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1 Haifa

You say the word "house" and it means so many different things to different people. One person sees it on an open road in the countryside; another sees a village. One thinks of a farm; another of a cliff dwelling in the urban landscape. Environment is culture and culture is archetypal; it grows from deep within you, embodies long-lived feelings towards shelter, family, community and self. To me the word "house" calls up images peculiar to my early environment.

It was a unique time when I was growing up in Israel. It was Israel in the making. Those were the days when the immigrants were coming in. The British were trying to stop them. There was the war of 1948. I was ten then.

I clearly remember the 14th of May, 1948. We were off school, about thirty of us boys and girls aged ten, and we rushed down to Haifa's city hall square. Loudspeakers were strung on the trees and light poles. There were so many people we could not move. All of a sudden, there was silence and over the speaker came the voice of David Ben Gurion: "We members of the National Council . . . by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and by resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations hereby proclaim the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be called Israel."

It seemed everybody around was crying. At that moment the word "family" meant everybody around us. The word "community" had such a special reality that for many years after I was reluctant to use it. It had a kind of reverence that bears no mention.

In those days people did not lock their doors because there were no thieves. Tel Aviv had no prostitutes; it has today, because it's a "normal" place, but then it was a collection of people who had come there for special reasons through a very selective process. There was an air of being part of something unique.

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We all were active in our youth groups, each with its specific political allegiance. Starting at the age of ten, boys and girls met twice a week, organized hikes into the country and spent the summers in kibbutz work camps. We would work half-days and, in exchange, the kibbutz gave us food and lodging and the use of their recreation facilities. We did everything with the kibbutz members, ate in their dining room, washed in their showers, worked in their fields. We worked hard. This life made us independent; in one sense it detached us from our families; it made us dependent on that bigger family, those fifty boys and girls with whom we spent our whole waking life.

This detachment from our parents, this kind of independence, meant that from a young age we had an unusual relationship with them, the kind of relationship between equals that made possible communication as between friends. Many of the children of the kibbutz – for whom this relationship is even more pronounced than for us, the children of the city – expressed this symbolically by calling their parents by their first names. Authority was clearly not a thing to be gotten by decree or by virtue of happening to be mother or father, but rather by the assertion of one's personality and convictions. The greater family was to become a permanent fact. When I returned to Israel in 1967, after fifteen years of absence, a good part of those fifty friends came to Haifa where we once again met. They came with their husbands and their wives and we sat and talked until late. We had all developed in different ways and in different directions; some of us had little in common. But we still felt linked to each other the way only members of a family feel.

At the age of twelve, we went on a five-day hike into the mountains of Galilee. We would march twenty to twenty-five kilometers a day, sleep in crusaders' forts and in deserted ruins of temples. Our group leaders were only sixteen and they were the oldest. Thinking as a father now, I can't imagine my daughter, when she is twelve, going with fifty other people her age into the country, with three people of sixteen to lead them.

Our ideal as children was that when we were eighteen, we would leave home and, after the army, start our own kibbutz. Four out of five in my generation belonged to such youth groups and had the same idea. All my social thinking was in terms of that kind of life. In the end, maybe one in five did it, maybe not even that. But it was our social dream.

We were in very close contact with nature. Haifa, my home town, which is a high-density city by North American standards, is a hill overlooking a harbor. The whole city has roads that follow the contours up the hill. These are connected by steps everywhere, so we spent our lives walking up and down stairs rather than driving.

Haifa as a city had a lot to do with my feelings about environment. Even though I lived in an apartment, like most apartment buildings there, it was so arranged as to give each dwelling its own private entrance on the hill. I had fifty chickens

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and two goats, and I had two beehives – a little farm in the middle of the city. As in other Mediterranean cities, the line between rural and urban is softer than in North America. There is more interpenetration. Yet, at the same time, it's an *urban* environment, not a suburban environment. It's dense, compact, mixed – probably a little denser than Habitat. Except for the old part of the city which was stone built by the Arabs, Haifa was basically Bauhaus architecture, i.e. it was built during the thirties and forties by Europeans who were part of the modern movement. It's probably one of the few places with a stylistically consistent architecture of the "international style," circa 1930.

In high school I drew cars and houses, as any kid does. I loved mathematics and chemistry and I probably would have enjoyed specializing in either. I could not have become a painter, but I could have become a mathematician. I even thought about architecture as a career but I could not reconcile being an architect with being a kibbutz member, and so I decided I would study agricultural engineering. I was also very interested in – in fact, obsessed with – animals.

The beehives took a lot of my energy. Bees are fascinating creatures. You get a wax base on a frame which is put into the hive and the bees build a very regular pattern of hexagonal cells upon it. No machine has ever been able to match their accuracy in making the actual honeycomb. If you make it by machine the bees won't use it. Some of the cells have white spots in them because there is a bee developing; some have liquid in them, the sugar syrup; some are sealed with very dark wax because they are filled with honey; some of them are bigger because they are nourishing a potential queen. The male cells, too, are bigger than the female cells.

If you try to combine two beehives by putting one on top of the other, the bees kill each other because of the foreign scent. You have to separate them with a piece of newspaper. They immediately start attacking the newspaper, trying to go through it to kill each other, but it takes them about half a day to do it because they don't have the tools to cut paper, and, by the time they get through, the foreign scent has mingled with their own and they don't know who is who anymore.

Bees have such a sense of location that if you move your beehive two feet away, at night they will all come back to the spot where the beehive was and stay there and freeze to death. You have to move hives and bees a long way, five miles or more. When they emerge they find such a foreign environment that they re-establish their sense of location and learn to come back to that spot. This means that if you want to move your beehive two feet, you must first move if five miles away, leave it there for two or three days, and then move it back to the new spot. Otherwise, you'll lose all your bees.

I would, without doubt, have become an agricultural engineer if political events had not intervened. Half the heavy industry in Israel is owned co-operatively by

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the trade unions. It's not state controlled; it's not state owned; it's trade-union controlled and owned. More than half the people in the country are members of the Histadrut, the trade union federation. Like most independent businessmen my parents were not Histadrut members. Naturally, I was, like all my friends, "socialist" all the way. This gave rise to many discussions between father and me, and between many of my friends and their parents. I believed in the kibbutz as the only way, and in the co-operative movement.

I still believe that socialism in its co-operative form in Israel is the highest social development reached anywhere in our century. In my home town for example, the bus company was owned by the bus drivers. To join it, you had to have enough money to buy half a bus. You bought half a bus and you became your own boss. This is not bureaucratic socialism; it's a much more humane interpretation of Marxism. I think the kibbutz is an open-ended, civilized interpretation, respectful of man in contrast with the Russian misinterpretation. The kibbutz members actually live by the rule, "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." There is no private property, only communal property. Everything is owned by the community, not the state, and that is a big difference.

In 1953, the Israeli government, in response to an economic and currency crisis, restricted imports, and that finished my father's business, which was importing textiles. It was terrible for him; he seemed to take it in a very personal way. He considered the government acts to be an infringement on what he felt to be basic private enterprise, and he refused to work in the flourishing black market. For a while he became politically active, working for the right-of-center party supporting the perpetuation of free enterprise. He also tried other business ventures but they appeared to be unworkable in the climate of the time. Slowly he ate up his capital and, in discouragement, decided to leave Israel.

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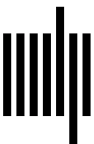

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