



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Mike Snow

I've been having a great time since I got here nearly three months ago, but only recently have I felt that I am really starting to experience what I came here for. It is strange and hard to articulate, but I will try. I was not originally set on coming to Israel, and thought that I was ready to go straight to college. Of course any college experience is going to involve a lot of self-searching, maturing, and "figuring life out". But I made the decision to dedicate an entire year of my life to just that. Not only that, but to do it here, in the Old City of Jerusalem, our people's capital, of all places. There is something so very different, focused, and quite intense about it. Less than three months in, and I can say with confidence that I made the right decision; not only to come to Israel, but to Orayta as well.



During the first few weeks we were here, the sudden independence of living on our own with other 18 year olds, together with the culture shock, prevented anyone from getting bored, I think. Living in the Old City is definitely an adventure in its own right. It didn't really matter that maybe I wasn't so interested in the Gemara shiur then, because at the end of the day we could always have a fun time going to town. Being in Israel for the holidays was great, but I still felt more like I was here on vacation having a good time with my friends, rather than actually doing anything seriously worthwhile with my time.

Bein Hazmanim (Yeshivish intersession, so to speak) was pretty great. The highlight of vacation for me, and possibly even Israel so far, was the three day *tiyul* (hike) I did with three other Orayta guys. We hiked from the Mediterranean Sea to the Kinneret, and the best part of it was that we did it totally on our own, no tour guide, or medic, or anything. I really felt like I was an independent teenager in Israel; Tel Aviv one weekend, then sleeping on the beach in Hertzaliyah the next. It was great, but at the same time I felt that if I wanted to just have a good time and party or whatever, I could have gone straight to college. I anticipated it being difficult to get back into the swing of things learning-wise once the new *zman* started. The weird thing is though, one day, a few weeks ago, the learning sort of just clicked and I actually began to enjoy it.

The concepts we discuss in Rabbi Aaron's class are radically redefining the way I feel about my Judaism. Throughout high school I never really understood or enjoyed my Judaism as I am beginning to do here. I love it when I need an Advil or two after spending hours learning the Kabbalistic aspects of Hashem's name.

One of my other favorite parts is simply the amount of reading I am able to do here. I'm in the middle of my second time going through *Derech Hashem* and I *kvell* over the small twitch I've developed in my right eye from so much reading.

Of course some days are better than others. The more productive I feel, the better I feel. For the first time in my life though, I actually enjoy learning *Gemara*. It's still very challenging, but I'm beginning to appreciate its intricacies.

It has definitely been an intense and daunting three months. I'm having trouble coming up with the right words, but, to spend all day examining not only my Judaism but my whole life and figuring things out is very...urgh. The only way I can really describe it is: Ahhh, growing up is hard!