



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Rob Sheen



Israel is a very special place for a Jew. It is the only place where the Jewish people are able to be themselves. Elsewhere, there is an overall, common stereotype of a Jew. Each stereotype varies from place to place throughout the world. In Israel, all those different kinds of Jews come together and as a result are as they are. It has to do with the fact that being in the land of Israel leads people away from the trivial things that seem so important outside of this holy land.

After living just a week in the Old City of Jerusalem, I have come not just to understand but to actually experience this for myself. This city is where my ancestors dreamed of seeing for almost two thousand years. Here we are, the Orayta group, living in this sacred place. The *Bet Midrash*, where we learn daily, is a nine hundred year old crusader fortress. It is amazing just thinking that what was used nearly a millennia ago to oppress and kill Jews, is now a place where Jews are learning the very foundations and pillars of their Jewish identity.

One experience that truly brought Jerusalem to life for me was my first Thursday night. Throughout the course of the evening I kept pondering what I could do Friday that would be meaningful. I kept thinking about all the different possibilities: shopping in *Machane Yehuda*, walking the ramparts, visiting a museum or a *mikvah* before *Shabbat*. I couldn't decide, so I just kept walking along Jaffa Road with a few friends until I happened to randomly arrive at a Yeshiva called *Ma`ayanot*. I figured that I would head back, as I would need some sleep to make plans to do something Friday. Since I had been in yeshiva all day, why would I go in here? However, for some unknown reason, something motivated me to go in and check it out.

I happened to overhear a conversation in Spanish, and realized that this would be a perfect opportunity for me to practice. I got to know this guy named Effy who was from Argentina. He told me a story about his experience of living in Israel for the past year in a half.

Effy told me that some time last year he happened to take a trip to *Ma'arat Hamachpelah*, in Hebron, in order to *daven* in a place that is spiritually meaningful. After *davening* at this holy site and realizing that he had lost his keys, Effy was approached by an elderly man who started asking him random questions, one of them being if he was married.

After the short encounter with this man, Effy ran back to *Ma'arat Hamachpelah* to look for his keys. With little success he realized that his keys must have been left on the bus. So Effy went to catch the next bus. As he boarded he asked for his keys, but realized that this was a different bus with a different driver. The driver was nice enough to let him off at the bus station where the original bus that Effy took would most probably be. The driver also told him that he needed to press a red button on the side of the main door in order to get inside. As Effy struggled with the door, he once again saw the same elderly gentlemen approaching him, only to say that life can be very short. It was then that Effy realized that the keys were not important.

That story really related to what I was thinking about that night. It is as if Effy was reading my mind, or was it the power of just being in Jerusalem? After joining in on some pre-*Shabbat* dancing in the streets of Jerusalem with the Yeshiva group, I realized that I did not have to plan on doing something meaningful the next day. Just by walking these sacred streets, meaning is right in front of me.

The night did not end there though; a group of guys from Orayta met up in the Old City on this cool and clear Thursday night. We figured that there was more to do than just sleep, so we stayed up until sunrise with a *Kumzis*. (Singing/ Playing Guitar)

Everybody is searching for who they are. Here in Jerusalem all one needs to do is just open their eyes, because the answers are right in front of us in this very magical city.

I wish all a very meaningful *Shabbat* and *Rosh Hashana* ahead, which is truly a time to open ones` eyes and discover the blessings before oneself.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rob Sheen