

Integration, Israeli Style

BY MARA KOCHBA

Menachemiya nestles in the Jordan Valley at the point where Israel's frontier with Jordan meets the former Syrian-held Golan Heights. During the recent battles between King Hussein's Beduin troops and the Palestinian terrorists, the settlers in the valley had ringside seats as they watched the hostilities with binoculars from their doorsteps.

Menachemiya has rarely had the luxury of watching Arabs fighting each other from a distance. For most of its seven decades, the moshav has been in the midst of Arab attempts to push it and other Jewish settlers out of the Jordan Valley.

In 1901 five Israeli-born pioneers founded a new settlement in the midst of a hostile Arab population. Bron Rothschild gave the group a loan to build up the village and Sir Herbert Samuel later paid a visit. It was in honor of Sir Herbert's father, Menachem, the settlement was called Menachemiya.

For the next forty years the pioneers struggled as they fought Arab marauders and worked to make their land productive. During the War of Independence in 1943, Menachemiya battled the combined forces of Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi troops. All women and children were evacuated from the area and the carefully natured farmsteads were destroyed. At the end of the war, only five families remained in Menachemiya.

Following Israel's independence, the Jewish Agency began to resettle the moshav with new immigrants from the D.P. camps of Europe. In the early 1950's newcomers from Poland and Rumania were sent there. They had no agricultural skills and had to be trained to be farmers. Each new immigrant received 20 dunams of land, 1 cow and 1 horse. The psychological problems of rehabilitating the refugees, Arab infiltrators, and difficult climate of the Jordan Valley, the acute shortage of employment opportunities -- these proved insurmountable obstacles to many of the European newcomers. During the financial recession of 1957-58, many of them left Menachemiya.

The settlement struggled along, seeking out a living from winter vegetables, grain crops and livestock. The next wave of immigrants -- Jews from North Africa -- came in 1962-63 and at the beginning brought more problems to the settlement than they solved. The Jewish Agency sent the new immigrants to the Jordan Valley by the busload directly from the boats in Haifa Port. These people were not given their own land, but were paid farm workers.

Menachemiya today is a nice town. There are palm trees and flower gardens; the streets are clean and the people are friendly. Life is better now, but conditions are still difficult for many of the towns people.

Each house in the village has had a new room added -- a room made of reinforced concrete that can withstand a direct artillery hit from across the Jordanian border. Reinforced concrete roofs have been constructed on all communal buildings. These measures are mandatory for border settlements -- and the high expenses of the defense are a tremendous burden for such less prosperous communities as Menachemiya.

Families are constantly adding rooms to their homes to accommodate more and more children. Though there are some eight hundred people in Menachemiya, there are only 150 families -- 50% of which have over eight children! Most families need some form of social welfare assistance, though only 26 families are on complete welfare with no other income.

Community projects have been built with financial assistance from the Keren Hayesod United Israel Appeal and various government agencies. Keren Hayesod's Special Projects Department financed the construction of Menachemiya's Kindergarten in 1960 and the Mother and Child Care Center in 1968. There are 27 youngsters in the kindergarten and an equal number in the nursery. The village's school of eight classes has 117 pupils; for high school, some go to boarding schools, others attend area schools at nearby kibbutzim and in Biberias.

There is a recreation hall for afternoon activities supervised by girl soldiers but this hall has become too small and a new recreation center is planned at the cost of IL. 350,000.



YOUNG SHEPHERD OF MENACHEMIYA, CARRIES A TRANSISTOR RADIO INSTEAD OF THE TRADITIONAL SHEPHERD'S STAFF.

Also to be built is a new nursery for babies up to the age of three, costing IL. 400,000. A new synagogue and a new kitchen and dining room attached to the school are also planned. All such buildings must have reinforced concrete roof, which add to the construction costs, but insures protection from shelling from across the border.

In Menachemiya, the average family income is IL. 450 per month. There is no extra money for the communal projects that are vital to the settlement's growth. All these expensive projects must be financed with outside help.

Today only 20% of the population is Ashkenazi. They are generally better educated and better skilled among the older generation -- but amongst the young people and the children there is no distinction.

"We made the effort," says Moshe Ben Zvi, one of the oldest pioneers who came from Austria in 1919, "not to even think of separating Ashkenazim and Sephardim in our minds. And we taught our children the same idea. Today we do not talk of the marriage between the son of a man from Poland and the daughter of a man from Morocco as a 'mixed marriage'. After all, we are all Jews, aren't we?"

Similar thoughts are echoed by Amar Massoud, who says he is only 45 though he looks sixty years old. He came to Menachemiya in 1956, straight from Spain to Haifa and then to the Jordan Valley. He is a farm hand who works for any farmer needing help. His wife practices primitive healing methods and is known as the local "witch doctor". They have many children and a three room house -- with the inevitable addition of the reinforced concrete room.

Even though life is not easy and his family does not have the luxuries available to city

NEW YORK--5,800 high school and college youth will enjoy an Israel experience tailored to their special interests when they join the 39 different programs offered by the American Zionist Youth Foundation's 1972 Israel Summer Programs, announced Mrs. Shirley Kalb, Acting Chairman of the AZYF Board of Trustees.

NEW YORK--Zvi Brosh, a ranking official of the Israel Embassy in Washington and the president of the Zionist Organization of America declared that the unprecedented influx of Soviet Jews to Israel has increased the need for greater aliya from the United States.

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dwellers, Massoud concludes that the environment for children is much better in the village than in the city.

"My children all go to school," he says proudly, "and they stay out of trouble unlike city kids. It is healthier here."

After seventy years, Menachemiya is a show-place of the achievements of old pioneers and new immigrants from many cultures working together to give their children better lives.

That is, after all, what Israel is all about.



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