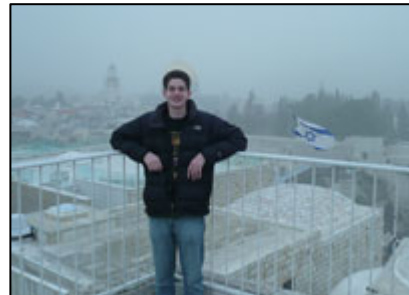




A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Daniel Ackerman

If you were to ask me a few months before coming to Orayta “Hey what do you think of going to Israel to study for a year... in Yeshiva?” I would just laugh and say “Highly unlikely.”



It wasn't until I was told of the *Rebbeim* who would be heading the Yeshiva that I was sold. When I was much younger my parents would take my Gameboy and I along on Isralight retreats even though I was in no way able to comprehend what the classes were about. Little by little I stopped playing Mario and involuntarily started to listen I, mainly because of the atmosphere created through the Rabbis' charismatic personalities. There was something so captivating about listening to Rabbi Binny and Rabbi Aaron. I can't quite put my finger on it, but, when an eleven year-old boy somehow enjoys listening to Torah and army stories, as well as Kabbalistic ideas - you know you are in the presence of very special people.

Getting off the plane and realizing I was actually deferring college to study in Israel for the year was all too surreal. I had so many thoughts rushing through my head. Is this really going to be the best for me? Did I jump into this too fast? How will I maintain my friends? How long “exactly” will I be here? Would I be happier if I was in college, will I be happy here?”

Will I be happy? Now this was a big question.

As the months went by, many of these questions naturally disintegrated and I was unconscious of how much I was really growing until recently one of Rabbi Aaron's Philosophy and Mysticism classes put it all into perspective.

In this particular class we tore apart a work by **Abraham Heschel** called, “*Man is not Alone*” which focused on the basic theme of human existence – to be happy. What does Judaism say about happiness? Lots of people come to Judaism with preconceived ideas of how their needs should be met which

often leads them to walk away unsatisfied. Judaism makes you ask yourself what you truly need in this world to serve Hashem. We don't serve him in the sense that he is some Guy in the Sky looking to make our lives miserable if we don't follow his commandments. This is antithetical to Judaism because really we are all a part of Him and therefore doing His mitzvos makes his presence manifest in this world through us. Hashem needs us because we are each individual expressions of Him, like rays of the sun.

People are pleasure seekers, looking for something to satisfy their preconceived needs and that's why they are dissatisfied with Judaism. It is like how hunger works; I'm discontent, I need food, I have food, now I am content. All you have to do is come with the right attitude! People who are self-satisfied feel their life is futile and in despair. Their whole life is how everything has to fit to *them*. What is meaningful is how you fit into Judaism, not how Judaism fits into you. Satisfaction is getting what you want fulfilled. Pleasure is the satisfaction of an itch. As soon as you get it – it's gone.

Judaism inspires discontent and the wanting of more and more needs. We always want to do more, crave on a level that I will never be satisfied; to find needs to satisfy other needs. Judaism teaches you to be content with what you have and not with what you are, because it wants you to always be growing in a genuine way. I'm starting to realize that this is truly living.

Being in a state of non-striving, static bliss, and contentment - is death.

Another idea that really resonated with me stemmed from the question – is there an objective requirement of me? Is there something that could be asked of me that may not feel comfortable but I need to do it, or am I the frame of reference? Judaism is based on objective requirements, what can I do for Hashem? Not what can Hashem do for me? Usefulness is the key to feeling good about yourself. "I want to be commanded" Abraham said to Hashem, "I want a command, not given advice or merely a subjective interest. When we realize what we can do for Hashem we are truly happy and realize what we can actually do for others, because everyone is a part of Him. An example of this connection is like the human body. If a person is walking and stubs their toe by accident their toe wouldn't say to them "Hey! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?" That's ridiculous, your toe and your body are one entity!

When Rabbi Aaron defined happiness as, "the certainty of being needed," I stopped taking notes to think about that idea.

The best example I was able to think of for having an objective requirement is when I was in High School Theater. Each and every individual had a specific task that was needed of him or her towards the production of the Show, and without him or her, the show couldn't go on (I believe, contrary to popular belief). It's an unbelievable feeling of happiness when you realize that you are a part of a production so colossal to you. From the Stage Manager, to the Ensemble member... even down to the kid who sweeps the stage, making sure there are no sharp objects for performers to hurt themselves on. Everyone is needed. People are always asking, whether it's to the Director, fellow Techie or Actor, "What can I do?" In the midst of all these requirements though, rehearsals and Tech, negativity creeps in. People do get frustrated and feel unhappy when they are in the theater several hours a day, missing

vacations and family time. Lots of times you wish you weren't there and think "there are so many better things I could be doing with myself right now." I confess, I thought that. But really, deep down in my heart, when I put aside my selfish ego of doing what I wanted, when I wanted and how I wanted, I realized what I really wanted to do is be there all hours of the day and night, giving 100% of myself to work with my friends and teachers towards the universal goal of putting on one magnificent Production.

People are unhappy in old age homes for example because they feel as if no one needs them and that they are the "needy" ones in other people's eyes. You can make someone so happy if you genuinely make them feel needed. Someone can always need you, always be asking what you can do for others. There is never a moment in your life where you can't contribute. Some people die of old age because they have nothing to do. "What good are you?" means, "What goodness could you bring into the world!"

Judaism does not see happiness as a goal. In fact the one thing that gets in the way of human happiness is happiness itself. Constantly asking yourself if you're happy is the best way to make yourself miserable. The best way to be happy is to make other people happy, make other people's happiness your goal. Focus on doing what you need to do and happiness will come. Happiness is a side effect. Judaism says to serve Hashem makes you happy.

Every day I am challenged in my studies, as opposed to my old static regimen of High School. It finally hit me that throughout each day I became more and more happy to learn as much as possible. But, once I thought I couldn't study another thing, I wanted more. These books and classes need me to read and learn them. My friends and family need me to read and learn them. This is my objective requirement. The learning I did yesterday lit the wick to learn today, and the wick that was lit today will light the wick to learn tomorrow. I hope my life will be an infinite flame to learn more and know more developing the best "Daniel Ackerman" as a representative spark of the Ultimate Being, Hashem, to grow with and always be there for the people who need me most.

This is happiness.

Danny graduated from West Boca Raton High School. He was a member of the Theater Department's Technical Crew for 4 years as well as being a member of the school's Swim Team. Danny is quite an artist and enjoys combining his creative talents with our other students.

Danny's favorite thing about Orayta is: My chavruta with my Orayta Fellow, Baruch Ze'ev, because it gives me personal one on one time to explore aspects of Judaism that are most meaningful to me at my own pace, which is guided by a very intellectual and spiritual person. I also really enjoy Rav Binny's Thursday Night Kumzits'. After a long week of learning it gives you a good hour to clear your mind through beautiful music and inspirational thoughts.

After Orayta, Danny plans on attending an Art College back in the USA.