



A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Linda Brownstein

*"One who teaches another child TORAH is regarded by the tradition as one who gave birth to the child."
(Sanhedrin 19 B)*



I can't believe that this year at Orayta is winding down this *Shabbat* for all of us. Our family feels like we've been there with Natan at Orayta and in the Holy Land all year long (in addition to Chanukah!) and what a beautiful, deep journey this has been for all of us.

Last year at this time, we were all worrying about a million things. (This year we are still worrying about a million things, but maybe they are different things to worry about?!) Israel for a year or not? Credits through college or not? Which program to choose? To trust a Yeshiva program in its pioneer year? What's Orayta? How many bags should you take to Israel? How many bags to bring back? We have to decide that NOW? How are we going to get your pillow and blankets to Israel? How will you work out? Are you sure you won't eat dairy? Will you promise to come home? Will you eat at my table when you do? Will you keep in touch? Will you bring honor to your family? Your ancestors? Will you deepen your family roots? Will you live within your budget? Will you love us still upon your return?

It is an unbelievable feeling to reflect back to this year and have such a profound, loving feeling toward everything that has transpired at Orayta. From the beginning, everything seemed like it was working out. Well, ok...not everything...Natan's money and *tzedakah* was stolen in the first week from the workers. Oh yes, then the blankets got lost in customs and Natan had to take the bus to Tel Aviv and use his best Hebrew with the customs agent to negotiate getting his boxes returned to him. And Natan had to get himself some dairy free pizza on Thursday nights. (Thank you Scott.) This was about not to sweat the small stuff. The very most important aspects of this year in the holy land, the highest quality of the Orayta *Rabbunim*, the diversity and philosophy of the program, the respectful way that our children were treated, the relationships from every direction and in every possible configuration that were nurtured, satisfied, allowed to grow...and it seemed that everything clicked together in just a short moment of time, that the learning unfolded authentically and the desire to grow, learn, deepen, be connected, understand and integrate... it seemed like it all happened so beautifully in this journey of this year.

Lieba, Ilan and I will very much miss our Orayta year too. Our family downloads all the pages from the Orayta news every *Shabbas*. Rabbi David Aaron, Reb Binny and Student's perspective...and we take turns over *Shabbas* curling into a cozy chair around the *Shabbas* table or in the living room and read the words from these *Rabbunim* in the Holy land that "just so happen" to be Natan's teachers. What a gift. We have been so inspired by the teachings of the students at Orayta and the Rabbis; we are so grateful that we too have had a year of deepening, learning, growing, questioning. We have each deepened our davening and personal practice, influenced by all of you...Orayta's staff and students. With Rabbi David Aaron's books piled on our table, we explore some aspect of our Jewish lives and souls most every day/week, and we feel very connected to everything Natan has experienced. (Our phone bills are testimony to that!) That connection has brought an exceptional experience of aliveness, pride and uplift to our lives here, far away in Portland, Oregon, USA. Natan's blog has touched many hearts here in Portland and throughout the country as his very heartfelt words, inspired by his experiences through Orayta were sent through cyberspace. Natan's accounting of *Yom Ha Zikaron* brought me to sobbing tears as I drove to work that morning, and inspired us here in Portland to honor the day with greater depth, meaning and a real connection to the State of Israel.

As some of you may be aware the day after we returned from our trip to Israel in December, and the amazing 5 days together at Orayta, our Rabbi, Rabbi Aryeh Hirschfeld z"tl passed away. Since that time, we have been emotionally frozen in that time of year in many ways. We count all our mourning and the community and personal changes from that day forward and we have not really been able to sit down and talk to anyone about our trip to Israel and all that we experienced. Really, not one story at all, because that moment of time exactly upon our return became the time of our Rabbi's death and it seems that nothing yet has been spoken about surrounding those dark days. I wanted to be sure that I send my gratitude to the *Rabbunim* at Orayta for counseling Natan at such a difficult time for him, for allowing him to devote teachings, services and *kaddish* to the memory of our beloved Rabbi. I thank you to Natan's friends who have been there for him in so many ways this year, listening on the other end of our long phone calls and traveling with Natan to visit our friends and family all over the countryside since I preferred that Natan didn't travel alone. *Todah rabah* for all this and so much more.

I am so appreciative and thankful to *Hashem* for the blessing of your idea of a parent week/*Shabbas* time together and how amazingly you pulled it all off. *Mamesh*. What a delightful, sweetness. I have never celebrated *Erev Kabbalat Shabbat* before. . I have rarely, I can't remember when...been in a room with parents whose children were all in the same experience and been able to talk openly about this stage and age of development which has its confusing, preciousness. The sharing of our stories that afternoon with Reb David Aaron was one of insight for me and will positively impact my relationships with all my children. Touring the holy land with Reb Binny? It just doesn't get better than that! Hearing the stories, challenging our own heart to be filled with the passion of the holy land and to be able to speak out loud the voices that are sometimes quieted in the most beautiful, stark, dramatic places. The three of us were so moved and drawn in by the teachings that week. Natan's passion growing for *Gemarah* with Rabbi Noam. Scott and Devorah taking care of so much food thoughtfully and consciously organized. I loved being across the table from the families of the *Rabbunim* at Orayta. Sharing *Shabbas* with the kids and grandkids. Thank you for everything.

I am so grateful. For absolutely everything. For loving my son and guiding him this year. For finding him in the United States (or actually, Reb Moshe was it Vancouver B.C.?!), for opening the door to invite him in, welcome him and help him to know himself at a time of his life that will profoundly impact his view of himself forever. For presenting Judaism in such a way that allowed him to let it seep through his bones and deep into his heart. So why does the *Sh'ma* say, "*Upon your heart, Al I'vavchem?*" So that when your heart breaks open, all these teachings, all these memories, all this love, all the joys and sadness...can slip through your heart and be closer to your soul.

At one point this year I wanted to have a talk with Natan about his new *Shomer Shabbas* life path. I went to Orayta, to the Holy Land to see him, yet I never said a word, never brought up the subject. It wasn't really necessary. I realized that it is now my job as the mom to step back, step aside, walk alongside differently, lead and follow. I have learned something profound this year...about how to walk with my son, alongside *Hashem*. I ask *Hashem* for the blessing of a long, healthy life so that I can walk with my children and *Hashem* for many, many years.

I bless all of you, all of us whose lives Orayta has touched on this year's journey together, on this *Shabbas of Beha'alotekha*...When You Raise Up. Wow Orayta. Blessed *Rabbunim* and staff...you have had the vision, the strength and *gevurah* to raise up a program that had been but a dream. In gratitude for lighting the fire, lighting the living menorah inside each of us...that has been inspired by your holy flame ...that will carry us forward in life. To recognize the challenge of this Torah portion is to hear the call for spiritual practice. ***To our sons especially, I bless you all to gather your fullest attention on this Shabbas, to set forth on the path before you with all that has inspired you with incredible renewal.***

I remember Natan telling me that you had discussed together the amazingness of this year, "There will never be another first...*Rosh Hashanah* together....first *minyán* at the *Kotel*...first Torah for Orayta..." Now this *Shabbas* is the first last *Shabbat* of Orayta and we are all part of this with all of you.

Shabbat Shalom. Todah Rabah.
B'shalom,
Mateh Esther Brownstein
Mom of Natan, Lieba, Ilan.

Natan's family, Lieba, Ilan, Mateh Esther/Linda and his dad Stan live in Portland Oregon. We have lived here for 10 years, but we left Ketchikan, Alaska so that we could be part of Jewish life and community off the remote island in Southeast Alaska.

While in Alaska we found very unique, creative and beautiful ways to deepen our Jewish practice. Lieba and Ilan are 15 years old and 3rd generation twins, having just finished their freshman year of H.S. and have missed their brother Natan desperately. It is all our dream to return to the Holy Land as often as possible, and our trip this year inspired me, the mom, to make Aliyah there, Bezrat Hashem in the soon/future.