

Kibbutz Bet Alfa



In 1922 my parents left for Israel (then Palestine), where they founded the Bet Alfa kibbutz. They began with nothing. Some settlement organization bought land from the Arabs, which had for a long time, several tens, more likely hundreds of years been uncultivated anyways. At first they put up tents on the fallow land...and today it's this nice little town, a settlement. Bet Alfa was composed of primarily Zionists from Czechoslovakia and partly from Germany. My parents belonged to the first members, who at least partly knew each other. The rest got to each other later. The Bet Alfa kibbutz still exists. In the year 2000 I was in Israel, and by coincidence I managed to visit it, it was about five or ten kilometers off our route, so when I said that I'd like to see it, that I was born there, the driver took us there. Today there are three to four hundred people living there. I have no idea how many there were during my parents' time. The important ones for me are primarily those who the same as we returned to Czechoslovakia, we were in contact with those. In the time of my parents, a rare mosaic floor of some synagogue from the 5th or 6th century was discovered there. Now it's quite famous, I've seen it in several publications, tours come to see it and they charge admission. Zionism was actually this communist movement. These were perhaps the first and last functional communist communes. Everyone gets according to his needs, and of course according to the cooperative's resources. The difference between this and a JZD [Unified Agricultural Cooperative, where membership was compulsory] is quite large, and lies in the fact that members of the kibbutz can leave anytime. No one forced them to stay, no one forced them to join, when it was already founded, whoever else could come along and join them. On the other hand, there were people always leaving, so the membership was in constant flux. But I don't know at all whether they used to get any money back then. Probably not, but when someone needed a new shirt, he got a new shirt, his subsistence level had to be met. In the time when my parents were then, it was probably still a very poor kibbutz; it took some time before they managed to get it going reasonably well. Somewhere I found my parents' marriage certificate, it had been issued by the rabbinate in Jerusalem. The date was according to the Jewish calendar, so I had to look up what the actual year had been. I found out that they had lived together for some time, they didn't get married until 1926, so at a time when my brother had already been in this

world for two years. Probably over there they didn't make a big deal out of it. There was no rabbi in the kibbutz, so he had to come from Jerusalem, and undoubtedly some mass wedding was organized, where all those couples, some of which perhaps had several children, were married at once. And so all obligations were taken care of. Everyone in the kibbutz had to work, our parents too. We children were in this children's home all day. Every day towards the evening, or in the evening, I don't know any more how long we were there, the parents would pick up their children. They simply came from work, had supper, then went for the children, so that they could play a bit with them and so that the children would know that they've got parents at all, and when it was bedtime they would take them back to the children's home again. Children were in that home right from birth. While mothers were nursing, they didn't go out to the fields, but got some work to do in the compound and once in a while took a nursing break. My parents didn't have a house, only one little room somewhere that they lived in. That was their privacy. Everyone ate together in one hall, their laundry was all washed together, that's how it was. These days it's a bit of a different situation, the parents for example have this little bungalow, they can even cook for themselves, but from what I saw there, they still go for communal lunches and suppers. Apparently they also get some sort of an allowance now. Oddly enough, until it makes you stop and wonder, that ideal is still alive, after so many years. It probably doesn't have anything near the influence it once had, there aren't as many kibbutzim, people are running away from them, because that excessive modesty doesn't suit everyone, but it's still there. Some kibbutzim are quite wealthy; the one that I was in didn't exactly look all that rich, but the people in it somehow make do.