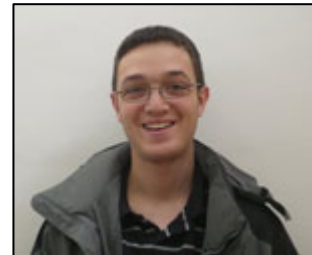




THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

by Eitan Cooper

As I write this last “alumni perspective,” I find myself sitting in a spacious dorm room which, in comparison to the Chabad Street “pit”, is a luxurious palace...



The anxious new students who arrived at Brandeis University this week were all assigned orientation groups, which were carefully designed to make us all feel comfortable. But a conversation I had with Rav Noam the other day made me realize that for a Jew on campus, there should be no such thing as comfort.

As I perused the busy bookstore, painstakingly looking for all of my textbooks, I passed by the Calculus, Biology, Economics and Anthropology sections. I was searching for the required texts for my class called “Topics in Advanced Talmud,” when I finally stumbled upon a Gemara and a shita mekubetzet. I chuckled to myself. This was really quite amazing... here I am, standing in a secular university, in a secular bookstore, with English textbooks surrounding me. And staring me right in the face was a sefer kadosh, one which Jews all over the world have coveted for thousands of years.

So, naturally, I rushed to email Rav Noam. “There still is some hope for us yiddin in secular college!” I wrote to him.

Now Rav Noam’s response may have been an attempt at humor. But the truth is that what he wrote back to me had a profound affect on my day, and hopefully on the rest of my college experience. Here’s what he wrote: “you see, that’s the problem with galus ... you go to Brooklyn, everything’s kosher, all the businesses are Jewish, you go to Brandeis, you can learn gemara .. nu, all is good in america - so why make aliyah???”

Rav Noam helped me to realize that while I have a *Gemara* class in my American college, and I have a huge Jewish community here, maybe I shouldn’t be so comfortable. He reminded me, quite bluntly, that I have to keep my priorities in order.

But how does one do that on a daily basis? How do Jews, faced by the challenges of *galus*, manage to keep their priorities in order?

I think that part of the answer lies in this week's *parsha*, *Ki Tetze*. In *Perek 21*, we read about the famous "*ben sorer umoreh*." The *pasuk* reads,

"**18** If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, that will not hearken to the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and though they chasten him, will not hearken unto them;"

The English text translates the word "*shomea*" as "hearken." But *Onkelus*, the famous *tanna* and first translator of the *Torah*, translates the word as "*Mekabel*" or "accept." In other words, *Onkelus* feels that the problem with the *ben sorer umoreh* isn't that he is not listening, but that he is not *accepting*. The *ben sorer umoreh's* crime is so heinous because he refuses to accept another into his life. He refuses to accept that there may be an authority that is greater than him- his parents. *Kal V'chomer*, this boy couldn't even imagine accepting *Hashem* into his life. He selfishly thinks that he is the source for his own existence. And as a result, the child cuts himself off from the community.

Proof for this can be seen within the *Torah* scroll itself (and in your *chumash*; that's what the abbreviations stand for). *Torah* scrolls are divided into columns, and within each column there are lines which are "*patuach*," or open ended, and lines which are "*satum*," or close ended (this is why we often see a *ו* and a *ו* in our *chumashim*). The section in a *Torah* scroll devoted to *ben sorer umoreh* is seemingly "cut off-" the immediate lines preceding and following the description of this case are "*satum*." Maybe this is because the child has "cut himself" out of the community by refusing to accept others?

Acceptance can be very difficult, especially when dealing with parents and even more so with *Hashem*. Humans do not always want to allow others into their life. We do not want to surrender authority to someone else, and oftentimes it is our nature to want to make decisions for ourselves. Deciding to accept someone else in your life, and make room for "other-ness," as Rabbi Aaron would say, is one of our biggest challenges.

But "other-ness" is crucial. Accepting loved ones is exactly what *Hashem* does for us every day. So, in a way, when we accept *Hashem* in our lives, we are elevating our actions to a divine level.

I think this can be one approach to keeping our priorities in order. The more we are able to recognize that acceptance of others into our life is a divine act, and the more we recognize that we are never self sufficient, the more we can be aware of *Hashem's* presence in our daily lives. And this, *b'ezrat Hashem*, will help us to realize our ultimate goal, which is not studying *Gemara* in Boston, Massachusetts on a college campus, but learning in *Eretz Hakodesh*.

I hope that the Orayta 5770 students are inspired, empowered and educated, and I wish them *b'hatzlacha*.

Shabbat Shalom,

Eitan Cooper