



STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Michael Mitzner



When I realized *Chanukah* was soon coming, and I had not yet written a student perspective, I thought that I would definitely have a cool experience to write about, so I volunteered for the job. What I didn't know yet was that my first *Chanukah* in Israel would not only give me great experiences to share with family and friends, but also would have a meaningful impact on me.

On the first night of *Chanukah* the Orayta students and parents (here for the parents retreat) gathered together in the dorms. We had a beautiful candle lighting ceremony, followed by singing and dancing. During the lighting, Rav Binny pointed out that from the windows where we lit the candles, we could see the spot where the miracle of *Chanukah* took place, on the Temple Mount. The miracle we have celebrated for thousands of years happened here, right in front of our eyes! And the fact that we lit candles in the old city is a great miracle in itself.

After candle lighting and a *shiur*, the Orayta students and Rabbis had an awesome meal. Accidentally, a couple hundred extra *latkes* were made. Fortunately the Orayta staff has someone like Keith, who does more *chessed* than anyone I know. Keith and some of the Orayta guys decided to go out to the *Kotel* and the *Rova*, with guitars and drums, to sing *Chanukah* songs and hand out extra *sufganiyot* and *latkes*. Soldiers, beggars, and even the bus drivers were thrilled by this. Their faces lit up with excitement and happiness, and I started to understand what this holiday was about.

On the third night of *Chanukah*, close family friends were gracious enough to take me out to dinner. I arrived a couple of minutes early, and decided to wait inside the restaurant. I came in right as the entire staff of the restaurant came together for a quick five minutes to light candles and sing *Maoz Tzur*. For five minutes the staff stopped waiting tables, cooking dinner, and setting up, to come together as a unit and remember the miracle of *Chanukah*. I realized that only in our country and at this time in our history, is it possible to publicly light candles and enjoy the holiday it is supposed to be.

On the seventh night of *Chanukah* a friend and I went on a quick trip to the *Malcha* Mall. A quick fun fact: Office Depot *does* sell menorahs! We were walking through a store, and I watched as one of the store clerks called out to the rest telling them that they were lighting candles. This reminded me of dinner a couple of nights before. The store got together and took a moment to light candles. This showed me how every Jew in this country celebrates the miracle of *Chanukah* together, and that a fundamental character of the Holiday is unity.

Back in America, I would only describe *Chanukah* as a celebration of the military victory of the Maccabees and the commemoration of the miracle of the *menorah*. But here in Israel I give it a supplementary meaning. *Chanukah* in Israel is defined by the unity of the Jewish People, and by our caring for one another in our land. I hope your *Chanukah* experience was as meaningful as mine.