



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Rafi Lowenstein

Many student perspectives have been written. Some funny, and some serious. But every student perspective that I have read answers a simple question: How have I (the student) changed or been affected because of Orayta and my year in Israel? I do not wish to answer this question. The question that I wish to answer is radically different and is going to make this much more interesting.



My question is: WHAT REALLY IS ORAYTA, AND HOW HAVE THE STUDENTS AFFECTED IT? This is the end of the year for me, but the beginning of a long journey for Orayta. You deserve to know.

Orayta is special. To phrase it better, Orayta is definitely not ordinary. But it is because of Orayta and its *Rabbeim's* undaunted courage to try something new that makes it extraordinary, and as a result I too have learned to be unusual. This goes for all of the students at Orayta. Our facade is normal: socially, intellectually, and Jewishly we appear to be well functioning people (at least I hope). But it is our inner selves that are unique in direction, thought, and mindset. This, I believe, is the path of leadership; this is Orayta.

Most *Yeshivot* base their accomplishments upon the amount of *halachik* information that has been infused into the students' heads. But Orayta, as you may have assumed by now, does things differently. Learning is a life process; *yeshiva* is just the start. I recently asked a good friend of mine who is learning at a different *yeshiva* in Israel what he had learned this year. He said 50 blot of *Gemara*. As much as I commend him for this incredible accomplishment, Orayta's aim is much different: confidence, commitment, purpose, understanding, and most importantly a sense of self. *Gemara shiur* is a pivotal part of the Orayta day, but with these goals mentioned above, concepts in *shiur* become more than just intellectual and informational; they become natural. Orayta gives one the ability to blast off into the next stage of life. Don't run after life, walk before life. Welcome to Orayta.

Student perspectives throughout the year have discussed how the *yeshiva* has affected us; now the tables have turned. Besides inspiring patience, which you need a lot of to be a Rabbi at Orayta, the students have really left

their mark on the *yeshiva*. Most *yeshivot* are perceived as a place where one can spend a year or two, learn *Torah*, and then move on with life. The way the students made it work at Orayta is quite the opposite. We used Orayta not as our “place” to learn, but as our **foundation** to learn. A *Beit Midrash* can be anywhere, but if one has not cultivated the ability to be deeply rooted in the core values of Judaism, then learning - no matter where - means little. We have made Orayta our foundation. The *Torah* is said to be a tree of life. Many people, and organizations, start by climbing the trunk, racing to the canopy. At first glance this appears wondrous and impressive. But then a strong wind comes and blows the tree down because the roots were never established.

My friends and I planted deep roots in Orayta. The affects may not be visible for a few years, but when the time comes Orayta is going to be a tree of life and everyone will be running to hold fast to it.

Rafi Lowenstein is a graduate of Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, IL. He was captain of the ICJA wrestling team, and vice president of the student council. Rafi will be attending Washington University in St. Louis next year.