



## A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Sara Morrow

### *In the Footsteps of Our Children -- A Parent's Perspective*



My oldest son, Zach, spent last year at Orayta with its inaugural class. Unfortunately, I could not attend the 2008 Family Winter Retreat, and when I read the "Parent Perspective" for the week, I knew that I had missed a very special opportunity. *Baruch HaShem*, my middle son, Levi, also decided to attend *Yeshivat Orayta*. I would possibly be given another chance, an experience that I was not about to miss!

As I was making plans for my visit to Israel, I was thinking: "Ok, so I only have 8 days with my feet on the ground. If I spend 5 of them at the Orayta parent retreat, that still leaves me three days to travel. One day would evaporate in the trip to see the *Otniel Hesder yeshiva* where Zach is now learning in preparation for the I.D.F. There would be one day to deliver the multitude of packages for the neighbor's kids studying in Jerusalem and the environs, leaving one singular day to do whatever I please. One day...."

Should I go to *Tsfat*, I wondered? Maybe a bus trip from *Mea Shearim* to the *Kivrei Tzadikim* in *Tveria*? Then it hit me: what I need is a good hike and a warm soak; that means *Ein Gedi* and the Dead Sea. Perfect. What could be better than a spa day?

**Day 1** with Orayta involved a group *tiyul* (field trip) to the *Beit She'an* gladiator stadium and the kosher McDonalds (I actually think this was the true impetus for the trip), hop scotching our way through Jewish history and geography:

*Mitzpe Yericho* - a full view of modern day Jericho and the desert beyond.  
*Andarta Habica* - a war memorial, and war weaponry sculpture reaching perhaps 30 feet over our heads and above the Judean Desert.  
 The Jordan Valley's Le Bellevoir Crusader Fort – to find a space between the raindrops to *daven Mincha* in the Knight's of St. John's dining room, and to take in the sweeping vista of the valley, imagining the physical endurance and raw guts required to mount that summit in the heat of battle.  
*Naharayim* - a garden of eight memorial mounds commemorating the lives of eight school girls shot down at play by a Jordanian soldier.  
*Beit She'an* - the Roman gladiator stadium where Jewish slaves were pitted against lions for the pure sport of the contest. Here also is where one of our

great martyrs was burned to death, wrapped in wet wool and a *torah* scroll, while his *talmidim* looked on.

The group jumped on and off the bus throughout the day, experiencing the full spectrum of history and emotion that is *Eretz Yisrael*; it was a very full day. Rav Binny filled each crevice of time with history, anecdotal thoughts, and heartfelt remembrances of his own experiences throughout the area.

**Day 2 - Shacharit. Shiurim:** Philosophy and Mysticism with Rav Aaron, Rav Binny on *Rambam's Hilchot Deot*, *Chumash* with Rav Sam. *Mincha*. Lunch. *Gemara* with Rav Binny, *Chavruta* time *Maariv*. Dinner....a virtual watershed of Torah. Overseeing this operation: Rav Moish, Devorah, Scott, Shlomit and Ov -- what a team !

**Day 3** -- more, yes more, *Torah* learning. I am enjoying every *pasuk* of learning with the young men, their parents, the alumnae visiting and the *rebbeim*. Post lunch we embark upon Rav Binny's foot tour of the Old City, a trip unlike any I have ever tramped. It is one thing to conjure in your mind the visages of *Dovid HaMelech* and *Yehudah HaMaccabi* walking the cobblestones -- or the Roman legions encamped in the hillsides laying siege to the city. It is another to experience the mental slideshow of hand-to-hand combat through the effort of 1967 to liberate Jerusalem. However, to synthesis the two time periods and straddle the cradle of history's surge fractures the mind and leaves the heart longing to return Home. That my sons and yours have the opportunity to live this history and work with this particular group of renaissance educators is a tremendous gift to them and to the Jewish people.

As evening arrived, we settled down to a simple meal followed by a stream of music, stories and *divrei Torah*. It is Thursday night and we begin preparations for *Shabbat*. We are coddling the spirit, beginning to ease the week's demands, nourishing the heart and mind with the anticipation of the coming *Shabbat*.

**Day 4 - Machane Yehuda** is all about *Shabbat*. Piles of pungent spices, sweet *rugalach*, warm *lechem* and *challah* greet the senses. There is pushing and acquiescing, the ebb and flow of human bodies and trolleys of produce cartons. It is exciting and anticipatory in its rhythm. 3 o'clock arrives. Parents and students file into the *Beit Midrash*. Time to *daven Mincha*, followed by stories and songs. After lighting candles in the *Beis*, we move to the roof for *Kabbalat Shabbat*. The sun reclines toward the West and the city tumult melts. Voices rise all around. It is a virtual symphony of joyous yearning as *Shabbat* approaches. The Dome of the Rock flashes a pixel of gold as the sun sighs behind the Jerusalem hills.

During *Maariv*, the rooftop chill begins to seep into the bones, and Orayta retires to the *Beit Medrash* -- turned dining room. The usual rituals are observed. *Nigunim* lead us from one course to the next as Rav Aaron speaks of *Shabbats* past and present. Rav Binny officiates at the post - *Oneg Q & A*. Happily exhausted, the parents retire bit by bit, leaving the diehard Orayta alumnae from 08'-09' to continue the discussions long into the night.

**Shabbat by day.** Danish and *d'var Torah* at 8:30; *davening* at 9. The crowd is a little sleepy. We shake off the mental cobwebs with the *Pesukei d'Zimra's* preparatory hum. Even behind the *mechitzah* I can sense the growing camaraderie between the *Ravs*, the *Fellows*, the *Alumnae* and this year's not-so-new students. Wives and children of the *rebbeim* join us again, and I have

the opportunity to say “thank you” for all the *Shabbat* hospitality and especially the supply of chicken soup for my virus-laden Levi. I am grateful for the care demonstrated toward each young man, and for the very real relationships developing between mentors and students, rabbis and *talmidim*.

**Havdalah** in the *Beit Midrash* does not bring the event to a close. *Shabbat*'s tide continues to ebb away as more singing and story-telling ensues. I think that we finally left the *Beis* around 8. Many of the parents are leaving on the late night flights back to the States; we exchange hugs and email addresses, knowing that we were partners in time just for a brief visit with our sons; that we likely might never re-connect; however the intensity and bitter sweetness are difficult to let go, and we hope that we will meet again.

**Day 6** - The Orayta routine resumes, albeit that there are a few parents still coming and going, meeting with various faculty, sitting in on more *shiurim*, photographing the Jerusalem skyline via Orayta's rooftop vantage point, traipsing up and down the *Kotel* steps, *davening* for their son's and Israel's welfare. A few more head to the airport. I deliver the packages: chocolate cookies, medications, a warm coat, *seforim*, a few extra pairs of stockings, underwear, socks...

**DAY 7** - Adventure beyond the Green line. After a short walk, two buses and three hours, Zach and I arrive at *Yeshuv Otniel*, home of 300 *Hesdernikim* (yeshiva students heading into the I.D.F.), an actual army base, and a smattering of settlers' homes. All surrounded by barbed wire, open fields and then Arab villages. The beautiful and modern *Beit Midrash* sits at the center like an enormous raindrop amidst the expanding rings of a puddle. The casual familiarity with which these young men shoulder their weapons and then pile them on the end of the lunch table is an image that will always stick with me.

Ditto on the return trip, adding an hour wait at *Kiryat Arba* as the wind lifts our collars and the evening's crispness nips at our ears. Zach and I trot back to the Old City as dusk falls and *Rechov Yaffo* lights up. We arrive in time for a quick bite of MILK's pizza before Rav Aaron's Philosophy and Mysticism *shiur*. After his discussion with the boys, I am left with a couple of questions. Well, more than a couple...however, over bowls of hot onion soup and fresh bread, my boys and I kick around the *kabbalistic* conundrums. They clarify a number of ideas for me. The main concept introduced: What is Choice? Does G-d have free choice? Our job here is to choose - for G-d to do Good. While we were in that pensive neighborhood we went over a number of points required to process these questions: Who or what is G-d? Who or what am I? Where do I intersect with G-d - or don't I? What part of me in G-d makes choices? Why can't I see Absolute Good without passing through both good and “evil” (what I like to think of as “unrevealed” Good) .....We talk into the night.

And then, there was One. One parent left. One day left.

**DAY 8** - I find that I cannot give up the Orayta “spa for the soul” and go off on the planned field trip for the *Guf* (the body). So, I will continue in the footsteps of my children, walking the Old City alleyways, sitting in the *shiurim*, debating with the *rebbeim*, and bathing in the refreshing perspective of a new breed of *chinuch* (Torah education) where the students explore who they are, what G-d's creative intentions continue to generate within us, and how our singular soul's journey reveals G-d's Greater Good and His Creation's Ultimate Purpose. Whew! What a retreat!