

Letters From a Kibbutz - #1  
The Pardez "Orchard"

Off two grateful mom's hands, while they chatted today for an hour, I took Noah "Noam" 7, his sister Noga, she's 4, Benji 3.5, and little Hagar, whose at that adorable age of being older than the other two young ones as she reminds us all- "ani almost hamesh" (5)... all preschoolers yet, . Their dads are doing army duty yesterday and today, Yom Kippur. We wandered further west into orchard with Sasha the shepherd dog. She can still have pups but she is 13 and very very attentive to the young ones, always watching and herding them. A fox and her three kit were playing on the hillside. Sasha got in between even though they are like 100 metres away.

There is a hot "Shuf" or desert wind gusting from the east from Jordan, but when you get into the orchard it's so wonderfully cool. Well comfortable enough to run half naked without shivering at all. The kids love it in the "pardez".

I picked a pomalite and the kids were jumping up and down in anticipation.

They are so funny! I whip out the Swiss army knife and deftly shell the fruit, split it in 4 and hand them a quarter. It's better than mother's milk as they all four roll around on their back on the ground sucking and munching and oooaaahhhh mmmmming.

All of the fruit is organic. No pesticides. Drip irrigation runs under the soil. There are little tubes sticking up every once in a while so the foxes and badger don't chew through to get at the water. It drips down into old halves of plastic containers below. The kids run off to rinse their hands in the dripping water and return for more fruit.

Only "Nogee" is bilingual, so I'm back speaking Ivrite as best I can...

"Ata rotsa pomalite? Kann? Oooo Zay-oh?"

Little voices all shout softly in unison, "Kaen! Kaen!"

Nogee alone says in a cute little voice... "kaen! kaen! yessa-please!"

The orchard is a magickall place. One cannot but help feeling close to the altar of the gawdess herself. This Kibbutz area has been settled for 5000 years. I took the kids to a nearby, small rocky shelf at the pardez edge where there is a tiny natural arc shaped cave about 1.5 metres at the tallest opening, about 5 metres wide and five metres back into the rock. Three metres above the ground there is a flat white Yerushalyam granite ledge.

On top, there is carved a perfect circle about one and a half metres diameter, with a donut sized centre hole bored down through the rock. The kids stay down below, while I go on top. They lay in the shade under the hole in the roof of the cave, looking up heads touching in a circle. I open the big shiny blade of my knife and direct the sun down and flash it in their eyes and they giggle.

Then they come running up to run round and round the 10 cm deep hollow, chasing each other inside this ancient long abandoned olive oil grind-press. I sit beside them surrounded by the shade of huge pine trees, on a round altar stone from aeons past, the shape and size of a small classroom dustbin, set in the rock. I have no oil to offer the olive gawdess, but I'm sure it's okay as she has no taste for human child offerings or my ass.