



## STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Jason Eisner



Although I was extremely nervous coming into Orayta, any fears I might have had were alleviated right away. Over the last three weeks, all 48 of us have truly bonded. I can't believe I've already made so many good friends, in such a short amount of time. The Rabbis are amazing, and so unlike what I'm used to. They are so welcoming of *all* questions; they are interested in who we are (Rav David Silverstein and I meet once a week just to talk); and, they are obviously here for *us*. They really want us to grow religiously, spiritually, and as individuals.

I'm not going to go into detail about the *shiurim*, but I will say that *all* of them are amazing. I'm not just saying that to make you parents feel better. I mean it. I especially love my morning *shiur*, *Gemara*, with Rav David. The kids are incredibly inquisitive and bright, and he's just awesome. He's taught me so much (like what "*Shteig*", "*Haimish*", "*Givaldic*", and "*G'schmak*" mean, and some *gemara* and its relevance along the way) and he has done so with such humor and intensity at the same time. For the first time in my Jewish life, I actually enjoy learning *gemara*.

Last week, we took a break from learning to volunteer at the *Chazon Yeshai'ah* Soup Kitchen. It was such a moving experience. I already loved cooking, but to do it for a real purpose elevates the act to an entirely different level. After we were done cooking, Jon, Jerry, Sam, and I served the food to dozens of poor and homeless Israelis. I was saddened to see how many there are. More than 20% of Israelis are below poverty level, which is a very disturbing statistic. One thing that really stood out for me was seeing how, even though these men and women may be starving, when I would hand one person the tray, he or she would always pass it all the way down to the other end of the table, to help their fellow in need – even if it meant having to wait a few extra minutes to get their food.

My day there really made me appreciate not to take things for granted. It was also a great bonding experience with the guys. It was so inspiring to see more than two dozen people working hard to feed and help others.

My experience in Israel, however, is not taking place only in *Yeshiva*. I have a ton of family and family friends in Israel, and they've also really added to my enjoyment of being here. I've spent three weekends with family and friends, and it has been so nice to see them. This past Sunday, I went to the *Yarzeit* of the husband of my cousin. It was such a beautiful and moving night. *Tehilim* were read by his grave, with more than 60 people (mostly family of mine) standing solemnly. After visiting the grave, we returned to my cousin's house for some food, remembrance, and celebration of my cousin's life. Seeing all of my Israeli family at once (though I'd rather it had been during a *simcha*) was so special. All of them are no more than second-cousins, but we're still so close and they are so loving and welcoming. I am so appreciative for them. I am sure that my year in Israel will continue to be greatly affected by my wonderful friends and family.

When I got to Israel, I immediately felt at home. I love this land so much. And, I know my year here will only enhance my love and gratitude for it. I look forward to spending the next 8 months with my friends and family, in addition to growing with my *new* friends and family.

May we all enter into the New Year with great appreciation for all that we have and for all those we love.

Shana Tova.