



ORGANIC RIPENING; A TRUE STORY

Back in 1989 the Kats family arrived in Baltimore from Kiev. It was a father a mother and their two girls, 13 year old Yana and 9 year old Inna. Upon their arrival they learnt about Camp Shoresh and both girls spent that first summer there. Rabbi David Finkelstein, the director of Shoresh, called Paysach Diskind and told him about these wonderful girls. Paysach immediately contacted the family and Yana expressed interest in attending a Jewish school.

Bais Yaakov opened their doors and Yana was accepted into the 8th grade. Although in Hebrew studies she was placed in 2nd grade she quickly adjusted to her new environment and created several close friendships that would last for tens of years. At the end of her first year Yana felt uncomfortable in Bais Yaakov since she was the only non-observant girl in her class. She was torn internally; was she a Bais Yaakov girl who dresses in a skirt or a non-observant girl who wears pants. She had two sets of friends as well. She therefore decided to switch to Pikesville High School for 9th grade and continued until the end of high school. Her relationship with her Bais Yaakov friends went into deep freeze. After graduating Pikesville she went on to College Park, got her master's in psychology and landed a nice job for the government. She bought a home downtown and was enjoying life.

In the meantime her younger sister, Inna, had spent some time in Israel and embraced a Torah way of life. For Yana, however, it was not time yet.

One Friday as Yana was leaving work her African-American co-worker asked her what her plans were for the weekend. Yana had no special plans. Her co-worker told her that she was going to a Shabbat dinner perhaps Yana would join her. Yana was shocked, "You are going where?!" The co-worker thought that Yana did not know what a Shabbat dinner was and so she began explaining what Shabbat is and so on. Yana, however, knew very well what Shabbat was and what a Shabbat dinner was. She had participated in many Shabbat dinners years earlier in her Bais Yaakov days. Yana told her that she knew what Shabbat is, "in fact, I am Jewish". Her co-worker exclaimed "You are Jewish?! How fortunate you are! So, will you join me?"



Naturally, Yana joined her. After the dinner one young man got up and offered a ride home for anyone who needed. Yana was struck, "I thought that we may not drive on Shabbat! If this is a Shabbat dinner how can they offer a ride home?"

This launched Yana into a soul searching mission. She turned to Paysach Diskind, her address for Jewish issues, and discovered a deep seated yearning to connect with Torah and mitzvos. She went on to study in Israel for a year at Shaarim and then returned home.

At the age of 33 Yana met a wonderful young man from Queens, and they got married. They currently have 3 children and are building a beautiful Jewish family.

Fruits ripen at different times. Some need sunlight while others need time and yet others need both. People also ripen and some need warmth and some need time ACHIM provides both the sunlight and the time.

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