



## A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Zoosie Bloomberg

*When I heard the learned astronomer;  
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;  
 When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and  
 measure them;  
 When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much  
 applause  
 in the lecture-room,  
 How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;  
 Till rising and gliding out, I wandered off by myself,  
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
 Looked up in perfect silence at the stars.*  
 -Walt Whitman



Stepping into the Orayta curriculum after spending a semester in university drastically changed the perspective I would have had as a full year yeshiva student. Over the last four-and-half months, I spent most of my energy studying secular courses like sociology, anthropology, English, and linguistics. I learned more about the world I was living in during those four months than I had my entire life beforehand. When I received the e-mail from Rabbi Aaron saying that I had been accepted to Orayta for the second half of the year, I told myself that I would have to finish strong in the area of studies that I was currently in, and after my final exams, I would have to “drastically change my mindset”. But I found out I was wrong.

Looking back on the last two-and-a-half weeks here at Orayta, I realized that I'm receiving a Jewish education that's dissimilar to what I've been receiving for the 12 prior years of my life. I'm used to a setting where the little bit of a relationship that's established with the teacher fizzles out by the time the following summer is over, where material is approached on an elementary and surface level, and where emotion and course work don't mix. At Orayta, I'm experiencing a much greater approach to Jewish education, and I'm learning about things that I might have found absurd only a year ago. Speak to Rav Yair for five minutes and you'll see how strong a human being can be, sit in on Rav Dovid's afternoon *shiur* and you'll touch concepts that other *yeshivot* may think are off limits, and attend the six o'clock fellowship with Jon

Hoffman in the room behind Rav Binny's office and you might understand *shomer negiah* in a way that you've never understood before.

I thought that I needed to drastically change my mindset before coming to Israel for the remainder of the year, but I was quickly redirected to another notion. I don't need to change in order to learn in Israel; I just need to be willing to change. In the Walt Whitman poem above, he describes greater forms of learning and edification that go beyond the classroom setting, and nothing feels more alike that idea than what I've been feeling the last two-and-a-half weeks. If it's not learning Rav Kook in between the Patriots and Giants game at Rav Yair's house at 2 am, then it's sitting on top of the roof of the *Beis* looking "in perfect silence at the stars".

Last Tuesday night I was fortunate enough to be a part of a small group of boys to help send a friend off to America to take care of family business. Carrying one of his bags up the road and knowing that I was doing something to make his situation a little easier, his fifty-pound bag seemed weightless. Waiting for the rest of the group at the top of the hill, I heard the murmur of "*Acheinu*" marching up the road. Linked with our arms around each other's shoulders, we spent the last few moments with our friend by crying "*Acheinu*" two times. I've been around campfires, senior retreats, and even pledged the AEPi brotherhood at Queens College, but I've never felt a closer connection with my brothers than last Tuesday night. Among the *Torah* that I've been studying, I've been learning even more about myself, the people around me, and the land that's sheltering me. If I continue to learn as much as I've had and at the pace I've been learning, I'll be telling myself this June that I'll have no issue heading back to a secular world with the tools that Orayta has provided me with.