

SHABBOS OF CHINUCH INSPIRATION

LEAVES FLATBUSH BREATHLESS AND INSPIRED

By M. Lowinger

ANYONE WHO SPENT SHABBOS IN FLATBUSH last week could not help but notice the elevated atmosphere and the enthusiasm that resonated around our community. What with the incredible weather and the many guests and community members walking the streets, there was a certain aura, an uncommon but wonderful vibe. It was as if we were all celebrating a Shabbos simcha together.

The Flatbush Shabbos of Chinuch Inspiration was coordinated by Project Inspire, a program of Aish HaTorah, in conjunction with the many communities around the world who were hosting Shabbos Project events of their own. This year's program was held at Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin, with hordes of participants coming and going all Shabbos long. The program was sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Isaac and Edie Gross in memory of their beloved mother, Malka bas Yoseph Yuspeh, O"H.

Most of those who attended the event found it difficult to leave. And many admit to being overwhelmed with inspiration. The highly spirited Kabolas The with its floral and soaring thought lavish Oneg centerpieces the thought Chinuch Panel enlightening of Rabbi Yaakov heartfelt words of each was a gem And that was just program! community observed: "It's as if someone brought a Convention right here to our doorstep!" It was an accurate description, to be sure. In the comfort of our own neighborhood, without leaving our homes, we were zoche to spend a Shabbos listening to words of wisdom and inspiration from some of klal yisroel's most esteemed Torah leaders, many of whom are the unparalleled experts in the field of Chinuch and raising children.

We heard from our own Rav Moshe Tuvia Lief, Rav of Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin, who welcomed the huge crowds with warmth and enthusiasm. We listened to the advice of Rav Yaakov Bender, Rosh Yeshivas Darchei Torah and an undisputed authority on Chinuch issues. We heard Rav Moshe Lowy, Rav of Agudas Yisroel of Toronto, discuss the urgent need to reach out to save our fellow Jews who are drowning. We listened to Rabbi Zecharya Greenwald, Menahel of Me'ohr Bais Yaakov in Yerushalayim, describe positive communication methods. And we all laughed out loud as Rabbi Yitzchok Fanger described his personal journey from secularism to Yiddishkeit with tremendous humor.

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Some of us joined Rabbi Chaim Sampson, Director of Project Inspire, as he discussed the five levels of Free Will. Others joined Rabbi Aharon Lopiansky, Rosh Yeshiva of Ateres Gedalya in Greater Washington, as he presented a brilliant Parsha shiur on the evolution of Avodah Zarah. And hundreds of determined women packed a beautifully prepared Shalosh Seudos event in the Lower Ballroom while being inspired by Leba Schwebel, Tzippi Reifer, and Chanie Juravel.

The thoughtful and profound shared the limelight with the melodious and sublime. Yanky Lemmer, Mordechai Shapiro, and the Zimra Choir didn't merely entertain us. They energized us and elevated our Shabbos to greater heights. The soaring Shabbos tefillos were outstanding, and the rousing Havdallah ceremony blew us all away. It was the perfect culmination to a Shabbos experience that left most of us wishing for more. Despite having attended hours of classes, shiurim, and Shabbos tefillos, we could have danced the night away. It was heartwarming to witness the range and breadth of participants who came to this event. There were plenty of Flatbushers, of course but also lots of guests. Some walked great distances to attend. Others arranged to spend Shabbos within the community. People who never met each other before were sharing their thoughts and their reflections. And total strangers were seated together, discussing the topics of the day as if they had been friends forever. It seemed like everybody wanted to be a part of this, and nobody could get enough of it. We were reluctant to walk away from all this, but the feedback and the comments continue to resonate long after the program has ended. "Wow, what a Shabbos!" says Rabbi Chaim Sampson of Project Inspire. "Our motto as an organization is 'inspire yourself to inspire others.' I believe this Shabbos we were able to provide a heavy dose of inspiration for ourselves, without which we cannot inspire others."

Rabbi Sampson was encouraged by the huge turnout, "reflecting the tremendous desire and needs of the community to hear how they can be inspired, how they can keep their children and grandchildren connected, and how to deal with the issues of the day." He expresses his appreciation to Rabbi Lief "for the incredible support and hishtadlus to help make this happen," and to the Gross family for "sponsoring the Shabbos and being a constant source of inspiration and guidance to myself and the entire team."

And R' Isaac Gross, who has been the guiding force behind the annual Flatbush Shabbos Project, reflects upon Shabbos and says, "I wish I could bottle it and give it out at street corners. The whole Shabbos was so amazing. Every year we do it and the crowds are just bigger and better. There wasn't a seat to be had, and nobody wanted to leave."

He specifically remembers the conclusion of the memorable Friday Night Oneg. "It was 12:30 AM and yet nobody moved. We all just wanted to stay. Even the guest lecturers who joined us for Shabbos were totally blown away."

As we brace ourselves for a chilly winter season ahead, many of us will draw repeatedly from the inspiration of last week's Shabbos. It will certainly be a source of comfort and warmth.

Says Rabbi Lief, "The Shabbos of Chinuch Inspiration was intended to be a game changer. And it was."

