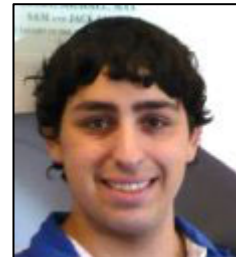




## A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Moshe Volovik

I was a little nervous about the drive to *Chavat Gilad*, a village of 20 families near *Shechem*, whose legal status is complicated at best. I wasn't sure what to expect from a place which the New York Times described as "a hardscrabble unpaved collection of 20 trailers" whose residents, "many of them armed, and all of them furious over the 2005 withdrawal of Jews from Gaza and four West Bank settlements... live by the slogan: 'Never forget! Never forgive!'". I was told that its residents are very serious, and that they don't tend to want American visitors for *Shabbos*.



After arriving, I found out that within a week of the article being published, Arabs had burnt their fields and some of their houses, and that just 3 days ago Arabs had tried to steal the villager's horses, which had led to a violent struggle. I was starting to expect an extremely serious, and most likely fairly awkward, *Shabbos*.

At least the landscape was beautiful; the rolling hills and the view of Tel Aviv far in the distance against the backdrop of the Mediterranean was stunning. I suddenly realized how important it is to hold on to this land. Not only is it as much ours as the rest of Israel, but giving it away would create a threat to the entire country. From the adjacent hill, and certainly from hills a little bit down, terrorists would have a clear shot at Tel Aviv.

*Shabbos* began, and to my surprise there was singing and dancing. Everyone was joyful, and many even made jokes after *davening* in *Shul*. After what I read about 'settlers' hating soldiers, I was amazed when the family I was eating at invited soldiers, there to ensure the recent violence doesn't get reignited, to eat with them, even insisting that the soldiers take food with them when they had to leave straight after *Kiddush*. Over the course of *Shabbos* I had the opportunity to ask the families whom I was eating at questions about why they live in *Chavat Gilad*, their views on 'the Middle East conflict,' and numerous other topics. I learned that most residents saw the beautiful landscape as the main reason for living there, with playing a role in preserving the Jewish people's rights to this land as an important secondary factor. I quickly discovered that they were not violent people or fanatics, just regular people (except nicer) trying to keep their homes. I found the people of *Chavat*

*Gilad* were amongst the friendliest I've met in Israel. They didn't hate the state of Israel; they don't want a bloody conflict; nor do they even have anything against Arabs, as many would have me believe. They don't want conflict, but are ready to fight for their, and all of *Am Yisroel's*, rights to the land.

These villagers held no resentment toward the state of Israel, despite the government's refusal to hook them up to the water or electrical system. They serve in the army in stark contrast with what the New York Times says. They were extremely welcoming; despite the warnings I had received that they wouldn't be. They were even extremely joyous in the face of the difficulties they go through. *Shabbos* in *Chavat Gilad* was nothing like I expected.

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Moshe is from St. Paul, MN. He graduated from Fasman Yeshiva in Skokie, IL, and plans to attend The University of Minnesota, majoring in Mathematics, next fall. Among his favorite things about Orayta are the unique opportunity to live in the Old City of Jerusalem, the Orayta guys, Rabbi Aaron's classes, and the Tuesday night Jewish History class.