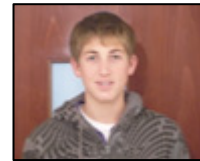




A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Matt Sherman



Jerusalem's Old City has a history that dates back to the fourth millennium BCE, making it one of the oldest cities in the world. More importantly, Jerusalem has been the holiest city and spiritual center for the Jewish people since the Tenth Century BCE. Throughout the course of history, Jerusalem has been destroyed twice, besieged twenty three times, attacked fifty two times, and captured and recaptured forty four times. Ever since the destruction of the second temple in year 70 CE, the Jewish people have longed and cried for their city. Now, in 2008, Orayta students have the awesome privilege of living in this city to which our ancestors forever hoped to return.

Most of you have had or will have the amazing opportunity of visiting The Old City. I am positive that each of you who have been here will admit to feeling a spiritual bond to the city that cannot be explained. As incredible as the city may seem as a tourist, living and learning in this city is on a totally different level. As night approaches and the myriads of tourists begin to disappear, the locals begin to fill the squares. And as the sun rises while all the tourists are still fast asleep, the *Kotel* is packed with its daily crowd *davening Vatikin*. The feeling we used to have as tourists has seemingly worn off. We are now, officially, Jerusalemites.

Now that we have lived here for almost two and a half months, it is safe to say that we think we know this city inside and out. With the help from our *Ulpan* class, each and every Orayta student is capable of mustering up enough Hebrew to give Israelis directions, a skill that is constantly put to test in The Old City. It has become common to see tractors riding around The Old City through alleys where cars do not fit, delivering groceries and collecting trash. By now we are all familiar with all of the big construction projects and historical sites in the area simply via eavesdropping on the plethora of tours that are constantly walking the ancient streets of Jerusalem.

I cannot explain in words how remarkable it is that everywhere I turn in The Old City, I am looking at three thousand years of history. Even though we have already gathered an enormous amount of knowledge regarding the history of Jerusalem, we are not even close to learning everything there is to know about this brilliant city. There is so much to learn about the Jewish people here that sometimes it is easy to forget the amount of history in our backyard that belongs to other former world powers. A question that I have come to ask is as follows: What is so special about this tiny city that every empire has felt the need to leave its mark on it? To me, my answer keeps changing. At first I looked at Jerusalem strictly from a military point of

view; Jerusalem lies on a hilltop surrounded by a chain of hilltops, making it very defensible. My second idea was that Jews yearned for Jerusalem and its temple, but the anti-Semitic world chose to control our city to spite us. I have recently arrived at my third answer; an answer that I believe will stick with me. There seems to be some spiritual feeling that everyone experiences solely from being in The Old City of Jerusalem. Everyone, Jews and non-Jews, feels this divine connection, and this is what attracts them all to visit our home.

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshat Vayeira*, we read about *Akaidat Yitzchak*. Avraham, in his final test from G-d, must bring his only son, Yitzchak, as a sacrifice. There is no sacrifice greater than bringing your son as an offering to *Hashem*. Obviously not as great a sacrifice as described in this week's *parsha*, we have made a huge sacrifice this year. We passed up jobs, we passed up college, and we have moved five thousand miles away from home. That is a huge sacrifice. The question becomes why is it necessary to spend our year in Israel as opposed to learning at Yeshiva in America? There are simply too many distractions in America as opposed to in Israel where we are surrounded by the history of our people and the very same characters we are learning about in our classes at Orayta. But why must we be in Jerusalem as opposed to anywhere in Israel? Furthermore what is the difference between learning in The Old City versus learning in greater Jerusalem? I believe that the spiritual environment of Jerusalem and the higher level of holiness in The Old City purely enhances our learning environment in Yeshiva. It is a subconscious feeling that cannot be described, one that can only be experienced by living and learning in Jerusalem's Old City, the home of the Jewish people.

Matt is a graduate of The Frisch School and is from West Orange, New Jersey. He was on the hockey team and participated in the Model UN. After learning at Orayta, Matt is planning on studying at the University of Pennsylvania.