

# JERUSALEM LETTER

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

86  
JL: 85 / 22 Adar II 5746 / 2 April 1986

## BEIT SHEMESH AND KIBBUTZ TZORA – THE POTENTIAL FOR INTERACTION

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**Continuing Tension Between Development Towns and Kibbutzim / The Study / Similarities of Opinion / Contrasting Histories of Settlement / Differences in Politics / Settlement-Funding Priorities / Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes / Is There Desire for Cooperation? / Potential for Change**

### Continuing Tension Between Development Towns and Kibbutzim

*The development town of Beit Shemesh was propelled into the international eye in 1983 through the publication of Amos Oz's book, *In the Land of Israel*. In a memorable chapter recording his conversations with the local inhabitants at a Beit Shemesh outdoor cafe, Oz painted a picture of anger, frustration and discontent under the previous Labor government, mixed with hope and feelings that progress was being made under the Likud. In addition, the locals expressed the opinion that the residents of neighboring Kibbutz Tzora belittled and ignored them.*

*The antagonism between kibbutz and development town is part of the conventional wisdom of Israeli life. It is assumed that kibbutz members denigrate residents of development towns, whom they employ as unskilled labor in their factories and guest houses, while the latter respond with anger toward the rich kibbutzim.*

*In 1984, Lori Nevias of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs undertook a systematic study of the relationship between the town of Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora. Ms. Nevias lived and worked in Beit Shemesh for six months while conducting this study. The central feature of the study was a questionnaire administered to samples*

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*of the townspeople and Kibbutz Tzora members. The results were surprising and refute much of the conventional wisdom on the subject. We are pleased to present those results in this Jerusalem Letter.* —Daniel J. Elazar

### The Study

Much has been made of the political and social differences between kibbutzim and development towns in Israel. This conflict has recently caught the attention of the Israeli news media and literary community. Have these differences been overplayed? What are the extent and nature of the differences between the attitudes of a typical development town, such as Beit Shemesh, and its neighboring kibbutz, Tzora? What are the attitudes of Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora residents toward each other? This study was undertaken to measure the existing interaction among Kibbutz Tzora and Beit Shemesh samples, and whether there is a desire for greater interaction. Also measured were the attitudes of the townspeople and the kibbutz members toward various economic and social issues in Israeli society, as well as perceptions of themselves and each other as kibbutz and development town residents.

A total of 248 questionnaires were completed and analyzed: 110 from Beit Shemesh proper, 90 from Givat Sharett, a new neighborhood in Beit Shemesh with a population that is considered more religiously and socioeconomically upscale than that of old Beit Shemesh, and 48 from Tzora. The male-female ratio was almost even. All respondents were Jewish, with 77.3 percent of the Beit Shemesh sample and 69.8 percent of the Givat Sharett sample indicating that they were religiously observant, in contrast to only 31.8 percent of the Tzora respondents.

### Similarities of Opinion

Despite the great differences in ethnic and political composition of the Beit Shemesh and Tzora populations, a striking similarity of opinion toward issues emerges in the two samples. Both Tzora and Beit Shemesh indicated a great overall desire for kibbutz and development town interaction. Both groups felt that development towns should have the highest government

funding priority, and both indicated an overwhelming lack of support for funding settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. In the analysis that follows, there prove to be many more similarities than differences in attitudes among the residents of Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora.

### Contrasting Histories of Settlement

Although Beit Shemesh and Tzora are geographically very close, their different histories and the very different ideologies of their respective founders contributed greatly to the lack of interaction between them today. Tzora was founded in 1948 by Eastern European and South African immigrants, together with native Israelis. A kibbutz is a highly integrated, self-selected socialist community. Its members eat and work together and raise their children cooperatively. Tzora is considered a well-established settlement and a strong kibbutz from an economic and social standpoint.

Beit Shemesh was established in 1952. It was one of the towns founded as part of the Israeli government's program of planned urban development in which large numbers of immigrants, mostly from North African countries, were settled. These development towns usually began as tin-hut transit camps. Although both of these groups arrived in Israel within four years of each other, it was the people of the kibbutz who were soon in the position of helping out the Beit Shemesh settlers, most of whom were from North Africa, did not know Hebrew, and were unaccustomed to the urban lifestyle into which they were thrust.

### Differences in Politics

The differences in the Tzora and Beit Shemesh populations extend also to religion and politics. The Beit Shemesh and Givat Sharett populations were inclined to support parties with a tough stand regarding the Arabs and the future of the territories. These parties include Likud, Tehiya, National Religious Party, Shas (Sephardi Torah Guardians) and Kach. This reflects the heavy development town support that these parties have gained in recent years. In Tzora, the overwhelming majority indicated left or left-of-center support for parties such as Labor, Citizens Rights Movement, Shinui, Yahad, Ometz

and Sheli. It is clear that there are a host of factors — political, religious, cultural, etc. — which have prevented cooperation between the kibbutz and development town populations. Yet there exists a need for integration. The question is, does the desire exist?

#### Settlement-Funding Priorities

Respondents were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating "lowest priority" and 7 "highest priority," in what order of priority should development towns; settlements in the Galilee, in the Golan Heights, in the Arava, and in Judea and Samaria; moshavim and kibbutzim receive government funding.

While the Beit Shemesh and Givat Sharett samples were virtually the same in their ranking of the different types of settlements for funding priority and similar in their mean score for each area of settlement, Tzora differed greatly from the development town sample in its ranking of priority. Tzora ranked settlement funding for Judea and Samaria seventh — the lowest score given by any sample to any of the settlement areas. However, both Beit Shemesh and Givat Sharett respondents ranked Judea and Samaria settlement sixth, a surprisingly low rating in view of their great support of political parties who strongly favor settlement in the territories.

Among the Beit Shemesh sample there was a strong correlation between party affiliation and settlement priority, although the total figures still indicate a general lack of support for funding of settlements in Judea and Samaria. While the mean ratings of Beit Shemesh and Givat Sharett for Judea and Samaria settlement-funding were higher on the average than the sixth highest score given by Tzora to the moshavim, there is still an overwhelming lack of support for such settlement-funding by both populations.

The strongest area of concurrence between Beit Shemesh and Tzora was priority for development town funding, ranked first by the development town and a close second by the kibbutz. However, this high rating may mean different things for each group. Beit Shemesh residents have a direct stake in development town funding, while Tzora members may be politically opposed to settling the West Bank in general.

Table 1

	B. Shemesh	G.Sharett	Tzora	Pop	N
Development					
Towns	5.55 (1)*	5.52(1)	5.40(2)	5.51	235
Galilee	4.67 (3)	4.86 (2)	5.52 (1)	4.92	231
Golan Heights	4.69 (2)	4.70 (3)	4.04 (4)	4.56	229
Arava	3.77 (4)	4.11 (4)	5.08 (3)	4.16	227
Moshavim	3.75 (5)	4.02 (5)	3.58 (6)	3.81	228
West Bank	3.56 (6)	3.66 (6)	2.28 (7)	3.38	210
Kibbutzim	3.16 (7)	3.29 (7)	3.81 (5)	3.34	229
(*rank)	X=4.16	X=4.30	X=4.32		

#### Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes

Both Tzora and Beit Shemesh residents gave significantly higher ratings to each other when asked to indicate their personal feelings toward both populations. Givat Sharett scored lower than Beit Shemesh on all questions, most probably as a result of its physical (and spiritual) separation from Beit Shemesh, as well as its greater physical distance from Tzora.

The mean score of Beit Shemesh residents' physical feelings towards Beit Shemesh was 4.91, as compared with 5.10 for Tzora residents' feelings towards Beit Shemesh. Likewise, Tzora residents gave themselves only a 4.24 rating, while Beit Shemesh residents gave Tzora an overall score of 5.02. This finding might indicate a natural tendency for people to be more critical of those who are nearer to them, as well as evidence of positive feelings between the two populations. Beit Shemesh has the most positive outlook on relations between Tzora and Beit Shemesh while Tzora has the least positive view. The feelings of both samples toward the residents of the other settlement are more positive than their overall assessment of the state of relations between the two groups.

Above all, the results illustrate that both the Tzora and Beit Shemesh samples underestimate the perception held by each community toward the other. While Tzora rated the Beit Shemesh residents' feelings towards them at 3.40, Beit Shemesh rated their feelings toward Tzora at 5.02. By the same token, Beit Shemesh respondents rated the feelings of Tzora towards them at 4.31, while Tzora rated their feelings toward Beit Shemesh residents at 5.10. The sense that one is perceived more negatively by one's neighbors than is the case must certainly have a negative effect

upon the desire for cooperation among both Tzora and Beit Shemesh residents.

### Is There a Desire For Cooperation?

A desire for cooperation in principle only signifies a willingness to cooperate in specific areas of endeavors. There the picture is less rosy. Respondents were asked to indicate in which of the following areas they favored cooperation between Beit Shemesh and Tzora: friendship, sports, social activities, trips, educational programs, ideological programs, joint elementary school, joint high school, joint college. As expected, areas of casual interaction, such as friendship, sports and social activities, received the greatest support, while sensitive areas such as education and ideological programs received the least support. The Beit Shemesh and Givat Sharett samples were proportionately much more supportive of joint education on the elementary, high school and college levels than was Tzora. Neither sample is very interested in ideological programs, and all three groups are fairly interested in social and educational activities and even more so in sports and friendship.

Table 2

#### In Which of These Areas do You Support Cooperation?

(\* percent of sample)

	B. Shemesh	Tzora	G. Sharett	N
Friendship	80(74.1)*	33(70.2)	60(68.2)	173
Sports	76(69.1)	44(91)	65(72.2)	185
Social activities	77(70.0)	32(66.7)	65(72.2)	174
Trips	71(64.5)	25(52.1)	49(54.4)	145
Educational programs	73(66.4)	33(68.8)	61(67.8)	167
Ideological programs	37(33.6)	17(35.4)	34(37.8)	88
Joint elementary school	56(50.9)	11(22.9)	46(51.1)	113
Joint high school	66(60.0)	19(39.6)	56(62.2)	141
Joint college	58(53.7)	29(60.4)	43(47.8)	130
Against all joint activities	6(5.5)	2(4.2)	4(4.4)	12

In order to isolate certain population characteristics accounting for the desire of kibbutz and development town interaction, a scale was created. It will henceforth be referred to as the "co-op" (cooperation) score, and consists of the

combined mean scores for the above areas plus one additional group of questions on the areas of the support of cooperation and the importance of cooperation. The co-op score measures a combination of the individual's feeling of the importance of cooperation and the number of areas in which that cooperation is supported. For convenience, the scores were simplified into high, medium and low.

Table 3  
Co-op Score

	Beit Shemesh	Tzora	G. Sharett	N
Low	11	2	11	9
Middle	7	4	10	8
High	82	94	79	83
	100	100	100	100
	(109)	(48)	(89)	(246)

A full 82.9 percent of all three samples reported high co-op scores, and it is clear from this scale that there exists a strong feeling of the importance of kibbutz and development town cooperation.

Respondents with a less than elementary school education reported the highest mean rating of the feelings of Tzora toward Beit Shemesh, while highly educated respondents reported the lowest rating. This held true for the rating of the attitude of Beit Shemesh toward Tzora. The highly educated respondents recorded the lowest mean score of 3.38 for this question. Again, the lowest educated respondents reported the highest mean rating of 4.15 for these relations, while the middle-educated gave a 3.86 rating. The overall rating by both samples indicated a much more negative perception of the attitudes of Beit Shemesh toward Tzora (mean score=3.79) than of Tzora toward Beit Shemesh (mean score=4.08). One can only speculate whether the samples were influenced by Israeli author Amos Oz's article on Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora, in which Beit Shemesh residents were portrayed as having rather negative feelings toward Tzora residents.

### Potential For Change

The essence of the difference between the populations of kibbutzim and development towns

does not lie in the bare fact that one is a kibbutz and the other is a development town, but rather in the country-of-origin, educational and religious differences that characterize those who reside in Beit Shemesh or Kibbutz Tzora. Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that there is no correlation between any of these variables and the desire for cooperation in principle between residents of Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora. Respondents of different origin, religious and non-religious individuals, and the educated and non-educated, all indicated strong support of interaction between Beit Shemesh and Tzora. Politics, which often seems to irreversibly divide the Israeli public on every issue, was not a major attitude determinant in this study. Although supporters of leftist parties were slightly more supportive of cooperation between kibbutzim and development towns, there is overwhelming support for cooperation among all areas of the political spectrum.

What is absent from this rosy picture is interaction. The vast majority of Beit Shemesh and Tzora respondents indicated that they have neither friends nor relatives from the other settlement, nor have they participated in the existing programs that are run explicitly to promote interaction between Beit Shemesh and Tzora, such as weekly folk dancing, a monthly inter-settlement singing workshop and joint holiday celebrations. The key to this lack of interaction lies in the feeling among both Beit Shemesh and Tzora residents that they are perceived much more negatively than the other settlement actually perceives them. Indeed,

respondents even rated the feelings of residents of their own settlements toward the other settlement as much more negative than people rated their own personal feelings toward each other. The negative correlation between respondents' education and their perceptions of the feelings of Tzora toward Beit Shemesh and Beit Shemesh toward Tzora is even more discouraging. If there is a need for integration between Beit Shemesh and Tzora to raise the education level, it is only logical that the most highly educated residents will be at the forefront of these efforts. It is clear that negative perceptions of each population's feelings toward each other have resulted in the lack of interaction between Beit Shemesh and Tzora that exists today. One must ask whether the realization that Beit Shemesh and Tzora do not actually have negative feelings about each other can change the status quo.

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*Lori Nevias completed her B.A. at Brooklyn College. In 1984, she was a student intern at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. She undertook this study under the direction of Professor Mervin Verbit, a JCPA Fellow, and staff researcher Hillel Frisch. She is presently back in Israel serving with Interns for Peace. The study as a whole is scheduled to be published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.*