



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Natan Brownstein

If you are a parent, sibling, friend or relative of someone here at Orayta you know what it took to send your child to Israel. Many of you had to decide between sending them into the familiar college environment or a foreign country. Others of you had to decide between different Yeshivot in Israel. I am here to tell you all that you made the right choice, that no other Yeshiva here in the holy land would be able to do what Orayta is doing to the 20 young men here this year.

Instead of many other Yeshivot, which spend the entire day giving *shiurim* on *Talmud*, Orayta gives you the full breadth of what Judaism has to offer. Going into this year, I personally knew that a lot of different courses were offered. Names like Siddur Analysis, Philosophy and Mysticism, and Character Building meant nothing on a schedule from orayta.org. But since then they have come alive to fill in all the holes missing in the ideal Jewish education.

In the morning we split up and half of us learn *Gemara* from Rav Noam while the other half of us learn *Chumash* from Rav Noam. After three hours split between learning with the class and in pairs the entire Yeshiva meets to have a class before lunch. For half of the week we are taught midot, which is character building. Rav Moish gives us ideas and ways to become better people. The other half of the week Rabbi Aaron teaching Siddur Analysis fills this time slot. In this class we learn how prayer can enhance our lives and how communication between G-d and us can make us better people and better Jews. Then we have a two-hour lunch break. However, the teachers and Rabbis come to lunch and spend as much time as the students need answering questions and spending time with the students.

The great thing about this Yeshiva is their motto that no questions are out of bounds. No question about G-d, Judaism, or the Torah is crossing the line. This makes for a wonderful environment in the *Beis Midrash*. Students can raise their hand to voice their concerns regarding their belief in G-d. In Gemarah someone (me) brought up the idea of women and *T'fillin*. Both ideas would be out of bounds in most places, but here at Orayta, the journey is your own. *Davening* is optional because no one should be forced to connect before they are ready.

After lunch three days a week we have a class on Philosophy and Mysticism from Rabbi David Aaron. This class is about G-d and who He is. What kind of role He can play in our lives and how our beliefs can affect the way we act in this world. Rabbi Aaron has been talking to us about how G-d wants to be a part of our lives and

how we are all a piece of Him. Really comprehending the idea that we are all a unique spark of G-d really blows your mind.

On the alternate afternoons the students who learn *Gemara* in the morning learn *Chumash* and vice versa. Before dinner each student gets their chance to develop their own Journey. A group of men called the Orayta Fellows come and meet in groups of 2 or 3 with students. Some of these men are Rabbis, some studying to be Rabbis, and some just in Yeshivot in Jerusalem. Each group learns whatever they want, whether it be concepts, a text, a book, or a commentary. My group happens to be studying *Pirkei Avot*, which is the *Mishna* (Jewish law) dealing with values and relationships between people.

Each night after dinner is different. Some nights there is an Israel Advocacy course, helping us to understand the situation in the Middle East when we go back to America. Other nights we have an *Ulpan* (Hebrew Immersion program), and one night we have a class about Jewish Characters in the Torah that we often skip over while studying.

I have just touched on the surface of what our first week at Orayta was like. I did not even begin to explain the historical tour of the Old City on Tuesday. Here at Orayta we dictate the speed of our Journeys. No one is telling us how to practice Judaism; no one is judging the kind of Jew we are by the amount of *halachot* we practice. This year we are not Jews learning Jewish laws, but the reason behind them. We are not just learning about Torah, but what we can learn from the characters in the stories. We are not only learning what G-d is, but how to connect with Him. Each of us is being inspired at our own pace in our own way. I hope you all have a wonderful, relaxing, and uplifting Shabbat.