



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Moshe Volovik

Yesterday I celebrated my 19th birthday with the awesome friends I've made at Orayta. A cool thing about turning 19 is that one's Hebrew and secular birthdays` come out on the same day; for most people the first time this happens in their lives. To me this represents two aspects of my life - the Judaic and the secular coming together.



In high school I viewed Judaism as unconnected to my true essence; it was just a set of rules stopping me from being me. My goals in life had little to do with *Torah* and *Mitzvot*. I was dissatisfied with my *Torah* upbringing. If I were asked, before I came to Orayta, whether I would be religious for the rest of my life - I'd have most likely said no. But now, after 2 months, I've discovered an entirely new view of my Jewish upbringing.

For years my life plan had been to just quit Orthodoxy by the time I completed high school. I just didn't see a long list of rules as relevant to my life. The summer before my senior year of high school I decided to give it one more chance; one last year. The whole first half of the school year, the *Yeshiva* I was attending was pressuring us to go to *Yeshiva* in Israel, but none of the schools they were pushing for seemed to be for me. They were almost all *Yeshivas* where *Gemara* studies took up at least ten hours of your day. The few that weren't like that were places for kids who think going to Israel is a yearlong party, and if that's what I was looking for I might as well just stay in America. None of the schools seemed to be what I was looking for, and besides - the time on my 'last chance' I was giving this lifestyle was running out. Then a Rabbi suggested a new place that had opened up, Orayta. Two minutes into my meeting with Rav Binny I knew that Orayta was where I wanted to go. I decided to give Judaism another chance, and see where it would take me.

Rabbi Aaron's classes have helped me understand that Judaism is not about worshipping some dude in the sky lest he smite me; instead the *Torah* teaches how to connect to my true self. He teaches the basics of Jewish thought on God, answering our questions in ways that our *Yeshiva* high schools never did. His classes give an entirely new perspective on Judaism that I don't think could be found at any other *Yeshiva*.

In my time studying in the Old City I feel that the Judaic aspect of my life, which I thought I'd have totally abandoned by this point, has become a real part of who I hope to be in the future. Just like my 19th birthday marks the first time my Hebrew and secular birthdays come out on the same day, for the first time in years I feel the Jewish and the secular parts of my life have begun to merge to form my future.