



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Misha Brenner

My name is Misha Brenner and I am a student at Orayta. So far, I am having a great time here, and I am really happy with my decision to come to Israel for the year.



One of the issues that hold back some students from coming to Israel for the year is the fear that they will become "brainwashed." Brainwashing is a term generally used to discuss one person or group of people imposing their will on another person or group of people through psychological means. According to one of the classic Yeshiva stereotypes, religiously confused eighteen year olds go off to a Yeshiva, where a Rabbi tells them that they must keep all the laws of Judaism; the kids come home wearing black hats, without really knowing why they are religious, and whether or not they actually enjoy what they're doing. Coming to Yeshiva from a public school, I had no idea what to expect - whether or not this "brainwashing" would actually occur.

A month into the Yeshiva experience, I realized that this "brainwashing" does, in fact, occur at Yeshiva. Furthermore, "brainwashing" happens at public school; around one's peers; and even at home. Every single place you go, people are influencing you one way or another, which can be taken as brainwashing. At Yeshiva, the Rabbis teach you based on the way that they look at the world and at Judaism, thereby implanting their ideas in your head. This is where that Yeshiva stereotype comes from. My high school was filled with kids who believed that in order to be cool, you have to be strong-willed and aggressive when somebody says something that you don't like. By being in such a situation, the society that you are in is in effect brainwashing you because its filling your head with these ideas. Even at home when your parents try imposing their ideals and values on you, is that not also "brainwashing"?

Everybody tries brainwashing everyone else in this world, but brainwashing does not occur because of teachers and society imposing its will on somebody else's brain. It occurs because people don't *think* about what is being taught to them. Kids who go to Yeshiva and get "brainwashed" become that way because they don't think about or question what is being taught to

them. Questioning is a mature way of thinking. When a parent or a teacher tells a six year old that it is wrong to hit other people, the child doesn't refrain from hitting others because they believe it's wrong; they don't do it simply because that is what they are taught. This immature thought process is the reason that some kids go to Yeshiva and get "brainwashed".

One of the reasons that parents send their kids to Yeshiva in Israel for a year is to help stimulate maturity. Getting the freedom to live in Israel without parents around requires Yeshiva kids to act like adults, and to therefore think like adults. Part of growing up is learning how to think for one's self, whether that be questioning what a teacher is teaching you, or doubting the value of what your peers are telling you is "cool." Perhaps the fact that teenagers rebel against their parents is also a sign of maturity. It shows that the teen's mind is maturing to the extent that they question what they are taught by their parents.

The goal of Orayta is to open our minds to new ideas that could positively affect the way we look at Judaism - and at life. What the students choose to do with that information is up to them. Making that choice about what information the student thinks is helpful is what separates him between being "brainwashed" and being "educated." It all depends on the student's ability to question.

Chag Sameach everyone!

Misha Brenner