



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Mendy Portnoy



“Do British people really throw rocks at each other at soccer games?” After explaining to my new dorm mates that they were getting Manchester confused with someone else, I realized there were some cultural differences I was going to have to get used to. For example, the basic principle that football was given its name because it is played using ones` feet is something Americans just can’t really seem to get their heads around. I guess all that will just come with time.

Seriously though, it’s been amazing how at home everyone has made each other feel – especially after just two weeks. I have to be honest: when I spoke to Rav Binny a few days before yeshiva started, he told me that all the American guys were coming on the same flight on Tuesday. My heart sank. Twenty one Americans...and the Brit! Everyone has been really warm and friendly and it’s just a great environment to be in.

The truth is, although I agreed to write the student perspective, I still don’t actually have a clue what it is I am supposed to write about. However, I experienced something quite amazing whilst in Israel a few days before Yeshiva started, which for me really sums up being in Israel.

It was a Tuesday afternoon, and I was volunteering at a Jerusalem based charity which my family have a strong link with. I was sitting at a desk in the office, concentrating intently as I folded the three hundred and fiftieth letter that day (I guess someone has to do it), when suddenly the door flung open and one of the organizers` children came running in, holding a pouch which he had found lying in a restaurant down the road. Within about six seconds his whole family and anyone working in the office were crowded around a table, staring at what at first glance seemed like an ordinary pouch.

It had seventy five thousand shekels inside. Cash. The excitement amongst the whole family that they now had an opportunity of performing the huge *mitzvah* of returning the money was just inspiring.

After finding a contact number crumpled up underneath some receipts in the pouch, and several phone calls, Leora, the charity's organizer, managed to track down the owner. The kids all rushed out to the street to wait for him. About ten minutes later they came running inside shouting at the top of their lungs, "he's here, he's here!" The grateful owner came inside, explained that he owns a grocery store, and had put his bag down in a restaurant on the way to the bank to pay off some debts.

The man then tried to give the kids (aged between three and ten) some money to go and buy themselves some sweets. It was their response which really sent shivers down my back. The eldest girl said in a shy voice "We can't take that money because if we do, we won't be getting the full reward for the *mitzvah* and that's what we really want."

Ten years old – and at a level which so many of us can only dream of being at.

Israel is an amazing place full of unbelievable people. In a way, it's kind of hard not to take for granted the awesome position we're in this year. We're living in the old city of Jerusalem, about three minutes away from the *kote*,/ surrounded by Jews from every kind of background you can think of – it's just unbelievable. This year is a fabulous opportunity to achieve so many things. An opportunity I intend to take full advantage of.

May *Hashem* bless you all with a sweet new year full of all the things you wish for.

Shabbat Shalom and Shana Tova,

Mendy