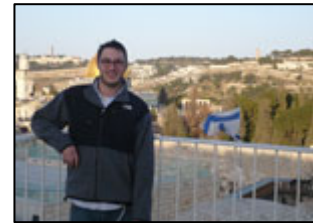




A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Andrew Rose



Last Thursday, the Jewish people celebrated the holiday of *Shavuot*, marking the anniversary of the Jews' acceptance of the Torah from *Hashem* at Mount *Sinai*. This year, the Jews of Israel had a special *z'chut*, as *Shavuot* fell out on a Friday, followed by *Shabbos*, which made it a sort of "mock" two day *yom-tov*. This was exciting, because the *Alter Rebbe*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, thought that the Jews of *Eretz Yisrael* should keep two days *yom-tov* as in the diaspora (while at present they keep one day). The *Bnei Issaschar*, the *Munkatcher Rebbe*, commented that the *Moshiach* would have come had the Jews taken on this custom! Regardless, between the cheesecake, coffee, and all time record high attendance in the *Bet Midrash*, *Shavuot* was definitely a success for Orayta.

For me, beyond cheesecake and coffee, *Shavuot* is a special time. The other night, a few of us from Orayta attended a lecture by Rabbi Steinsaltz, who spoke about one's own personal acceptance of the *Torah* being the most important day of one's life. For me, it was undoubtedly *Shavuot* 2006.

From Kindergarten to 8th grade, I attended a very "Waspy", secular prep school. However, call it fate, Divine Providence, or coincidence; I somehow managed to enroll in a Jewish high school after those years.

This new school was a change, one that I wasn't quite sure about. I began learning more about Judaism, dabbling in more strict practices; but I didn't quite know how I felt about a more traditional lifestyle. I was curious to see what Judaism had to say about certain topics, but merely on an intellectual level.

In my sophomore year, around *Chanukah* time, Matisyahu began to gain wide acclaim in my high school. The catchy music along with Jewish themes was a novel idea, and it sparked my interest. In particular, a friend and I began wondering what he was talking about when he said, "*Moshiach's* coming tonight," and "We want *Moshiach* NOW!"

We began to ask our *Gemara* teacher about it, requesting to learn a *sugya* on the topic. He refused time and again, calling it absurd and ridiculous, but we persisted. Finally, after months of badgering, he gave in and taught us the *sugya* from *Sanhedrin* which discusses the qualifications the world needs to realize for *Moshiach* to come.

Thirsty for more, this barely satisfied us, although the class continued on to a different topic. At the end of the year the teacher assigned the class a final assignment: the students were to break into groups of two and do some sort of art project on one of the *sugyas* we had learned throughout the year.

For my friend and I there was no question – we would do a project on *Moshiach*, in an attempt to learn even more about the topic. We decided to make a documentary on the subject, and, after drafting a few basic interview questions, began to compile a list of possible interviewees.

We began by going to the International World Headquarters of Jews of Jesus (based in San Francisco of course); where they tried to convince us that Jesus undoubtedly fit into Judaism and that the “Second Coming” is a Jewish belief. We were quite confused to say the least. We continued on, interviewing Rabbis from Reform and Conservative synagogues, as well as a Catholic Priest, all of whom did a great job in dodging questions and giving strange, unsatisfying answers that felt more like excuses.

The last person on the list was Rabbi Yosef Langer, head Chabad Rabbi of San Francisco. A City personality, Rabbi Langer is widely known. From his *mitzvah* bike to his celebrity friends, everybody in San Francisco knows him as the Rabbi with a heart of pure gold. Being a Chabad Rabbi, when we called him to set up an interview, he responded with an invitation to *Shavuot* dinner. As we had school off anyway, we figured there was no harm.

We arrived about an hour and a half before *yom tov*, and immediately saw that there was no chance we were going to interview the Rabbi. Between the preparations for *chag*, we ourselves being conscripted to help, we barely spoke to him about our topic. When *yom tov* came in, we sat down. Without the worries of recording or anything not permitted to use on *yom tov*, we embarked on a discussion about *Moshiach*, which for the first time sounded like satisfactory answers. As the night continued, between the people, the warmth, and the l'chaims!, my friend and I felt that this was a place where we could grow immensely.

As we left later that night, after learning a myriad of different things (we didn't stay up all night, only until about 2 am), we left with a feeling of connection – to Rabbi Langer, his family, and their entire community. Later in the week when Friday came round, we showed up again at his house, as became our habit for the next two years.

The relationship I built with Rabbi Langer and his family is the reason I am so connected to *Torah* and Judaism today. Had it not been for him, I know with complete certainty that I would not be here, spending a year in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Last August I found it difficult to leave the life I had created in San Francisco, to depart from a place so full of love and *Torah*, to embark on something new and foreign. Reminding myself that *Chassidim* don't say goodbye, I constantly told myself that I would soon return to San Francisco to be with the Langers once again.

Now, as the year winds down, I feel a similar struggle, but this time with a different outlook. I see that even though this is the end of my year in Israel, that doesn't mean that the connections end. The key is to bring this year with us, wherever we go in the future.

A *chossid* once asked the *Tzemach Tzedek*, Rabbi *Menachem Mendel*, the third Chabad Rebbe, if he thought it would be a good idea for him to make *aliya*. The *Tzemach Tzedek* replied, “Make *Eretz Yisrael* here.” This is how we must approach

our leaving Orayta on to the next stage of our life: to bring Orayta with us wherever we end up.

The purpose of *Shavuot* is to constantly renew our connection to the *Torah*, to find the day we recognized this connection and walked away truly changed. Between the times I've spent at the Langers, and a year here in Israel, I look back on my personal acceptance of *Torah* and the change that it's made on my life. *Hashem* should bless us all that we are able to take this recognition and embark on a new chapter in our life toward the best.

Drew attended the Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco. He was the Captain of the School Golf Team. Drew was also very active in the San Francisco Chabad. He helped organize the annual Puirm concert and he helped raise tzedaka funds for the local Jewish Community.

The thing he likes best at Orayta is: "Rav Noam's Gemara Shiurim. I also find that learning with my Orayta Rabbinic Fellow allows me to learn the Torah subjects that I choose and helps me grow at my own pace."

After attending Orayta, Drew is planning on attending Northeastern University.