



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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The first time I heard about NCSY Shabbatons, I wasn't sure I fully understood what they were. It was the fall of 2001 when my then-boss at NCSY, Rabbi Steve Burg, described to me how the Shabbatons worked, and in particular, this incredible moment called *Havdalah*. To be honest, *Havdalah* had never been especially meaningful to me until then. It was simply what you did when you came home from *shul* on *Motzei Shabbat*: you made *Havdalah* and moved on. But when Rabbi Burg explained that it could last an hour, filled with singing and dancing, I remember thinking, how

good could it really be?

In December of 2001, my family and I joined our first regional Shabbaton in Los Angeles with 56 Vancouver NCSYers, and that *Havdalah* changed me forever. The room was dark. A huge *Havdalah* candle, made in Tzfat, was held high by the regional board on stage. A full band, alongside Rabbi Danny Lamm and Mikey Butler z"l, played uplifting music that filled the room with energy and spirit.

The songs began with the traditional *Hiney Kel Yeshuati*. Then, at a certain point, the music slowed and voices alone carried the moment. With the boys on one side and the girls on the other, everyone swayed together, singing from the heart. I looked around and thought to myself, "This is such a beautiful way to end Shabbat." From that very week until today, our family has made *Havdalah* last 10 to 15 minutes. We sit together, bless one another for the coming week, sing, and try to make *Havdalah* an experience that eases us out of Shabbat with meaning rather than rushing through it. That night at the Shabbaton transformed our family practice.

There was another moment during that same *Havdalah* that struck me even more deeply. At one point the music shifted from soft, reflective singing into fast-paced, passionate dancing. The song was "Ratzah" by Dedi Graucher z"l. It began slowly, almost plaintively: "*Ratzah HaKadosh Baruch Hu lezakot et Yisrael*," Hashem wants to give merit to the Jewish people. Over and over

The OU Israel family wishes
Mazel Tov to
Abigail Lerer & Eyden Zimbalist
on their wedding
this past Monday, September 1st

Mazel Tov to parents:
Sarah & Daniel Lerer
and Hili & Jonathan Zimbalist
and to the grandparents:
Chani & Norman Schmutter,
Deborah & Solomon Lerer,
Betsy & Stuart Zimbalist
and Ilana & Eric Love

Mazel tov to great-grandmother
Eva Laub Kunstler

we sang those words. Then came the turning point, when the pace quickened: “*Lefikach, hirsch lahem Torah u’mitzvot!*” Hashem gave us many mitzvot out of His love, to give us the opportunity to come closer to Him.

I looked around the room and saw hundreds of young people dancing with passion, singing about Hashem’s love and His gift of mitzvot. I was overwhelmed. Afterwards, I asked some of them if they understood the words. Many did, and even those who didn’t sang with all their heart. That image has stayed with me vividly ever since.

These memories come back to me this week as our family, *b’ezrat Hashem*, celebrates the bar mitzvah of our youngest son, Mordechai. He will be reading *Parshat Ki Teitzei*, the parsha with the most mitzvot in the entire Torah. My prayer to Hashem is that the love He shows us through the gift of His mitzvot will continue to be reflected in all of our children. I look forward to standing beside Mordechai Tzemach as he reads all 74 mitzvot in this week’s parsha, and to reflecting on the eternal goals Hashem has set for us.

Let us pray that the passion our youth show when singing and dancing—whether they fully understand the words or not—will carry over into all aspects of their lives. May that same passion inspire them in their *davening*, in their acts of *chesed*, in their service in the army, and in their commitment to defend and uplift the Jewish people. Thank



God, we can already see a generation filled with passion, filled with light, and filled with greatness. May that passion bring us, *b’ezrat Hashem*, to *Mashiach Tzidkeinu*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Rabbi Avi Berman.

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel



Mazal Tov to
Richard & Brondie Levine
and family on the Bar Mitzvah
of their grandson