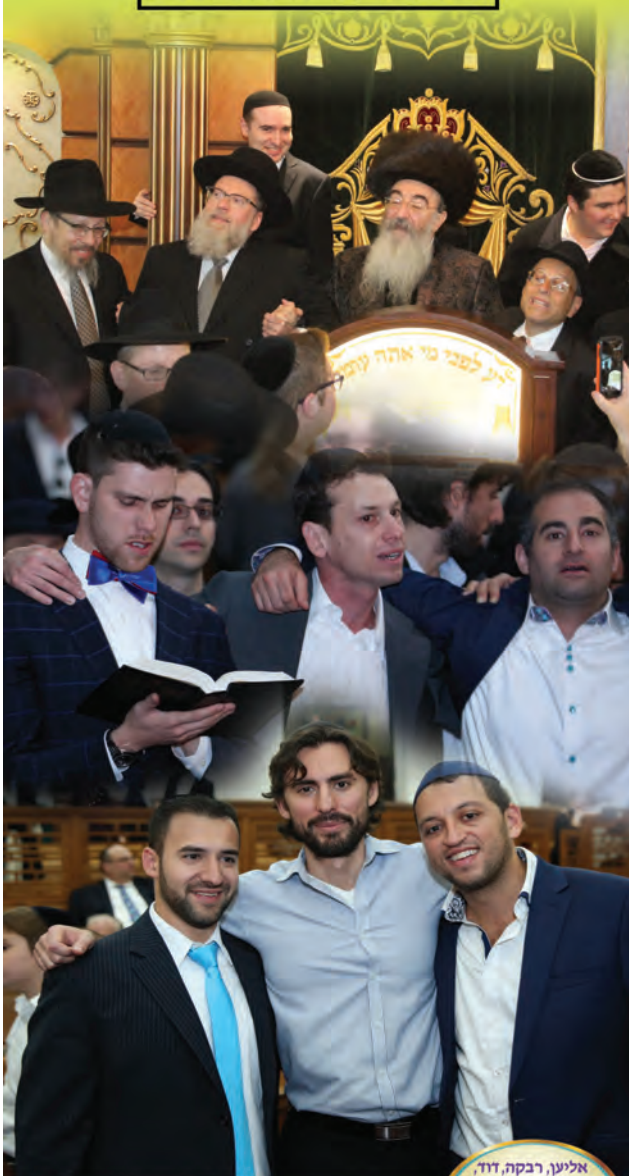


The Shabbos Project

KEEPING IT TOGETHER



PROJECT INSPIRE. A PROGRAM OF aish INTERNATIONAL

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למשפחת ששון

The Shabbos Project was Sponsored in Memory of The Sassoon Children

Shabbos Project 2015: Project Inspires Inspires Us All

M. LOWINGER

Maybe it was our imagination, but there was something special in the air this past Erev Shabbos. A serenity, yes. But also a sense of anticipation, as if we all understood that something really big was about to happen. And as the sun began to set, thousands of Jews — hosts and guests — lit their Shabbos candles and walked to shul, all of them realizing that this was not going to be an ordinary Shabbos.

The Shabbos Project was launched two years ago in South Africa and has since gone global in a very big way. Communities around the world have been intrigued by the concept of Jews of every background keeping Shabbos together. In Flatbush and around the tri-state area, Project Inspire has been instrumental in planning and orchestrating many of the events, as well as offering resources and guidance to communities around the area. All told, roughly a million Jews participated in Shabbos programs around the world last week, many of whom had never experienced Shabbos before.

The aura of Shabbos is powerful, and once it's been sampled it can change a person's life forever. Moreover, those who participated in the Shabbos Project realized that they were part of something larger than life. By the time Shabbos ended last week, thousands of Jews had developed relationships with others, and many more expressed a keen interest in learning more about Shabbos and revisiting their hosts. The Shabbos Project's success could be felt on so many levels.

Project Inspire Captivates Flatbush

Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin became the hub of the Flatbush Shabbos Project, with satellite activities being held in many other locations. Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Gross, the program was fully loaded with a variety of lectures, panel discussions, *tefillos*, *onegs* and a community *seudah shelishis*. It culminated

with a breathtaking *Havdalah* ceremony.

Friday night *tefillos* were led by Mr. Simcha Leiner. Rabbi Yoni Zakutinsky and Harav Moshe Tuvia Liefv warmly welcomed all guests to the neighborhood. As Rav of the Agudah, Rabbi Liefv served as *daas Torah* for Project Inspire, enthusiastically encouraging their activities and offering guidance and counsel in all areas. Rabbi Liefv continued to inspire the *olam* with *drashos* during *davening* and at *seudah shelishis*.

As many guests enjoyed the Shabbos evening *seudah* at the homes of their hosts, there were also several huge communal *seudos* held around the neighborhood. About 70 guests, including Aish alumni, joined Mr. Sholom and Mrs. Zehava Horowitz

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and their family. And 75 people from Jinspire participated in the *seudah* at the Agudah.

After the *seudah*, all returned to shul to hear inspirational messages from Rabbi Y.Y. Wenglin of Yerushalayim ("From Harvard to Hassid") and Reb Isaac Gross, who spoke about how Shabbos protects the Jewish people.

The Shabbos Project in Flatbush was dedicated in memory of the seven Sassoon children, and thus we were honored and humbled to be addressed by Rabbi Gavriel Sassoon, their father. Later, a lavish *Oneg Shabbos* was enjoyed by guests and hosts until the wee hours of the morning, as

everyone went about the business of connecting with each other.

In the morning, Rabbi Chaim Sampson, director of Project Inspire, spoke about prayer in the shul's Lower Ballroom, while *davening* commenced upstairs. A beautiful *kiddush* was prepared, sponsored by community members Mr. Usher Langsam and Mr. Eli Lieberman. In the afternoon, huge crowds returned to shul for more inspiration, with concurrent sessions on "Secrets To Happiness" (presented by Dr. David Lieberman) and "Grill The Rabbi Q and A" (including Rabbis Mordechai Becher, Chaim Sampson and Daniel Mechanic). Later sessions featured Rabbi Mordechai Becher on "Jewish Gastronomy" and a panel of CEOs speaking about their personal experienc-

es as observant Jews in the workplace (including Mr. Isaac Gross, Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein, and Mr. Shlomo Werdyger). Nobody could get enough of the wisdom and inspiration.

After *Minchah*, we regrouped once again in the Upper Ballroom for a massive *seudah shelishis*, during which Reb Gavriel Sanders discussed his journey to Judaism. Eventually, dusk descended upon the neighborhood, and all gathered in the shul for *Maariv* and a communal *Havdalah*. Rabbi Yaakov Solomon explained the significance of *Havdalah*, and how difficult it is for us to bid farewell to Shabbos. In an emotional and mean-

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ingful ceremony, many felt reluctant to let go of the magic that had transpired here over Shabbos.

But the seriousness didn't last long. Once *Havdalah* ended, the Shlome Dachs band began to play and everyone, both upstairs and downstairs, started to dance. What a powerful moment it was. That's when we realized that the inspiration just has to continue. This is not the end of our Shabbos experience together. This is

It Was Happening All Over

While much of the program centered in the Agudah, there were additional programs being held all around the neighborhood. At Kehilas Ateres Shloime, under the leadership of Rabbi Mordechai Twerski, members of the shul opened their homes to the Jewel women of Aish HaTorah.

"We had an unbelievable Shab-

In an emotional and meaningful ceremony, many felt reluctant to let go of the magic that had transpired here over Shabbos.

bos," says Mr. Izzy Itzkowitz. A highlight of the program was a massive Shabbos *seudah* shared by hosts and their guests together in the shul. According to Izzy, 120 people enjoyed the *seudah* together.

At Yeshivas Ohr Yitzchok, says Rabbi Binyomin Wallerstein, "we did the Shabbos Project within the framework of what we do on a regular basis... Rabbi Becher spoke to the *talmidim* on Shabbos morning. 'The buzz' created by the Shabbos Project was tremendous. It made us feel part of something big."

Members of Beis Medrash Faltshin-Skver, under the leadership of Harav Yonosan Katz, invited guests for Shabbos as well. In the morning, Rabbi Wenglin addressed a full house, speaking about the "fanaticism" of sports fans. Imagine, he continued, if we could channel that fanaticism to serve the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

According to Daniel of Khal Zichron Mordechai, (led by Rabbi Shimshon Sherer) it was a Shabbos filled with *achdus* and unity, inspirational for both hosts and guests. Friday night *davening* was led by Mr. Sruli Hersh, followed by an *Oneg* and inspiring words from Rabbi Mordechai Becher. Shabbos morning *davening* was led by Mr. Aron Zutler, followed by a *kiddush* in honor of the guests and a *har mitzvah*

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SHABBOS IN BROOKLYN

Be'er Hagolah High School students. On Shabbos afternoon, the *kehilah* was addressed by Rabbi Yaakov Salamon, by Reb Ari Freilich and by Rabbi Daniel Mechanic.

A program was held at Yeshiva Gedola Ohr Yisroel, located on Nostrand Avenue, under the leadership of Rabbi Avrohom Zucker. Members of the shul invited guests, and all enjoyed an inspirational speech by Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson and a beautiful *Oneg Shabbos*.

Kollel Bnei Torah (led by Rabbi Yosef Eisen) hosted a group of young

Project Inspire

As a grassroots movement whose goal is to unify the Jewish people, Project Inspire provided resources, guidance and programming to Shabbos Project activities in many locations. They helped support programs in Queens, Monsey, the Five Towns, Staten Island, Passaic, Lakewood, Elizabeth, New York City and even Chicago, Toronto and beyond.

"We encourage *frum* Jews," says Rabbi Sampson, "to share the beauty and wisdom of *Yiddishkeit*. Whether friends, family, neighbors

"I don't know what this will turn into from here on out, but I can guarantee you that it touched them very deeply in a way they've never experienced before."

people from Horizons in Montreal. *Davening* featured the talented Travelling Chassidim. Hosts and guests all joined in the Shabbos *seudah*, and were addressed by Rabbi Becher. *Seudah shelishis* were celebrated by the men at shul and the women in a private home. During *seudah shelishis*, many shared their thoughts.

"It's not about big growth," said one member of the group. "It's about tiny growth. If we can say we are more committed this Shabbos than last, then we were successful." Another participant shares, "It was unreal. I want to try to start keeping Shabbat even though my family doesn't. It's something I want in my future."

In a follow-up letter to Rabbi Eisen, Alexia writes, "I don't know what this will turn into from here on out, but I can guarantee you that it touched them very deeply in a way they've never experienced before."

At the Jewish Center Nachlat Zion, located on Avenue V, a Carlebach-style *davening* ushered in the spirit of *achdus*. Over a hundred people joined in the *seudah*, enjoying meaningful *divrei Torah* and rousing *zemiros*. The inspiration continued with a beautiful *Oneg* and *kumzitz* that lasted well into the night. "It was

or co-workers, we all know someone we can reach out to." Project Inspire provides guidance as well as holiday gifts with user-friendly explanations. They also prepared a "Shabbos" that contains all the basics needed to celebrate Shabbos properly at home, as well as a handbook with easy-to-follow guidelines.

Looking back on this past Shabbos, the Project Inspire staff and the community at large is stunned by the aura that was created. Messages of gratitude and appreciation pour into their office on a regular basis. Only days after Shabbos ended, guests and hosts are already arranging their next meetings, their upcoming events.

In the end, it wasn't just about the guests. The effect of the Shabbos Project on the local community is indisputable. "Judging by the mass attendance at the events," Rabbi Sampson observes, "many local *frum Yidden* found themselves to be greatly inspired and motivated as well."

It's easy to lose track of the beauty of Shabbos, especially when we are overwhelmed by the responsibilities of daily life. Thanks to the Shabbos Project, we learned to appreciate Hashem's greatest gift to the Jewish

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