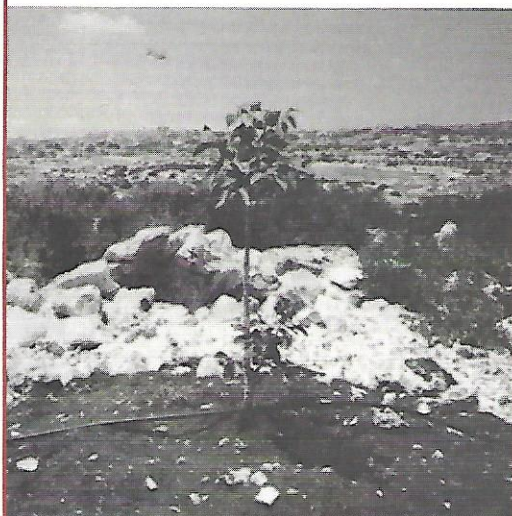


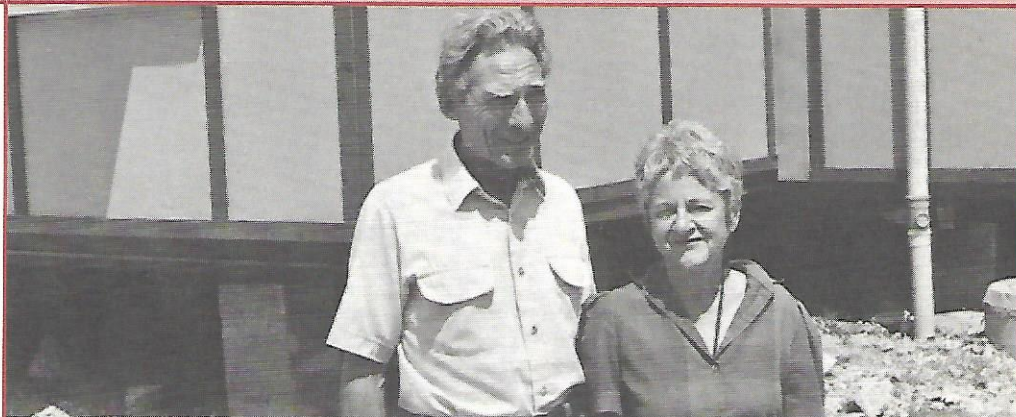
Settling In and Fighting Back at Har Halutz

When the first settlers of Har Halutz, the Reform free-enterprise settlement in the Galilee, moved onto their mountain across from the city of Carmiel, they found sterile mobile homes, an unpaved access road, and a rocky landscape interspersed with scrubby vegetation. Twelve families and nine children currently live at the settlement, and six more families are to move in shortly. Less than eight months after their arrival, the settlers have made dramatic changes. A total of 115 walnut trees, planted at Tu B'Shvat, line the paved entrance to the settlement along with a drip irrigation system that feeds those trees. Gravel walkways, flowers in small private gardens, and Israeli flags have transformed the site.

Har Halutz is a village of private families, each one earning its own livelihood, but all cooperating in the common interest. The settlers have named a nearby hill Tourist Mountain, and plan to build a guesthouse there and make it a center for conventions, seminars, and weekend retreats. They have also begun to integrate themselves into Israel's Progressive movement. Rabbi David Forman of Jerusalem is a regular visitor, and conducts study and discussion groups. Har Halutz is also joining with the Leo Baeck School in Haifa to design a new brochure that will help recruit Israelis into the Reform movement.



A TREE GROWS IN HAR HALUTZ: One of the 115 young walnut trees fed by drip irrigation which line the entrance to the settlement.



Ehud and Yonat Ryden at Har Halutz.

Ehud Ryden Denied Registration

Har Halutz has had its share of difficulties, including religious ones. One of its members is Ehud (formerly Edward) Ryden, a 64-year-old retired home designer from the San Francisco area. Ehud converted to Judaism in 1973 under the direction of a Reform rabbi, Joseph Asher. He and his wife, Yonat (formerly Jean), who is a Jew by birth, made aliyah to Israel in April 1985. When Ehud applied for citizenship in July 1985 at the offices of the Interior Ministry in Acre, he was subjected to the same treatment that Shoshana Miller had received in Tel Aviv; officials there refused to recognize him as a Jew, and insisted that his conversion be referred to Haifa's Orthodox rabbinical court, which was certain to reject it. Knowing that he was entitled to be registered as a Jew under the Law of Return, Ryden refused to go to the court, and his identity card is now marked "not registered" in the categories of nationality and religion.

"I was very hurt that, having undergone the conversion process, which is no easy matter, the State of Israel did not accept me as a Jew," Ryden said.

Nonetheless, having swapped his comfortable California home for a trailer on a hilltop in the Galilee, Ryden said that he would not be cowed by the Orthodox bureaucracy's defiance of the law. Like Shoshana Miller, Ryden believes that Reform Jews must fight back, and he has sent a generous check and a letter of encouragement to ARZA's

Religious Rights Fund, which is financing the legal challenge to the Interior Ministry's actions.

Members Back Ryden

Ryden's aggressive attitude is shared by virtually all residents of Har Halutz, where approximately one quarter of the settlers are converts. In an open letter sent last May to Prime Minister Peres, the settlement members demanded that discrimination against Reform converts be ended. The letter stated, in part: "As members of the movement for Progressive Judaism we came to the Galilee to build and to be built, and to add the development of this Galilee mountain to the works of our sister settlements in the Arava—Yahel and Lotan. By our aliyah to the State of Israel, study of her language, integration into her population, contribution to her productivity and service in her army, we are proving our desire to become rooted in the land and to add our contribution to the heritage of Israel. . . . We (now) turn to you, in our names and in the names of those who intend to join us, and request that you say to your subordinate, the Minister of the Interior: 'Stop this discrimination!'" The letter was also signed by 15 visiting members of the UAHC Board of Trustees.

Har Halutz is an ARZA project, and receives an annual grant from ARZA of \$22,000 to be used for recruitment. Congregational groups visiting Israel are urged to visit Har Halutz. Arrangements may be made through the ARZA office.