



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Arel Kirshstein



You open the door of the dorm to the Old City of Jerusalem. You hear it shut behind you as you straighten the *kippah* on your head. Only three minutes till *shiur*, and you don't want to be late.

Earlier in the year you would have turned left and taken the longer route. You are experienced, and know better. You briskly head off to the right, toward a side street called *Barkai*.

You slow down. It rained last night and Jerusalem stone is extremely slippery when wet. You cautiously pick up speed down this street, and burst out onto a main street taking a left. Past the *HaRova* seminary's dining room, a few tourist traps, the warring pizza places (over customers - nothing more), what looks like an old olive press, and the yellow falafel stand with its horribly misspelled English menu, you take a right as you see the *Cardo*. At least a minute has passed if not more; you know you're running out of time.

Giving directions in the Old City is impossible. I can show you how to get somewhere, but to describe it is a much different story. The best I can explain the next move you make is a weird left-right combo. Regardless, you skim past the lonely minaret (the only thing remaining from the Jordanian Legion's takeover of the Jewish Quarter), ironically dwarfed by the reconstruction of the Churva synagogue (only the 2nd time), and the Ramban synagogue, oddly located underneath the Churva.

Now you consider two different routes. You could access the shorter one and hope it isn't crowded with tourists, or the road less traveled by, the one you just discovered, the one that passes a Karaite synagogue and the remains of a Chassidic one - which have coexisted peacefully for many years - the one that passes the venerated Quarter Café. You remember that in the morning few tourists are about, only in the afternoon they clog the streets like cholesterol in an artery. To this reasoning you choose the shorter route, but calculate that on your return for lunch, the longer way might be prudent.

So you enter into the square in all of its grandeur. However, you have no time to notice it in its full glory. Neither do you have the time to notice the few raised stones off to the side, which, in ancient times, used to constitute a sidewalk. You have no time for this, because only one minute remains.

You pick up your pace, passing the square, squeezing between two cars at the other end to take a right. Now you reach the final stretch. You race past the unopened candle store, the *makolet* (small grocery shop) where you often buy snacks, Burgers Bar, and Bonkers Bagels. You impatiently, but kindly nonetheless, tell Luna, who has just asked you for money, that none exists on your person in an awkward Hebrew. You lurch down the steps, pass a shwarma place, and turn left. Two arches later you are standing in front of a green *Rova*-mobile that has nearly blocked your way into the building. A construction crew is dumping various debris into it.

Somehow you bypass that annoyance, and ascend the stairs to the main door of Orayta. You wave to the security camera, at which either Shlomit, or Devorah is hopefully watching, to convey a 'good-morning.' You enter the building and tentatively peer into the *Beit Midrash* to see if the *shiur* started. It hasn't. You are puzzled, but nonetheless enter the *Beit Midrash*.

You look at the clock and a stark realization sweeps over you. It is 8:56 (four minutes before *shiur* starts). Only now you remember, the clock in the dorm has been set five minutes fast, at the behest of your fellow dormers, to make sure everyone is on time. Ready to begin the day, you sit down, and wait for Rav Noam to start.

We pass so much on our way to the main building. The ancient collaborates with the modern to create a whole different ambience. Unfortunately, as human beings we often miss the ambience because we acclimate to the environment we live in. It's difficult; nigh impossible, to consistently live within the transcendental. But sometimes, if we can penetrate the thick stupor of human habit, our environment can shock us into whole new levels of perception. Every so often we realize where we live, in the city where, at times, the whole world contested, the city which was central to the ancient Jewish civilization, and to the modern one, the city which centers itself around the place where, it is said, man was created. And we live here!

But we often forget the nature of the city we live in. This collection of hills, trees, and buildings are taken at face value, and habit assumes its role. At that point we just need to wait for the next time Jerusalem sweeps us off our feet. It might happen while walking down the path to Jaffa Gate, or while on the roof of Orayta gazing at the mountain where our Temple once stood, wishing it still existed to gaze back at us. Either way, we eagerly wait for it to strike us again.

Arel grew up in Charleston, SC and graduated from the Feinstone Yeshiva High School of the South in Memphis, TN. He was of the Founder of the School's Book Club and was stage Manager for the School's Production of "The Real Inspector Hound" and "The Comedy of Errors". He was a participant in the Memphis "Fed Challenge" organised by the Federal Reserve Bank.

Arel's favorite part of Orayta is: "Rav Binny's Chumash Shiurim. It's because we look at the whole picture and come up with our own ideas on the text before we go into the Commentaries and see what they see. I feel that I'm learning Chumash instead of just learning how Rashi learned Chumash".

After Orayta, Arel is planning on studying at Yeshiva University.