

# IN THE GALILEE CLOUDS

*Chaya Burstein*

We woke up in the clouds again this morning. The scrub oaks are dark stubby shadows against the grayness. A donkey brays in Kisra, the Druze village, invisible on the next hillside. And the rich, tangy smells of oak and bay laurel drift in the windows on wisps of mist. It's 6 a.m. For my husband Mordy it's time for exercise, breakfast and a quick drive down the mountainside to his job as construction superintendent in the nearby town of Karmiel. Before I start my own work I'll step out of the caravan to water the vegetables and breathe the gentle, damp air. I'll watch the sun burn through clouds and see Kisra and our other neighbors appear. In this clear Calilee air I'll even see the blue line of the Mediterranean on the west and on the east the round hills rolling down to the Kinneret. I'll admire the tiny green tomatoes and squashes in our rocky garden—our first harvest. And I'll pinch myself again to realize that we're here in Israel at last. We're clearing rocks and striking roots and soon we'll build our permanent home here on quarter acre plots on a mountaintop in northern Israel.

Our settlement is called Har Halutz, Hebrew for 'pioneer mountain.' We are a group of sixteen families made up of 60% westerners and 40% Israelis and 17 mostly sabra children. There are retirees among us and newly married youngsters, and all ages in between. Our members work as artists, carpenters, teachers, engineers, computer programmers and an architect, a writer and a potter. Most of us find work in Karmiel, just down the hill, or in Haifa and Naharia, an hour's drive away. In addition to earning a living we're working at developing a way of life with each other and with neighboring settlements. Many of us are Reform Jews. We are slowly evolving Sabbath services and holiday celebrations that are meaningful and enjoyable. Last Sabbath eve we started the service by walking up the road at sundown singing L'ha Dodi. At Purim there was a swinging, glittering masquerade party, and at Sukkot we built a giant macrame Sukkah and had a puppet show for the kids of all the nearby communities.

We argue and disagree a lot—about everything from a dog litter law to standards for our permanent houses. I think we argue because we care a great deal about Har Halutz. We also share with each other much joy at being up here. The archaeologists tell us that this mountain hasn't had a permanent settlement since the days of the Second Temple. We found an ancient earth filled stone wall that our ancestors had built. We will build our first permanent house close by. That gives me a good feeling, a sense of being rooted even more deeply than my new tomato plants.

We need only one thing ... more people to join us on Har Halutz. We recruit both in Israel, mainly among Olim families, and in the U.S. Families interested in our project, while in Israel, are invited to call Hal, our general secretary at (04) 925-270 to arrange for a visit.

Haim Sharett in February and March and Hal Applebaum from April to mid-June will be visiting the U.S. and would be delighted to meet with all interested families. To arrange for a meeting please call or write the *Aliyah Desk* at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10021-7046. Phone (212) 249-0100 Ext. 548.