

# Mazel Tov

It was a few short minutes after birth, and I sensed something was wrong. With rising panic, I anxiously looked around, hoping for some explanation. The nurse seemed busy, and no one made eye contact with me. Finally, the doctor walked closer to the bed and said a sentence that changed our lives forever. "It seems that your baby may have Down syndrome." He turned and walked away slowly, and I felt a tremendous darkness descend. "No, this couldn't be happening to us. This couldn't be true. I wanted to open my eyes and have this whole nightmare disappear. I wanted it to be nothing but a big mistake. But when they brought the baby to me a few minutes later, it was clear that this was no mistake. I recognized some of the features and knew deep in my heart that this was true. I was frozen. There was no warning or any indication about this prior to his birth, and the shock numbed all my senses. I felt detached, like I was watching a story that had nothing to do with me. My husband was processing the news in his own way. The shock was overwhelming and he was faced with sharing the Mazel Tov with our parents. Mazel Tov? Was it a Mazel Tov? It certainly didn't feel like it at that moment.

Fast forward 4 years. 4 wonderful years. As I look back at the day that Chaim was born, I marvel how far we've come. Chaim is a precious little boy whose smile lights up the room. He has transformed our family in so many wonderful ways. Chaim has opened up our hearts and expanded our visions. He is part of our family, and we sometimes even forget that he has Down syndrome-he is just Chaim.

It took time for the transformation to happen. At 3 months old, his medical issues began, and we dealt with that for over a year. It wasn't easy. It was a roller coaster of hospital stays, surgeries, crises, and emergencies. During that time, while he was fighting for his life, his diagnosis of Down syndrome was irrelevant. He was our sick baby who needed a Refuah Shelaimah. Throughout those endless days and nights spent hovering over his crib in the PICU, we davened for him, and connected with our precious baby. We forged a special bond, and slowly we moved from feeling vulnerable and helpless, to feeling empowered with our mission to raise this child.

Although the diagnosis did not change, we changed.

We learned to love, and to be loved.

We learned to give, and to receive.

We learned to accept and appreciate.

We can now truly say how Chaim is the greatest gift Hashem has bequeathed to our family. Despite the inevitable challenges that come along with raising a special needs child, Chaim has made us who we are today, and for that we are grateful. ✨