

Commentary

AUGUST 1946 HISTORY

The Journal of Kibbutz Buchenwald

Our comrades returned on August 10 from Bergen-Belsen, where they had contacted the halutz group in connection with our move...

by Meyer Levin

INTRODUCTION

When the Buchenwald concentration camp was freed by the American Army on April 11, 1945, some of the Jewish survivors formed themselves into a group with the purpose of setting themselves up as an agricultural commune, a "kibbutz," in Palestine. The journal of Kibbutz Buchenwald is the collective diary that was kept by the members of this group. It contains letters, sketches, and stories in addition to dated entries, and was written in Yiddish, German, Polish, and Hebrew. It comes to us from Meyer Levin, the American novelist, who learned of its existence in Palestine and translated much of it and arranged for the translation of the rest.

The journal is invaluable for the insight it gives us into the minds of some of the survivors of the German concentration camps. It helps give the answers to such questions as: What kind of people survived the German concentration camps? Can they live the same life as other people, in Palestine, and elsewhere? How do they feel about their past? What can we, not having lived through their experiences, do for them, and how should we understand them?

The first part of the journal, which appeared in the June COMMENTARY, described how the group was formed, with its principle of including all Jews, of whatever political views, religious and non-religious; how the members began to work an abandoned German farm, training themselves for an agricultural life, and waiting anxiously for immigration certificates from the Jewish Agency for Palestine. The first section closed with the news (August 1945) that eighty certificates had finally been assigned to them.—Ed.

Our comrades returned on August 10 from Bergen-Belsen, where they had contacted the halutz group in connection with our move to Palestine. What they had to present to us was unexpected and unbelievable; the message they brought created a crisis.

These people of Bergen-Belsen, they said, are true halutzim, prepared to sacrifice themselves and to set aside their individual needs and desires, placing the needs of the Jewish people first. They believe that there is something more important than their own migration to Palestine. First, they believe, they must struggle for Palestine to be opened to all the Jews of Europe. They are convinced that we should not accept the eighty certificates offered us, but should return them, since the Jews of Europe cannot be saved by eighty certificates, and through our acceptance England will be able to claim that she is helping Jews. Our task, they point out, is to carry on the political struggle until the entire Jewish question in Europe is settled, rather than to let ourselves be bought off with a few certificates. We should be the last to leave. First, let those whose morale is lowest be sent so that they may begin to be healed.

We hold a general meeting to discuss this question. We decide to take the certificates. We based our decision on this fact: Our certificates do not come from a new schedule but from the old one, issued several years ago, so that there is no cause for demonstration.

August 11—The kibbutz was still asleep, since we permit ourselves to sleep late on the Sabbath. Only a few comrades were on duty—those working in the stalls and in the kitchen. From the distance we heard a song. There were several voices singing. And those of us who were awake saw a group of young girls approaching, mounting the hill toward us, singing. We went out to meet them, crying Shalom! Shabbat Shalom! These were the first of our new comrades from Bergen-Belsen. The rest of the group came up the hill toward evening; our Oneg Shabbat had scarcely been concluded when the door opened and a diminutive girl entered with a huge Shalom! After her came a boy, then another girl, another boy and girl, all crying out Shalom! and greeting everyone excitedly—especially their comrades who had arrived in the morning. They kissed their comrades, and dropped their packs, and immediately began to dance the jungalia with so much fire and frenzy that we oldsters stood amazed.

Some of the Bergen-Belsen comrades had come to fill our quota for Palestine. The others would remain here to continue Kibbutz Buchenwald, and wait for the next batch of certificates.

Preparing to Depart

August 23—We are to leave Fulda for Marseilles the day after tomorrow as there is a ship leaving for Palestine on September 1. We organized ourselves for the trip. The commune was divided into three groups, each with a leader. A committee was organized for transport problems, another for sanitation, another for provisions. We also appointed a committee to turn over the kibbutz to our successors. On Sunday evening this committee met with a committee from the next group, the inventory was checked, the new haverim pledged to continue the kibbutz in the

original spirit, and then we had a farewell party, attended by both groups. We built a great bonfire in the garden, we sang and made speeches, and we burned the swastika on our bonfire, and we danced the hora and the jungalia until midnight.

August 27—We breakfasted early. At 7:30 sharp, five U. S. Army trucks arrived. We used two for baggage transport, and the other three trucks carried us, together with the fifteen comrades from Munich, off to our new life. Cries of “We’ll meet again in Palestine” mingled with the singing of “Hatikva” as the members of Kibbutz Buchenwald sent us on our way. At Fulda, two railway cars waited to carry us to Toulon and Marseilles.

August 27—We left the German town of Fulda, singing new words to the tune of “Sholom Aleichem.” “Woe to you Germans,” we sang. We boarded the cars. They were ancient, with broken windows and leaky roofs; we came to know each hole very well during the rainy days of our long journey. The cars were small and we were terribly crowded, but what does rain and crowding matter to halutzim on their way to Palestine! We know very well we won’t find palaces to live in there either; we intend to help build the country.

We waited two hours for our locomotive, but apparently the engine, unlike ourselves, had no fears about missing the boat at Marseilles. Finally, the Jewish U. S. Army major from Fulda called the necessary officials and secured the locomotive for us.

At Hanover, a representative of the Joint met us, and talked to the head of the railway station about securing passenger cars for us; but there were none to be had so we would have to travel several days and nights in this fashion. At night, we took

down some boards we had prepared to make bunks for ourselves, but even though we packed ourselves close together like sardines, there was still not room enough for everyone to stretch out. We had to divide ourselves into two shifts for sleeping.

August 28—We pass through Frankfort, cross the Rhine, reach Metz. Our provisions committee has worked hard, but there is very little water on the way, and we are thirsty. At Nancy, the local Jews learn of our arrival and invite us to a reception, with white bread to eat, and all sorts of other food. We meet the Jewish committee, and they show us the library of several thousand volumes which they have reconstituted. We hear how Jewish life is reviving: many Jewish children were hidden by the French, and a number of adult Jews were supplied with Aryan papers, and these have now returned to Nancy. We cannot help comparing the French to the swinish Poles who, for a pound of sugar, were ready to betray Jews hiding in the woods.

August 30—We halted for an hour at a station where we saw American Negro soldiers guarding cars filled with prisoners. Discovering these were SS men, we gave them a real greeting. We got off our train and hurled stones through the car windows. If our engine hadn't whistled for us there would have been no stones left on the road.

To Prayers

Through the dark of Europe, a few half-broken little railway cars are carrying a hundred people to Palestine. Each of them, months and years ago, sent his longing heart before him, sent his heart from behind electrified barbed wire, from behind the ghetto walls of what was once his home, and even from the poetic realms of

childhood. Now the cars halt and wait on a siding somewhere in France. The blue-white flag on the lead car is already weary of showing itself over the earth of Germany and France. Smearred with soot and dust, it hangs lifeless from its pole.

It is late at night, and there is quiet, quiet everywhere around. A silver moon pours silver light over the earth, it reflects off the black roof of the railway car, it brightens a whole row of windows and illuminates a row of trees, each tiny leaf standing against the backdrop of a secretive dark-blue heaven. There are few stars, and an electric light, hung from a high lamp post beyond the tracks, has begun to swing, making swinging shadows.

In the car, all sleep. Close and uncomfortable in the narrow space, pressed one to the other, tired, the comrades, boys and girls, have given themselves to the angel of sleep. Like good children they are listening to the angel's tales: a small smile comes over a sleeping face where someone is dreaming that perhaps there can yet be happiness.

At the open window stands a wakeful one. He has found a good excuse—there is no room for him to lie down and sleep. He follows the moving shadows with his eyes; his glances wander among the winking stars. He tries to understand what is wrong with him. He recalls things that have happened, and people; he looks into his past.

. . . There was one with blonde hair, long and braided, and laughing eyes. . . .

Then something sounds out like a slammed door, the moon trembles, a shadow passes; the trumpet strikes.

“Jews, good little Jews, dear kosher little Jews, rise, wake up to God's service, to prayers, to *slichas*, to prayers”

He wakes. The door of the car is open, and there stands a crowd of girls and boys laughing like cats. They are waking everybody to *slichas*, the morning prayer of the days before New Year. Ach. These are the comrades, they've thought up another

joke. They've remembered that this is the first night of *slichas* and they're waking everybody.

The melody of the call to *slichas* is so sweet and homey and old, sounding here as it was once sounded in the Jewish quarter of Cracow by the bearded and ear-curved beadle in his hearty voice, as he sang into the windows from the high stoops of the narrow old streets.

“Yiddelach, Yiddelach, dear kosher little Jews, rise, wake up to the services of the Lord, and to *slichas*.”

The sleepers in the other car have already been awakened; some are a bit angry, and curse the crazy fools, and some laugh, and get up from their hard boards, and join the conspirators in their mischief. Now the whole crowd gets out of the car and sits on the grass, near the railway. The awakened fiddler plays away on his fiddle and the comrades sing with him. There are songs in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, and Polish, and someone makes a silly speech, and the young people roll on the grass with laughter.

“Yiddelach, Yiddelach, dear kosher little Jews, wake, get up—”

Get up, come back into life again, with the old melody that lifted your soul, come into your new life, as the new day wakes for you.

It gets lighter and lighter.—Abraham Aho vein.

August 31—We reached Lyon, where Jews came to the railway station bringing us grapes.

The Departure

September 2—We arrived at Marseilles After two hours of waiting, trucks came for us, and we learned that Rabbi Marcus was in Marseilles and would come to Palestine with us. This made us very happy. We drove through the wide, handsome streets of Marseilles and reached a camp. There were many Jews in the low, fenced-in barracks, waiting to go to Palestine, and on the other side of the camp were French quislings.

Waiting at our barracks was our Buchenwald comrade, Mordecai Streigler. In the evening we had a meeting; Comrade Streigler spoke, describing the many difficulties awaiting us in Palestine, and urging us not to allow our group to be torn apart by all the parties in the Yishuv who might try to separate us. Rabbi Marcus also spoke of unity, and recalled the Biblical story of Jacob, when he was lying down to sleep and every stone called to him, “Rest your head on me.” We must keep our strength united, he declared, in order to save the Jews of Europe.

In the late hours, at a committee meeting, we discovered that we had only seventy-eight certificates rather than eighty, and it became necessary to strike two comrades from our list. It was decided to make every effort to take them along illegally.

In the morning we found our baggage in an open field, and took it to the ship; then we were taken from Marseilles to Toulon where we were to board the vessel. It was a two hour ride through beautiful mountain roads which reminded us of the tales of the Maccabees: they must have hidden in caves in mountains like these during their partisan battles, watching every Greek military convoy on the road, and springing upon it.

At last we reached Toulon where our ship was waiting. The sun was hot. We stood for a few hours until our turn came, then we boarded the ship, taking the extra two men with us. It was the “Matroah,” an English military transport.

September 3—We sailed from the French port of Toulon at 7:30 p.m and a great crowd was assembled on the shore; we sang “Hatikva,” and those on shore replied with “Hitlahovot.”

The “Matroah” is a military transport, normally carrying about two hundred men; aboard her now are a thousand refugees, so the crowding can be imagined. The refugees are from four centers: Switzerland, Belgium, France, and Buchenwald.

There are old men, and women with little children who were given refuge in Switzerland, and thus escaped the Hitler regime; there are prisoners who were saved each by a succession of miracles; there are halutzim with work-roughened hands, and there are even women with painted mouths and lacquered fingernails. Our idea of unity finds much sympathy among the passengers, especially among the ex-prisoners, but it is a little difficult for the people from Switzerland to understand us, since they did not go through the concentration camps, and they have apparently learned little from the death of six million Jews. They still have their old outlook, each still adheres to his old faction, and his old interests.

[The following is set down in the diary as “A Letter to Our Brothers in Palestine”]

After our liberation from concentration camp, many of us were physically and spiritually broken; we could scarcely be recognized as people of the Jewish nation, or even as human beings, and we felt ourselves incapable of returning to a normal civilian life.

Still, in spite of the martyrdom we had seen, in spite of our years of wandering through the cemetery of Jewish life, we have built a kibbutz to prepare ourselves for the Yishuv and an active part in the construction of our homeland.

. . . Our kibbutz is composed of haverim and haverot of different conviction, from Agudat Yisrael to Betar, from Poale Agudat Yisrael to Hashomer Hatzair. But we are coming to Eretz Yisrael with a new call—Unity. Buchenwald punished us,

ruined us, but Buchenwald united us, and on the ruins of the lives we left in Buchenwald we left all of our sickly egotistic leanings. We have not come away without leaving other kibbutzim to be built among the survivors to carry on this spirit. We are now coming to Palestine, to build our Kibbutz Buchenwald in Eretz Yisrael, and we call upon the entire Yishuv and upon all parties and groups to find Unity, to become as one, in the upbuilding of a free Jewish people in a free Jewish state.

September 7—We decided not to engage in a propaganda campaign for our ideas in Palestine, since the best propaganda would be the existence of our kibbutz.

This evening was Rosh Hashana, and we had a wonderful New Year's reception on the deck. Major Caspi of the Jewish Brigade spoke, and Comrade Shalteil of the Jewish Agency, and Rabbi Marcus. There was also David Frankfurter who assassinated Gustlov, Nazi leader in Switzerland. After ten years in prison, he is coming to Palestine with us.

September 8—Sabbath, and the first day of Rosh Hashana, and the day we first saw our homeland! We ate a hasty lunch, and took our baggage in hand, and went on deck, impatiently awaiting the sight of Eretz Yisrael. Then we saw the distant shore. Many people had tears in their eyes. As the shore became clearer and English vessels passed nearby, greeting us, loud cries of joy broke out. At 2:30 p.m we came to Haifa port, singing "Hatikva".

The Arrival in Palestine

[The following is from a letter written by one of the girls in the kibbutz]

In two hours we'll reach the shore. Do I feel this? I must answer No. How different it seemed to us this moment would be, in our dreams, years ago. Then, at the mere thought of Eretz, our land, I felt the blood quicken in my veins, and my heart beat stronger. How I would kiss the earth, and hold it to me. How I would roll in this earth, how I would want, with my whole being, to enter her. How I dreamed of this greatest of moments!

And now this moment had come. Why is it that I don't feel anything? Could it be that all that I have lived through has taken away from me the ability to feel? Does the image of the gas chamber and the crematorium stand in my way, and will it always stand between me and life, will there always be the wall of faces of those who have been ordered to their death?

Comrade, in this moment my hands clenched, something contracted deep in my heart, some unknown power which I had not felt for years took hold over me, my eyes opened wide, as though they must keep forever that which they beheld at this moment; my legs trembled. Friend, is it possible that there on the horizon, .still unclear, still veiled in a light fog, is it possible that I have seen a shape there? Of rolling hills, and heights, and valleys? Are these the contours of our land? In this moment I felt something intense, something unknowable, something that shook me out of myself and beyond objectivity. Eretz. I stand against the rail. I tremble, I cannot speak, it is difficult for me to write, I see no one, nothing around me; the excited halutzim, the Swiss women quickly putting last touches on their makeup, the little children who are unconscious of the meaning of the moment and run back and forth on the decks, all this I am aware of dimly, but something has happened within me, something has torn, something chokes me. My lips repeat, over and over, Eretz, my hands fasten tight on the rail, my eyes fog! I feel that this moment will remain with me as the happiest moment of my life. I know that the past will not leave me, and I am a little afraid. Once I wanted to believe in the world, in people, in ideals, and life has showed me that this could not be. Now the same wish begins to be reborn in me. I put away all that I have lived through in

these last years, I leave it here in the depths of the sea. I go to the new life as I saw and imagined it once. Only somewhere in me I still have a fear that disillusion will come again.

Friend, I see the first house. Now it is very difficult for me to control myself; all around me is excitement and tumult; people are dragging their baggage on deck, people are running forward.—Havera S.

September 8—A train takes us from Haifa and goes along the seashore. We look up, spellbound, at the lights on the high cliff, and cannot cease wondering at the beauty of Haifa. Then we go further into the night, and halt at a station. The name is Athlit.

Palestinian Jews are waiting to greet us. There are trucks for our baggage, and there is a Red Star of David ambulance for the sick. The rest of us walk along the road, uphill, and after a little we see barbed wire, and gates, and a guard before us. We feel an inner revolt. Still, we enter the camp; there are clean cots in the barracks, and there is a good odor in the dining-room, and there are showers in the washrooms. Now we feel all our weariness and filth, and it is good to have enough water for washing, and to have a clean white bed.

Athlit is a camp with many wooden barracks, with a double fence of high barbed wire, with observation towers at every corner, and with a guard of British police. Here, all the immigrants are taken directly from their ship except for those who manage to escape on the way. Here, the British decide who is legal, and who is illegal.

In Athlit

September 9—On the sun scorched grass in front of Barrack 57, the comrades sit in an uneven row, listening to the voice of the head of the kibbutz. This is our first meeting on the holy land of Palestine. Now our real work is before us. Now each must examine himself, finally decide: do his nature and convictions permit him to live in such a group as ours? If not, this is the time for him to leave, for we do not hold anyone. We must be sure that though each of us retains his own ideological convictions, and stays within his own political party, he will chose the kibbutz first in any conflict between the commune and his party.

During the meeting, night fell. We sat near the barbed wire, under the searchlight. Still we were in Palestine, and our hearts were glad that we breathed the air of Palestine under the Palestinian sky.

September 10—Comrade Rokaoch of the Histadrut (the General Federation of Labor) came to meet with us and proposed that we join the Histadrut as a workers group. Rokaoch told us about the Histadrut, its work and aims, and all that an entering member needed to know. After his talk, several comrades spoke upon our principle of unity, and its meaning. Rokaoch said he recognized and respected our ideals. We came to no decision in regard to joining the Histadrut.

September 12—In a conference with Rokaoch, it was agreed that those comrades who wanted to join the Histadrut could do so, and others could join their own parties, but that in the meantime Kibbutz Buchenwald would not join any organization, except that we would affiliate with the medical insurance group, the Kupat Holim. We would consult with the Histadrut on all technical matters concerning the setting up of our kibbutz in Palestine.

In the evening, Rokaoch met with us again and explained that the Histadrut was seeking a place for our kibbutz, and would help us through our first period. We would have no difficulties or worries about funds, and would have good opportunities for employment. He had three places in mind for our kibbutz.

Where to Settle?

Rekaoch has come, and with him two comrades from Kibbutz Afikim in the Jordan Valley. He proposed that our group should go to the Jordan Valley, and live and work in Kibbutz Afikim. We would have our own quarters, and our own group life, but we would be tied economically to Afikim for the time being; we would work in the fields, in the gardens, in the dairy, and would do every type of work together with the comrades of Afikim, and thus we would have our period of training. After a year we would be able to carry on by ourselves in our own place. As to the hot climate, he was sure we would get used to it as there were fifteen kibbutzim in the Jordan Valley, all healthy.

Comrade R: But we want our own farm.

Rokaoch: At present that is not possible. We have to learn what you're like, and whether you can be trusted to carry on an entire settlement.

Comrade G: If we are to be tied to another kibbutz, why precisely in the Jordan Valley?

Rokaoch: There is no other place that can make room, just now, for a group of your size.

Comrade L: Are there religious communes among the fifteen in the Jordan Valley?

Rokaoch: No. But there is a synagogue in Afikim and a group of the Orthodox Hapoel Hamizrahi is in Afikim in their year of preparatory training.

Comrade A: There isn't really any choice. Let us accept the proposal.

Comrade M: I suggest that six comrades go and look over the place.

Afikim Comrade: I don't want to talk you into anything. But you should know some things about us. Afikim has been in existence twenty-five years as a kibbutz, and we have been on bur permanent settlement ground for thirteen years. We have banana and orange groves, we have a large dairy, truck gardens, a plywood factory, a box factory, a motor transport company, a machine shop, and other shops. Once our place was a barren field, and now everything is green. It is true that the summer heat is very strong, but people can live there. Children live very well in our climate, and they go swimming in the Sea of Galilee. You will be able to live in this climate, too. A few weeks ago, twenty people came from Bergen Belsen to Afikim. In the whole of the Jordan Valley, more than 5,000 settlers now live. In Afikim we have 800 people. Your principle of unification is a new one, and whether you will be able to succeed with it, I don't know, but first you must be able to maintain the practical side of a kibbutz.

Comrade L: The climate should not frighten us, comrades. All we have to do is send a committee to see whether there is room for us to settle there. But we must remember we will be dependent on kibbutz Afikim, and there may be a danger of our being assimilated into their kibbutz, and losing our own identity.

Second Afikim Comrade: You believe in your own unity, comrades, then why do you fear Afikim? Your unification is between religious and non-religious members; you will be free to work out your ideas without being dependent on Afikim for anything other than material help.

Comrade C: The thing is, we want to live on our own land. In our own place, we would have more of a will to work, for we would be working for ourselves, and would be dependent on no one.

Rokaoch: We can't assign you any land until we know you are able to settle it.

Comrade I: There is no need for so much discussion. Let us send our committee, and they will see the conditions on the spot, and then we can decide.

Chairman: Comrades, let us go to Barrack 57 and hold a separate meeting, and choose a committee to go to Afikim tomorrow.

We went to Barrack 57, and chose a committee of five.

September 18—We spent the whole morning getting our passports from the police. In the afternoon, our five comrades left, with Rokaoch, for Afikim.

On the Land at Last

September 19—In the evening, a comrade suddenly came into the barracks and announced that our envoys had returned. Comrade E described what he had seen in Afikim—a garden of Eden! In his view, everything we needed for our final training was to be found at its best there, not only for material life, but for our spiritual life as well. He gave us the same information we had had from the comrades of Afikim, but added that everything was beautiful, green through irrigation, and he was simply enchanted. While our committee was at Afikim, there had been a meeting at which the comrades of Afikim discussed whether or not they should accept us. During the discussion, our committee members waited outside. Then they were called in, and each was permitted to speak. Their talks made a great impression at the meeting, and the comrades agreed to accept us.

It was unanimously agreed to go to Afikim. We decided to try to be on our way tomorrow, so as to be settled before Succoth.

September 21—While we were in the dining hall, L burst in, excitedly announcing that this was the day Kibbutz Buchenwald was leaving Athlit! We should finish our meal and pack our bags immediately. Buses were on the way.

The dining-hall became a bedlam of laughter, singing, crying, shouting.

Kibbutz Buchenwald hai, hai v'kayaml we sang.

By the gate, there was suddenly a heap of sacks, packs, bags—everything we had brought overseas from Europe. And then the bus appeared. We loaded our baggage on the roof, our passports were handed us, we boarded the bus, and went out the gate. That is—only part of us. The second bus had not yet come.

And now the last of us can leave. Finally we are out. We see bright sunlit fields all around us, here and there palm trees, hills not far off—we are out, forever free of barracks, of barbed wire. There is so much sun around us that we half-shut our eyes. Our auto slides swiftly farther and farther into our land, and through the open window a warm sweet wind greets us; it fondles us like water. All is good. We are joyous, we want to hug the world to us. So this is what it is like to be free in the world, to be filled with laughter, to be happy.

Now here is the sea, bright and large on our left, here she is, majestic and serious, all her blue-green clarity. Haifa. Large beautiful houses, and streets with Hebrew signs, a smartly dressed Arab policeman, an Englishman, an old, poor Arab, a Jew; the fine streets of Haifa vanish and there are fields, bright sunny dry fields. And everywhere, wherever the eyes turn, there are hills, naked hills. Some are yellow, sunburnt, dry. There is no fresh greenery anywhere, such as one saw at every step in Poland. It touches the heart. Is this our land? This scorched earth Why, why such a fate for the Jewish people, and the Jewish soil? Intense hot sunbeams strike off the desolate hills; the entire area pulses in a sea of light. Everything is still. All at once, we see a concrete blockhouse in the midst of a field. And farther, out of a hillside, a group of black Arab tents materializes. From time to time we pass green

areas, see patches of white, of people working in the fields—Jewish villages or communes. And then more naked dry fields and barren hills; a feeling of long painful regret comes over us, at what has become of the land of milk and honey.

The bus moves swiftly. And here, we are by a river. This is the Jordan. This. You remember how once in school you studied about this river, and imagined how the holy waters flowed, and roared. Now that you see it, you realize that you had imagined it to be wider, livelier, stronger.

The bus halts, by a stone road-block. English and Arab police enter and check our passports; we drive farther: there is a bridge, another bridge, and we have a glimpse of huge concrete structures, with the Jordan's waters penned within them. Ruttenberg's electrical works appear, out of a background of green foliage. Again, the road passes through wide, sun-dried fields, empty of life. And now the bus suddenly turns off the road; we see a lane of trees leading to a fine white tower. We drive through a gate, and halt. This is Afikim.

And it is as in the tales of a Thousand and One Nights. Paradise. Like an oasis in the desert. One huge cultivated garden. Friendly little white houses, floating in a sea of green. The fine large dining-hall, like an island. There are cement sidewalks, and walking peacefully and happily along them are the citizens of Afikim in their clean white clothes, talking, joking, while children, large and small, play about.

We are given temporary places in spare rooms in the white houses, and some of us in a wooden cottage. We take hot showers, and change our clothes.

In the evening, the comrades of Afikim had a welcome party for us, in the dining-hall. Many of their comrades, as well as ours, spoke about our coming from the hell of Germany to this land. We sang, and had fruits and sweets, and juice to drink. We felt that Afikim had welcomed us as brothers.—Meir Ahouval.

Getting Settled

September 23—There was much to arrange as we began our new life. We called a general meeting and elected a new committee in three sections: a general committee, a cultural committee, and a judiciary committee. One of the first questions was the organization of supplies; we decided we should not yet completely communize our possessions, but that each comrade's personal belongings should be set aside and marked.

September 30—Last Tuesday all those who were well (four comrades are in the hospital) went out to work. Some worked at building construction in the fields, under the hot sun of the Jordan Valley. They came home very tired; the comrades were ashamed to admit this, but their pale smiles told all. Next day it was the same, but within a few days they got used to the routine and were laughing at their work.

We had a meeting with our Hebrew instructor, a comrade of Afikim. He divided us into various groups, and made a schedule for our lessons. Every evening, after work, we'll study Hebrew. Twice a week we shall leave work at noon, so as to have more time for educational activities.

October 1—On our second Sabbath in Afikim some of the comrades took a stroll to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or Kinneret, as we call it. We bathed in the warm, still water, and on our way home we stopped in Dagania A and visited the farm and the Gordon museum, and then we went to Dagania B, and towards evening we came to Beit Zera. There is a group of young people in this kibbutz who arrived from France only a few months ago, and almost all of them were known to us from Buchenwald. After spending an hour with them, we came riding home—quite hungry.

After supper, we sat in the field where we had been threshing during the week. A few of our comrades who had come back from their trip around Palestine spoke of what they had seen. In the dark, only cigarette-ends were visible, and we felt close and intimate. Avram spoke about the relations between Arabs and Jews, and how they might come to better understanding; we discussed the troubles in the Yishuv. And finally, we separated. Tomorrow to work again.

Troubled Faces in Afikim

After we had been only a few days in Afikim, we noticed something disturbing about the comrades of Afikim. These people seemed to carry upon themselves the weight of some awful responsibility. We wondered: Why do the Jews of Palestine always seem worried?

I talked with a girl from another kibbutz who was visiting Afikim. And I learned that important events were expected to take place in Palestine. The Yishuv is preparing itself for anything that might happen; it is knitting together its strength in a military way. Here was something we had not realized. The Yishuv is preparing. Everyone knows trouble is coming in Palestine. Two fanatical elements oppose each other, and one or the other must give way. The Arabs claim that Zionist aims present a mortal danger to them, and that they must resist these aims. Just as determinedly, the Jews demand that the doors of Palestine be opened to our brothers in exile, and that the law against land purchase be abolished, and the White Paper be withdrawn. Otherwise, we must fight for our way. Illegal immigrants will be brought to the shores of Palestine, and if the British police try to prevent their landing, they will be fought. We will bring our people ashore by force.

The fate of the Jews follows us, even to Palestine. We have been through a great deal outside of Palestine, but we never showed much heroic militancy. Here we shall no longer be at fault, we shall not flee from our fate. Let us show that we

know how to die if through our death we can bring help to others, but let us die with arms in our hands, and not like sheep in Treblinka. Our place is in the fighting ranks.

October 5—What is Palestine's opinion of Kibbutz Buchenwald? We had hoped that our early days in Palestine would be passed in quiet, so that we might start to work and build our world. But the newspapers wrote a good deal about us and our principle of Unity. They showed themselves warm to our idea, and wished us success. But things seem a little different with the various parties and factions in Palestine. They have welcomed us with warmth and respect, but they seem sceptical of how long our plan will live.

Some Do Not Come Back

October 6—A number of comrades who found close relatives in Palestine did not return from their leave, as their families persuaded them to remain with them. One of the girls, G, wrote a letter to the kibbutz, telling us how now, after the years of loneliness, she had found what was home to her. She was surrounded with family warmth and love, and she could not overcome her need for this, so she was remaining with her family. But a few days later she wrote us again, from Haifa. She is tired of the city, and longs for her comrades in the kibbutz. It seems silly to her to sit aimlessly at a table in a cafe hour after hour, or go to a fashionable dance. The hora is a thousand times better. And as for our jungalia, there is no comparison. Kibbutz Buchenwald, *hai v'kayam!* Up, and alive! She is coming back.

But some of the others do not return.

October 12—Days go by in Afikim. Life has become normal. We work in the fields, in the banana groves, in the garden, in the dairy, in the fish hatchery, in the orange grove, vineyard, factory, and many other branches of Afikim. Every evening after work we have our Hebrew lessons. Every few days we see a film or a play, together with the comrades of Afikim; often after work, we ride or walk to a nearby kibbutz; at other times we attend lectures given by comrades of Afikim. For example, we have learned about the valley of the Jordan and its settlers, about the methods used to combat malaria, about immigration, about the situation in Palestine, about the interests of the great powers in the Near East, and the place of Palestine in world politics. We have close comradely relations with many of the members of Afikim, with the Buchenwald youth-group at Belt Zera, with a youth-group here in Afikim, composed of Polish boys and girls who escaped early in the war, and who wandered through Russia, the Orient, and Asia, finally to Palestine from Teheran.

October 8—The entire Yishuv declared a strike today in protest against the prevention of immigration. The kibbutzim of the Jordan Valley assembled to demonstrate against the White Paper, and we of Kibbutz Buchenwald went to the meeting carrying our old, worn flag that we brought with us from the lands of exile.

October 18—(*This is the first entry to be written in Hebrew.*) Now that everyone has returned from leave, we had a meeting to settle many problems. First, as to the kosher kitchen. Some of the Orthodox comrades were convinced that we had to have a separate kitchen, contending that it is impossible to prepare truly kosher meals in the Afikim kitchen. Finally the majority decided that it was unnecessary to insist upon a totally separate kitchen, but that we should have our food separately prepared in the general kitchen, and have our meals at separate tables in the big dining-hall of Afikim. We agreed to observe the Sabbath by complete rest.

Eliza

Eliza is one of our best comrades. She is lively and happy. I cannot imagine what the Kibbutz would be like if Eliza were not with us. And as for myself never mind. I won't write about myself.

Eliza is a tall, slender girl with a head of beautiful black hair which she arranges in long, lovely plaits. And if anyone has not seen her in this light then he simply has no heart She is a girl beautiful as a golden tower, and with a lovely voice.

And her jungalia! This is an amazing dance. Eliza's own discovery; it has made her famous throughout all Palestine, and before that it made her famous in all the wide ranks of the American army. I saw a special article about the great dancer Eliza and her jungalia in an important American magazine, and it is well known that the firm of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which has a lion roaring at the beginning and end of each film, offered her a mountain of gold if she would come to Hollywood, but our Eliza is a halutza and doesn't care to go to America, even to Hollywood.

The jungalia belongs in the history of Kibbutz Buchenwald. For what were we before? A group of boys and girls, raised in the concentration camp; we didn't know what it was to live in the world, we couldn't even dance the hora—and who even dared think about a jungalia?

We merely lived our poor life day in and day out, monotonous and dull. Each Sabbath we tried to arrange a little celebration, a little Oneg Shabbat, but there was no taste to it, as can well be imagined since I was usually the master of ceremonies and the chief jeketeller.

But one Friday evening in Gerringshoff as we were coming to the close of our Oneg, a troop of halutzim and halutzot arrived from Bergen-Belsen, and among the halutzot there shone the beautiful Eliza. I ran and took her pack from her, I put it away, I hovered around her, and finally she gave me a glance. My heart leaped.

Meanwhile our chairman greeted our important guests. He spoke of pioneering, and ideals, and the upbuilding of Palestine, trying to give these staunch newcomers the impression that we too, despite our frock coats and silk hats, were halutzim. And all the while, I noticed that he was staring at Eliza—thus I became the blood enemy of my best friend.

When my comrade had finished, and the crowd was about to dissolve, Eliza cried out in her beautiful voice, “Wait, wait, we’ll dance the jungalia!” All the halutzim and halutzot took up the cry; jungalia!—they pulled aside the tables, linked arm in arm and began to dance. And Freda—that is Eliza in German—dominated the whole dance.

“Jungalia—fantasia—fantasia—jungalia!” she chanted. “*Mi hai?* (Who lives?)—*Yisrael! Mi ba-aretz?* (In whose land?)—*Yisrael! Mi boneh?* (Who builds?)—*Yisrael! Et ha-Emek?* (Builds the Emek?)—*Yisrael! Hagalil?* (Galilee?)—*Yisrael! Petach Tikvah?*—*Yisrael! Yisra-Yisra-Yisrael! Hail* The nation Israel lives! *Am Yisrael hai!*”

Then she chanted of two boys, Moses and Ephraim, two boys killed by Arabs, but the nation Israel lives It is impossible to describe the fever of this, and other jungalias, but Eliza danced, and lifted the hearts of our comrades.

Late in the evening, I had a moment of delirium, for when I showed Eliza to her bed, she whispered, “Avram—you know, I love you already!” Of this, I dreamed all night.—Avram.

Oneg Shabbat in Palestine

Meir proposed that each Sabbath eve another comrade should have charge of the program for Oneg Shabbat. The object of the Oneg Shabbat, he said, is to provide a touch of poetic life to the world of the modern Jew, particularly the Jew in

Palestine. During this service, non-religious Jews partake somewhat of the life of the religious Jew. In the past, Jews experienced a sense of holiness, and it was this holiness that gave them their feeling of elevation on the Sabbath. After their week's work, they gave themselves over on the Sabbath to the life of the spirit. But the spirit in the non-religious Jew differs in that it sets aside everything connected with the past; it is a modern spirit, interested in the life of today, and it wants to bring the life of today into the celebration of Oneg Shabbat. The life of our daily labor, of our travels over Palestine, the joy of Comrade Moshe who had found his sister in Palestine, the joy of our friends D. and H. who married recently, even though they are outside the kibbutz, the life of the kibbutz itself: all this is material for our Oneg.

When Meir had finished, Yechezkiel spoke. He disagreed with Meir. It was not possible, Yechezkiel said, to make a national poetry out of religion; there could be no such compromise. There is no middle road, embracing a little of this and a little of that. On Sabbath, there is Oneg, and it has only one meaning—religion, and rest.

[A Letter:]

Dear Comrade D—Today is my birthday, and I will take this opportunity to wish you happiness in your new life together with havera H. Just today on my birthday, when I should be happy, I feel sad, and I remember when I was at your wedding in town, you came from under the canopy to me and cried, “Shlamek, Shlamek, now I know why I feel so alone in the world. Look—my wife has brothers who share her joy, and I have no one left.” Today, I feel as you felt, for this is my birthday, my holiday, and I should be sharing it with those whom Hitler took from me. It will always be like this on the festival days of our lives. In the midst of any happiness, we'll feel this emptiness in our hearts, this terrible yearning for those who should be with us and are gone forever.

You ask me how do I feel in the kibbutz? Here in the kibbutz, I find my ersatz family. What was once only a phrase is now a fact; we are happy together. We live together, we share our deepest secrets with one another, as we once shared them

with our mothers and sisters.—Shlamek.

November 12—There was a meeting of the Afikim and Buchenwald committees. It was agreed that eleven of our comrades should now be accepted on actual jobs to develop as specialists. We will have assignments for a tractorist, a truckdriver, dairyman, wagoner, garageman, poultryman, and also assignments in the machine shop, children's house, vegetable garden, pasture, and field. We settled upon an allowance of four pounds a year as spending money outside the kibbutz. Two and a half pounds is allotted for needs on leave, a pound for special trips, and half a pound for incidentals. It was agreed that two of the younger girls should be placed on a youth schedule: half a day for study, and half a day for work.

We Must All Be Comrades

November 18—At a recent Oneg Shabbat, one of the comrades gave a talk on Jewish folklore, reciting and singing Hasidic songs, worksongs, and Sabbath chants. Part of his material dealt with the satiric and sometimes vulgar tales and songs by which the opponents of Hasidism attempted to ridicule the movement. One of these songs offended one of our religious comrades who took the recitation to be an attack upon Hasidism. There was a heated argument over this point, and it seems that a good deal of ill-feeling has remained from this meeting.

It should be possible even for a religious comrade to speak objectively about certain features of the folk-Hasidism of the past, and about the folksongs of its opponents; we must be developed enough to be able to discuss any topic without losing control of our emotions. Certainly there can be no possible offense intended toward the inner godliness of a religious comrade through a little folk song presented in the framework of a general talk on Jewish folklore. Why must there be so strong a reaction to so simple an incident?

Comrades, we must have a larger and more tolerant point of view, for we carry the responsibility of a very great principle.

December 5—This was the seventh day of Hanukah, and tonight the lighting of the Hanukah candle in the dining-hall of Afikim was given over to one of the girls of Kibbutz Buchenwald. She read a description of Hanukah in Buchenwald as contrasted with the festival in Palestine. The evening was filled with song.

December 24—Today we finished building our meeting-hall; it closes the fourth side of our square, as there had already been cottages on three sides. The inner walls are of plywood from the Afikim factory, and in the center of the wall facing the door we have drawn a large Star of David, and filled it with photographs of our land and the people who inhabit it. One corner is dedicated in mourning to the memory of those who will never reach Palestine; there we have placed a yellow badge such as we had to wear under Hitler, and edged it in black. On both sides are drawings to remind us of children put to death, and of the masses of Jews driven into the crematorium at Treblinka. On another wall, we have mounted the certificates for land redeemed by school children of Haifa which they had presented to us. On Friday, we shall have a party to celebrate the opening of our hall.

December 28—We had a big celebration to open our meeting-hall. Comrades of Afikim and many other guests packed the room, and stood outside the door and the windows. We began with Oneg Shabbat, and everybody sang. Moshe thanked the comrades of Afikim for all they had done for us. We had a moment of silence in memory of our lost people, then a comrade of Afikim spoke. “You are 40 out of perhaps 40,000,” he said, “but you are a symbol to us of our former homes in

Europe, now destroyed. You have brought us a last greeting from our brothers in exile. Each wave of immigration brought something new to Palestine, and you have brought something of the highest value—your principle of Unity.” There was much work yet to be done in Palestine, he declared; we were only at the beginning, for all these barren hills must one day be covered with green, and we must prepare the homeland for those who are yet to come.

“*Yesh avoda bli dail*” we sang. “There is work without end.”

Report of the Committee on Culture

Culture means not only singing in the chorus and studying Hebrew and Jewish history and Zionism; every moment of activity and labor is culture. There has been a great spiritual wandering in modern times, and only now are we beginning to see the goal of the trials through which we have lived; now we are coming from a world of emptiness into a world of known spiritual values; we are coming closer to these values and beginning to understand them, and this approach to a life of value and meaning is the essence of cultural work.

When we glance over the few months that have just passed, we can see that we have truly made progress.

First, as to Hebrew. The group is learning the language with intensity and enthusiasm. The study of Hebrew dominates all of our educational and cultural work and remains the most important of our tasks for the present.

Secondly, we have learned things from the comrades of Afikim—about directing a kibbutz, about the history of Zionism and the homeland, about the Jordan Valley particularly and kibbutz structure, and we have made trips around the region and become acquainted with our surroundings.

But the greatest achievements in our cultural work have probably been through the four classes into which we divided ourselves last November. These four groups called themselves *Kadima*, *Neile*, *Emet*, and *Kan Nisharim* (Forward, Prayer, Truth, and Here We Stay).

Kadima—This group has had eighteen meetings: eight were devoted to the study of Stalin's philosophic and historic materialism; one was on the history of the Maccabees and Hanukah; three dealt with Biblical material, especially from Joshua and the Song of Songs; one was an introduction to Jewish history, dealing with Abraham, Jacob, and Moses; two were on the Haskalah period, and another on the history of anti-Semitism, both according to Dubnow.

Emet—This group has met twenty-five times. Ten meetings were devoted to Graetz's History of the Jews. Seven meetings were on the history of Socialism, according to Baer: they covered the meaning of ancient social forms, the theory of primitive natural communism, social conditions in ancient Palestine, and communistic practices and social ideas in ancient Greece. There were meetings on the writings of Mendele Mocher Sforim (Mendele the Bookseller), Karl Marx, Ludwig von Beethoven, Palestine geography, climate, history, etc., Peretz, a discussion on human relations and the meaning of truth.

Kan Nisharim—This group has had twenty-two sessions. The first meeting dealt with the foundations of knowledge: science and the rules of physics. There were five meetings on Jewish history based on Biblical writings and on Dubnow, one on the Bible as literature, and another on new Hebrew literature. Fourteen sessions were held on socialism, beginning with Karl Marx, and progressing through the writings of Lenin and Stalin. This group also studied the political administration of Palestine.

As for other cultural activities: several of our comrades have become members of the Afikim chorus, and we have taken part in sports, and dances. We have built this hall, which has become the center of our cultural and spiritual life. Here we

have the daily Hebrew papers, and the beginning of a library, with books donated by the Jewish Agency.

This is a general summary of our work until now. There is being born in us a simple, natural orientation to truth, to truth in daily life, and a desire for a life full of meaning and truth. Our goal is to grow, and to develop in ourselves a healthy, self-knowing soul, to know ourselves as Jews, to become self-knowing responsible halutzim, and self-knowing responsible comrades in the kibbutz of Unity.—Meir Ahouval.

New Arrivals

March 23, 1946—Today our comrades from Kibbutz Buchenwald in Europe joined us at last. Fifty-seven of them arrived, and among them were twenty girls. Many of them are comrades who were already at the farm when we left. They were among those who took our places half a year ago. Others joined since. Many are comrades with whom we were acquainted in the concentration camps.

Now at last they are with us and our kibbutz is complete, for we now have sufficient numbers to establish a settlement of our own as soon as we have sufficient training and experience, and as soon as land can be assigned to us by the Keren Kayemet.