



STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Sandy Getraer



At Orayta, I feel like there is always someone to talk to about any question or problem I have, whether it's about a difficult word in a *gemara*, a struggle with belief in G-d, or just advice on something in my life. The rabbis and *madrichim* truly care about each student, and it's great to know that they are here to help me in any way they can.

Before coming to Orayta, I wondered if learning *torah l'shmah*, without tests, grades, or homework, would really be that different from the learning I did in high school. Now that I've been here for a month, I'm amazed at how big the difference is. Knowing that nobody is making me sit here and listen to a class, that I'm here because I want to learn and connect to Judaism, gives my learning far more purpose than any test ever could. In high school, sometimes I felt that understanding what we were learning was not considered as important as passing the test and moving on. When I learn at Orayta, making sure I understand what we're learning is the most important thing to me, to my *rebbe*, and even to the other *rebbeim*, *madrichim*, and staff members in the *beis midrash*, who are all happy to help me with anything from a difficult *tosafot* to a question about *davening*. It feels great to be able to focus on truly learning about Judaism.

We're about to go on a 3-week break for *Succot*, and I honestly wish we didn't have to. When I look on Facebook and see some of my friends say things like "Succot break is almost here, I can't wait!" I don't understand what they're feeling. I chose to come here to learn for a year, and I love it. Why do I need to take a vacation from my vacation? It's not like anybody's forcing me to be here. I go to morning *seder* every day and learn *gemara* for three hours because I want to, and I'm going to miss that over the next few weeks.

I love the time we spend with the fellows (students who learn in an afternoon *kollel*, and spend time with the Orayta students) because we get a chance to talk in small groups about the issues that are most important to us, and that we really want to know more about. Getting to bounce ideas off other people and hearing their perspectives really helps me develop my understanding of Judaism, *Hashem*, and myself. During a recent *chavrusa*, we were discussing

a person's connection with G-d, the *yetzer hara*, making mistakes and doing *teshuva*, and our own experiences with these things. Our conversation caused me to remember something that I had at times felt before, but had forgotten for a long time. In addition to being "our Father" and "our King," *Hashem* is in many ways the closest friend a person can have. *Hashem* knows everything about us, and He loves us. He is always there for us when we need Him. Sometimes in our lives we may have pain and sorrow, and we all need somebody to lean on. Sometimes we feel alone, and it's important for a person to know, and even more important to remember and believe, that we are never alone, and we always have a friend to talk to. Whenever you feel alone, think of the words "If you're lonely you can talk to Me," and remember that *Hashem* is always there to comfort you. (Of course, at Orayta we're also never alone because we have such wonderful *rebbeim* and *madrichim* to help us, but for those not fortunate enough to have such an opportunity, *Hashem* will always be there. That may sound like a joke, but it really is true.)

I hope you all have a meaningful *Yom Kippur* and an easy fast, and to the parents reading this, thank you on behalf of all the boys here for this incredible opportunity.