

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

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KIBBUTZ RAMAT RACHEL--YOM KIPPUR

PREPARATIONS FOR SUKKOT

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After breakfast, Hannu and I set out for *Ramat Rachel*, a kibbutz that lay within the city limits of Jerusalem. Sylvie had recommended a hike there because of its great view and because its park would be a great place for us to relax on Yom Kippur. As it was another extremely hot and dry day, we made sure that we took water bottles with us; however, we did not take any food as some Jews would have been offended by our eating on Yom Kippur.

Derech Hevron was almost deserted; the peace and quietness of Yom Kippur reigned over the land. On the east side of Derech Hevron, we passed through a new and affluent area of Talpiot. Large new houses of Jerusalem stone were tastefully landscaped with lawns, flowers, beautiful flowering shrubs and trees. Such single-family dwellings were not common in the areas of Jerusalem that we had seen; a very high percentage of the population of West Jerusalem live in apartment buildings.

Leaving the residential area of Talpiot, we turned south and climbed a long hill towards *Ramat Rachel*. *Ramat* comes from the word meaning "high"; and Rachel's tomb can be found not far from the kibbutz. She was, of course, the favourite wife of Jacob, mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

A kibbutz is a pure form of socialism. Real estate, equipment, and financial resources are communally owned; no money is used in its internal dealings. Meals are served in the central dining hall and prepared in the communal kitchen; washing and mending of clothing is done in a central laundry. All members share the same standard of living. Although only three percent of country's population live in the 270 kibbutzim, they have traditionally been the backbone of Israel's agriculture, producing 40% of country's food output and, in recent years, 7% of the country's industrial output.

Large orchards belonging to the kibbutz flanked both sides of the road as we climbed steadily south towards the entrance. Near the gate, we stopped to rest on a shaded bench and to appreciate the marvelous view of Jerusalem to the north and of the hills around its periphery.

After a while, we found washrooms and cold drinking water in the lobby of a modern hotel located on the kibbutz. Beside the hotel, a beautiful lawn shaded with large trees provided a great place to relax and take in the panoramic view spread before us of Bethlehem to the south, the new suburb of Gilo to the west, and the barren Judean wilderness to the east. To the left of Bethlehem, we could see the flat-topped peak of Herodian rising 800 meters above the desert floor. Perched on its conical peak lay the remains of a magnificent fortified palace built by Herod the Great.

The quietness of Yom Kippur was broken by the wail of a muezzin from Bethlehem. Security patrols were the only vehicles on a road that wound through the valley far below us. This kibbutz had not always enjoyed the peace and rest that we experienced that day. Placed as it was on the pre-1967 border with Jordan, it was a target for Arab troops and changed hands several times in the wars of 1948 and 1967. We talked for a time with a lady who was staying in the hotel for the weekend. Then, after reading a bit, I lay on the grass and fell asleep.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR SUKKOT

After returning home in the afternoon, we snacked on the things we had bought previously, slept for a while, and wrote postcards to friends and family back home.

The end of Yom Kippur at 6:00 p.m. was announced by the noise of traffic in the streets. In one of the front yards near the corner of our street, a family started building the wooden framework for their *sukkah* (booth). For the seven-day Festival of *Sukkot*, the *sukkah* would be where a family would eat their meals and perhaps sleep. The *sukkah* serves as a reminder that the Israelites dwelt in tents in the wilderness on the way from Egypt to Canaan.