



STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Eliezer Buechler



Jerusalem has been my extended campus for the past four months. I have explored the plazas and alleys within the old and new city, smelled some of the most exotic middle-eastern spices around the *shuk*, and eaten at deliciously exquisite cafes too. Yet unbeknownst to me, I really had not begun to touch the surface of what Jerusalem really entails.

Last Thursday afternoon, our Yeshiva embarked on a four hour walking tour of the first five neighborhoods settled by Jews outside the walls of the Old City. Rav Amos, one of our night *sefer* Rabbis who inspires us with his Israeli music and stories, guided us from the Zion Gate to *Mishkenot Sha'ananim*; the first new Jewish neighborhood settled outside the walls of Jerusalem. Rav Amos explained with great detail the hardships that the Jews had to overcome among the barren hills outside of Jerusalem in their pursuit of creating a better life for themselves and for their children.

We then moved on to the next four neighborhoods, all of which were established to make room for the ever expanding Jewish presence in Jerusalem. When we concluded our tour in the final neighborhood, *Mea Shearim*, I realized that what before had been just areas within Jerusalem now came alive through their unique histories.

Rav Amos' tour is quite telling of Yeshiva life over these past few months. What once were actions that I do on a daily bases, have now morphed into meaningful and inspiring *mitzvot*. Whether it is my conception of G-d or how our masterful system of *Halacha* works, Orayta has introduced me to new and inspiring ways of viewing all aspects of my life. With a greater understanding of the roots of many of the daily actions that we as Jews do, I have been able to comprehend and fulfill many *mitzvot* with abundant more meaning.

A prime example of this is the *Modeh Ani* prayer which is customarily recited upon waking up in the morning. We say, "I am thankful before You, living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul to me with compassion, how great is Your faithfulness". It has always seemed somewhat odd to me that

Halacha requires us to say this statement every morning upon waking up. I can only speak for myself, but I am usually a bit groggy upon waking up in the morning and this is not always the first thing on my mind.

Similar to Rav Amos' tour of Jerusalem with its vibrant history, Rav David Silverstein has explored with us, in his Philosophy of *Halacha* class the meaning behind many daily *mitzvot* including *Modeh Ani*. What was once just a phrase upon waking up in the morning has now become a theological statement about how I view the world. Originating in discussions in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud as a source of gratitude for living another day to fulfill my purpose in the world, to the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Modeh Ani* has been a part of Jewish tradition for thousands of years. The *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of *Hassidut*, encapsulates the essence of *Modeh Ani* best by adding that the first thing that enters into one's head in the morning remains with that individual for the rest of the day. For the Jew, it is his awareness of G-d's existence as an ever present G-d.

G-d's presence within this world as seen in *Modeh Ani* is a statement that allows me to live my life with an understanding that I have a purpose to everything that I do. Like my tour through Jerusalem which turned stone buildings into masterful symbols of Jewish nationhood, Orayta has turned my daily actions into fundamental principles of my Jewish faith. So I invite you to try to have a more meaningful *Modeh Ani* in the morning, and who knows, maybe you will say it upon waking up in our holy city- Jerusalem.