

Good Shabbos Everyone. Judgment day is approaching. On Rosh Hashana, Hashem "takes stock" of His creation. He examines every Jew in the world and judges their actions. There is plenty of time to do Teshuvah - to repent, to make up for misdeeds throughout the past year. Teshuvah means confessing to Hashem the wrongdoing, feeling remorse about and accepting upon one's self not to repeat the bad deed. For example, someone tells Hashem, "Father in Heaven, I ate non-kosher food. I am sorry. I feel bad about it and I promise not to do it again." Let us all be inspired by the following story to all do Teshuvah - to return to the proper path in life.

Rabbi Rafael Grossman and his wife of Memphis, Tennessee, are involved in the important task of outreach, reaching out to those Jews who are ignorant of their heritage. One useful method for attracting Jewish youth from the local colleges is the regular Shabbos "oneg," where students are invited to enjoy good food and stimulating conversation-thus exposing them to the beauty of a Torah life.

On one occasion, Rabbi Grossman noticed a new face in the crowd, a young lady named Elizabeth Gordon. Rabbi Grossman asked Elizabeth a little about herself and he was surprised to hear what the young lady had to say: Her parents were both Jewish but her father worked as a minister in a church, and she herself was raised in a church home.

"So what brought you here today, Elizabeth?" Said Rabbi Grossman. "I'm Jewish," Elizabeth said evasively, "so I decided to come." "You haven't come here to evangelize, have you?" Asked Rabbi Grossman as politely as he could.

Elizabeth did not answer the question, and Rabbi Grossman realized that he would have to watch this young woman very carefully. As the oneg proceeded. Rabbi Grossman saw that Elizabeth was, indeed, trying to persuade the other students that Xtianity was superior to Judaism. Politely but firmly, Rabbi Grossman asked Elizabeth to stop.

She began to argue theology with Rabbi Grossman, but it soon became clear to the listening students that Elizabeth was completely outclassed. With patience and clarity, Rabbi Grossman calmly refuted her assertions, explaining how her quotes from the Bible were poorly translated and completely misinterpreted. In the end, Elizabeth's voice trailed off into flustered silence. "I don't mean to embarrass you," Rabbi Grossman told her gently "But I'm afraid you'll find it very difficult to maintain your arguments with anyone with a clear understanding of the Torah." "I don't..." Elizabeth stopped. Without looking at anyone, she rose from her chair and left the room. Rabbi Grossman assumed that he would not hear from Elizabeth Gordon again, but to his surprise, he received a phone call from her a few days later.

When Elizabeth arrived at the Grossmans' home a few days later, she was agitated and distraught. "I've been taught to believe in Xtianity my whole life," she blurted out. "But I see now that everything was a sham and a lie. Is there some way I could learn the real Torah?" "You surely can, Elizabeth," Rabbi Grossman assured her.

Some four weeks later, Elizabeth spent a Shabbos in the Grossmans' home. Her conversations revealed Just how far she'd come in such a short time. She loved the holy atmosphere of Shabbos, discussing the weekly portion with Rabbi Grossman's daughters and displaying a clear understanding of the very basic precepts of the Torah. Afterward, as she spoke privately with Rabbi Grossman, she poured out her distress. "I just can't live this way any longer... I've got to start living like a religious Jew, too!" Rabbi Grossman promised her all the support she needed, and Elizabeth soon embarked on a new way of life.

Her studies continued and she was a frequent guest in the Grossmans' home. Her enthusiasm for Torah proved infectious; when she met a young secular Israeli, she convinced him to meet Rabbi Grossman and learn the beauty of a Torah life, just as she had done. The young man was soon wearing tefillin on a regular basis and observing many more laws of the Torah. Some months later, Elizabeth and the young man came to visit Rabbi Grossman together. "We came to ask for your blessing that we should marry," the young man said shyly. Rabbi Grossman smiled warmly at the young couple, feeling tremendous pride in their great accomplishments.

As plans for the wedding got underway, however, a problem arose. Elizabeth's parents wanted to come to the wedding, but they were still practicing Xtians. Rabbi Grossman told the couple that they could come to the wedding but they would not be able to accompany their daughter to the chuppah or participate in the wedding ceremony itself. Elizabeth's parents did not care for the compromise. Rabbi Grossman soon received an angry phone call from Mr. Gordon.

On the day of the wedding, both Mr. and Mrs. Gordon did come for the ceremony. They sat in the back, speaking to no one, as their daughter was married according to the laws of the Torah. After the wedding, Elizabeth and her new husband moved to a small community. There they organized a regular minyan and encouraged spiritual growth. A few years later, with the birth of their first child, they moved to a larger community with greater opportunities. Elizabeth opened the city's first religious school and continued to dedicate her life to spreading Torah to others. Eventually, with a family of five, they moved to Eretz Yisrael.

A few months after the move, Rabbi Grossman received a phone call from Elizabeth's father again. This time, he seemed even angrier than before. "You've brainwashed my daughter!" Mr. Gordon stormed. "I have half a mind to start legal proceedings against you!" "I could suggest a good lawyer for you, if you'd like," Rabbi Grossman offered, completely unfazed. Mr. Gordon, taken aback by Rabbi Grossman's response, changed his tone. He calmed down and began to speak more rationally.

Over the course of the conversation, which lasted over five hours. Rabbi Grossman learned that Mr. Gordon had originally become a minister in order to support his family. "Listen," Rabbi Grossman said finally, as he prepared to hang up the phone. "You haven't lost a daughter; you've found one. If you are prepared, you can accept this beautiful gift that Hashem has given you." Mr. Gordon did not seem able to reply, and he ended the conversation.

Two years passed. Elizabeth's mother became ill and died shortly afterwards. Rabbi Grossman picked up the phone to hear Mr. Gordon's trembling voice on the other end of the line. "Rabbi," Mr. Gordon said hesitantly, "My wife, before she died, she said that she regretted her conversion. She didn't want to be buried in the church cemetery, but ..." his voice trailed off into silence. "It's all right," Rabbi Grossman encouraged him. "Go ahead and purchase a lot for her in a Jewish cemetery. No one will ask you any questions." "But isn't that fraud?" Mr. Gordon asked unhappily. "After all, she lived her entire adult life as a Xtian." "She did teshuvah." Rabbi Grossman said softly. "She was born a Jew, and she died as a Jew. Have her buried according to Torah Law."

This time, Mr. Gordon did not simply hang up the phone and retreat from any contact with Rabbi Grossman. He called him often, seeking inspiration and encouragement. Rabbi Grossman offered comfort and support, recognizing that Mr. Gordon was a troubled, almost broken man. Things came to a head one Sunday morning, when Mr. Gordon went to his pulpit and gave a sermon that his Xtian congregants had never heard before. Instead of preaching about Xtianity, he derided Xtian beliefs and their way of life. Before the day was over, Mr. Gordon found himself fired. He was now completely alone; he had no wife, no job, and his daughter's family lived on the other side of the world.

Mr. Gordon went to Israel, where Elizabeth and her family greeted him warmly. Mr. Gordon was moved by the gracious welcome. Soon after, Mr. Gordon himself became a committed baal teshuva. He spent the last ten years of his life at peace, living as a Torah Jew. No one knew that the elderly man who stood in shul, immersed in his prayers, had spent years living as a Xtian minister before he finally found his way home. (From, Visions of Greatness, Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Volume 6, p.70) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**