



## The Eastern Mediterranean

### GEOGRAPHY

### Visit to a Kibbutz

*A kibbutz is a special type of settlement in Israel. The people of a kibbutz own the community as a group, including its land, housing, and factories. They equally share the farming and other work, as well as the community's food and profits. In the 1990s about three percent of Israel's population lived on one of the nation's 270 kibbutzim. Here, an Israeli from Jerusalem describes her visit to a kibbutz.*

With a population of about 650 adult members, 400 children, and 150 temporary residents such as volunteers, . . . Makom is one of the largest kibbutzim in Israel. Makom's . . . sources of income come from the production of agricultural machinery and food canning . . . [and] from the kibbutz's agricultural crops: wheat, cotton, olives, citrus fruit, beef, fish, and honey.

The kibbutz has a . . . school consisting of twelve grades, each class having its own living unit. From the age of six weeks, all kibbutz children are raised in the children's homes and taken care of by a *metapelet* [a job similar to a nanny]. Each afternoon they visit with their parents, then spend the rest of their time in children's company. In addition to studying, participating in social activities, and working, the kibbutz children sleep and take most of their meals together. Parents and children do maintain, however, a very close relationship. . . .

The kibbutz society is a direct democracy. Committees cover all aspects of life, and all the committees (with the exception of the Social Committee) are responsible to the elected secretariat [board of administrators]. The entire adult community may take part in the decision-making process through the assembly, which meets every Saturday night. . . .

From the outside, the apartments of each separate area in the kibbutz look alike; but, within, each room reflects the personalities of its occupants. The apartments of older, long-time kibbutzniks are tiny and extremely modest. . . . The younger members generally live farther out . . . in newer neighborhoods on the hills. Their apartments are spacious and furnished in contemporary [modern] styles; their kitchens are well equipped and adjoin the large living areas. . . .

The children's homes are in the center of the kibbutz, surrounded on all sides by adult homes and, farther out, factories and agricultural buildings. . . . Dogs wander freely through the multicolored fences. The children wear used, sometimes shabby, clothes. In the heat of the summer, many run about barefoot. . . . [But] all give the air [appearance] of being extremely well tended. . . .

The dining room is a huge airy hall. . . . At the entrance, a bulletin board announces various classes, meetings, and trips. People sit in twos

and threes, scattered about the room. . . . There is a continuous hum of voices, constant movement. This is an obvious gathering place. . . .

During the week, people are busy working. Nevertheless, numerous people walk unhurriedly on the paths, as if on vacation. They stop, completely at their leisure, to talk with toddlers taken for walks by their *metapelets*. I visit the various “branches”: the factories, kitchen, laundry. I take a drive in the fields. . . . I meet several members . . . and wonder at the incongruity [difference] between their personalities, talents, and the kinds of jobs they perform daily. A woman who wrote educational programs for the whole country sits in the laundry room folding shirts, pants, and towels throughout the day. . . . A man who teaches at the kibbutz teachers’ college sits, twice a week, on the food line in the factory, sorting olives. . . . Physical work is a value practiced in the kibbutz.

In the evening, lights are turned on along the paths, and the dining hall, at the center of the kibbutz, is brightly illuminated. Parents walk their children back to the children’s homes to put them to bed. Most people rest in their rooms, watching TV. Some attend various meetings and study groups.

. . . Tonight, there is a discussion on the future of the assembly meeting [that is held each Saturday], a . . . [practice] that seems to be on the decline. About fifty members attend—the “serious” people of the community and the members of the secretariat. Promptly at 11:00 P.M., a summary is presented by the chairman. There is a policy of closing all meetings at 11:00, to allow for enough sleep before the following day’s work.

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From Introduction (retitled “Visit to a Kibbutz”) from *Kibbutz Makom: Report from an Israeli Kibbutz* by Amia Lieblich. Copyright ©1981 by Amia Lieblich. Reprinted by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

**Understanding What You Read** After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. How are the living arrangements in a kibbutz different from those in a typical American community?

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2. How is an Israeli kibbutz governed?

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3. What evidence does the reading present to support the statement in the introduction that all the residents of a kibbutz share its workload?

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**Activity**

Using the reading as a guide, make a map of a typical kibbutz.