Arabs? Would three million refugees find themselves once again a persecuted minority in a hostile land? There is hardly a country on earth with a Muslim majority that does not, *de jure* or *de facto*, discriminate against non-Muslims. The Israeli Jew and the Lebanese Christian fight with the same desperate realization that, like King Canute, they are holding back the sea. The fastidious regard for equal rights under law, deemed crucial by the minority Jew of the diaspora, appears irrelevant, effete, or suicidal to the hard-pressed Israeli. The contradiction goes to the heart of Zionism. It is a canyon between the diaspora Jew and the Israeli.

In Israel one feels the presence of death. One afternoon a company of paratroopers rested on our *meshek*. They were on maneuvers. The next day they would march fifty miles, past Beit She'an, but today they rested and played soccer and ate with us, beautiful, healthy, wholesome young men. In the evening two boys come to shower in our house. What does one say to those who may soon die? I asked them what they would do after their tour of duty. A long silence. One answered: "We do not think that far ahead." I asked how they had made it into the paratroops. The visitors shrugged off the invitation to boast: "It's necessary." I asked them to come and be our guests in America: "Yes. Someday. That would be nice." Silence. These nice young men had written themselves off.

A physicist, now an artillery man, said to me: "We have the misfortune to have been born in the wrong generation. Of my high school class of thirty boys, thirteen are dead or wounded. What can we do?"

A friend complained that his sixteen-year-old daughter was studying geometry in high school. "It's a waste of time. They should be training her to shoot an uzi. That's what we need, not geometry."

No people can face such a prospect. And so they invent self-delusions:

"The Russians need us. We are their excuse to be in the Middle East. Therefore they can never let the Arabs win. And they don't want to pay the cost of resupplying

the Arab armies again. Therefore they won't allow a real war and they won't allow a peace—just fighting. We can live with that."

"The U.S. and the Russians use us to field-test their weapons. It's like the Spanish Civil War, where the Germans and Russians tried out their equipment. But neither side will let the other win. We are just a pawn in big power politics."

"We have to sterilize them now. A quick, clean strike to destroy their war machines. If the U.S. will just let us, we can do it before they get too strong. That will give us five years of peace."

(Lowering the voice) "I don't want to say this out loud, but the thing that's going to save us will be the nuclear bomb. A mutual annihilation standoff. The Arabs don't want to get wiped out any more than we do. If we have to, we'll use it. Because if we lose the war, we'll all die anyway."

"What we have to do is hold out for five more years. By then the world situation will be different. Then we'll be all right."

"You'll see. The oil situation is going to turn out to be our big break. The Arabs will overact—they always do—and the U.S. will take over the oil fields."

"In seven years the oil will be all used up, and then the West will repay the Arabs, in spades."

Most frequently: "It's too complicated. It's impossible to figure out." The subject is changed.

Time is on the side of the Arabs. Oil politics and oil money have won the world to their side, with the major exception of the U.S. (for which, praise our nation!). But U.S. support will not last forever. Money talks. If Sadat is unsuccessful in regaining more and more Egyptian territory, he may fight, or be pushed aside by an Egyptian Qaddafi. Having gotten back the land promised him by the peace agreement, Sadat has already begun disparaging the treaty. In twenty years Egypt, now forty million in population, will number sixty million. As time passes the Arab states grow, variously, more populous, richer, better armed, and more able.

An Israeli journalist reflected the prevailing view: "We made a big mistake. We should have found a way to make peace after the 1967 war, when we were strong. But we wasted seven years. We were living in a fool's paradise. Again after the Yom Kippur War there was a chance. But it slipped away. And if Kissinger had only given us three more days, we would have destroyed the Egyptian Second and Third armies."

"Would that have helped?" I asked. "You can't wipe out forty million people."

"It would have given us time. Five more years of peace."

"Well," I said, "don't you agree that sooner or later the situation could only get worse again? The Arabs are getting stronger."

"Yes, time is against us. Time is running out."

"Then doesn't that mean that you have to come to terms now?"

"No," said the journalist. "Not now. We can't do anything now. It's too dangerous."

He is right. And yet, one reads in *Pirkei Avot*, the Sayings of the Fathers, "If not now, when?"