

“WHEN CAN WE DO THIS AGAIN ??”

Shabbos Project Body and Soul Retreat with Jinspire

By M. Lowinger

WHAT HAPPENS when you put together 750 Jews of all ages and every type of background for an incredible Shabbos Project experience? Just ask anyone who spent last weekend at the Shabbos Project Body and Soul Retreat with Jinspire at the Sheraton Parsippany Hotel. For most of the participants, it is hard to articulate in words what they had experienced. In fact, the overwhelming feedback from the weekend was people asking “when can we do this again soon?!”

JINSPIRE, a division of Project Inspire and a program of Aish HaTorah, involves religious and less affiliated Jews of all backgrounds mingling in an atmosphere that encourages more connected Jews to learn, share and grow together with less connected Jews. Through its many programs and activities, Jinspire provides a forum for Jews of all backgrounds to share the beauty of their customs and traditions together in a wholesome atmosphere and supportive environment.

THIS YEAR, in honor of the worldwide Shabbos Project movement, Project Inspire and Jinspire set out to celebrate with its Body and Soul retreat. This was a revolutionary idea where frum people recruited non-religious people to attend the Body and Soul retreat with them for a joint Shabbos experience. Mr. Isaac Gross, longtime supporter of the program, explained: “We wanted to bring the Shabbos Project to the next level. Instead of asking people to host guests in their homes, we brought all these wonderful families to a luxury hotel and presented them with an unforgettable program. Observant and non-affiliated Jews had the opportunity to meet and connect all weekend long. Questions were welcomed and the ruach and spirit were palpable and genuine. The weekend was successful beyond our wildest dreams! This needs to be replicated globally to give more power and connection to all Jews around the world participating in the Shabbos Project.”

THE TONE was set at the very start with an energetic and action-packed Challah Bake on Friday afternoon for the women where one participant described the scene saying, “Frum and not frum, young and old, sheitels, tichels, and everyone else. We were dancing together like crazy!” From that moment on, there were so many moments of friendship, of discovery, and of inspiration. It was all about making connections. As Charlie Harary so appropriately summed it up in his

keynote address, “unity allows us to move from who we are to who we are meant to be. We can compare ourselves as a Jewish nation to a hockey team – similar to the U.S. hockey team and their Miracle on Ice, we need to worry about what it says on the front of our jerseys and play for the name of the country or the name of the Jewish people instead of simply focusing on the individual name on the back of the jersey.”

ON SHABBOS AFTERNOON, participants came on stage to share their personal stories. These real life testimonials demonstrated the power of Jews to make a difference in each other’s lives. One couple who immigrated from Russia shared that they barely knew about Jewish tradition while growing up. Today, they are fully Shomer Shabbos and have a kosher kitchen. “All this,” they said, “is due to our experience of being invited out for Shabbos by our Brooklyn neighbors.”

AN OUTSTANDING PROGRAM kept everyone engaged and inspired. It was a multi-dimensional experience with balanced programming that catered to everyone, no matter their age or background. From wine tasting

to Challah baking, from a pre-Shabbos musical interlude to a spirited Havdallah ceremony, from a gala Kiddush to three sumptuous Shabbos meals, from hilarious comedy routines to fun filled game shows, from Zumba classes to a Magic show and many inspiring educators and classes – this was a weekend that was enjoyed on every level. Most importantly, the impact it had on people has changed some lives forever. One woman from Brooklyn decided this Shabbos retreat was the final push for her to switch her children from public school to Yeshiva day school. There are countless stories such as this coming to the fore since the weekend ended.

YOSSIE FRIEDMAN, Managing Director of Project Inspire, was struck as he went from table to table during the Shabbos seuda hearing how “each one told a unique story of different types of Jews bonding with one another, making new friends, reconnecting with old friends and together figuring out the best way to grow and share together their Judaism and Torah.”

RABBI CHAIM SAMPSON, Director of Project Inspire, spoke about Rabbi Noach Weinberg’s zt”l vision to create a community of people who are united, no matter their level of observance. “We have each other,” he said. “We have the Jewish people. We are a community that cares and we’re going to learn, grow, and change the world together. Nothing will stop us when we are united.” On a similar note, keynote speaker Rabbi Shlomo Farhi concluded the weekend program with a powerful speech urging the participants to “let this weekend fuel your fire. Learn more, share, and light this fire wherever you go. Aish is a movement and it’s a movement because of you.”



The Shabbos Retreat was dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Isaac and Edie Gross in memory of their beloved parents.

For more information about Project Inspire’s programs, contact them at **646.291.6191** OR VISIT **WWW.JINSPIRE.ORG**.