



In the latter part of the twentieth century, American Jewry witnessed a fascinating phenomenon: the *teshuvah* movement. Suddenly, there were hundreds of *ba'alei teshuvah*—returnees to Judaism—Jews who abandoned their secular ways for the spirituality and meaning in traditional Judaism. As the *teshuvah* movement gained momentum, outreach shifted to the top of the Orthodox Jewish agenda (according to one estimate, there are more than 700 *kiruv* organizations worldwide today). More significantly, the movement succeeded in radically changing the landscape of American Jewry.

To be sure, assimilation remains one of American Jewry's greatest challenges, yet the thousands of *ba'alei teshuvah* who have joined religious communities around the country—and around the world—have infused Orthodoxy with renewed creativity, inspiration and vigor. Perhaps most astonishingly, the *teshuvah* movement does not seem to be going away anytime soon. According to Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, a contributing editor of *Jewish Action* and a *kiruv* professional quoted in our cover story, “more and more people are emerging every day who wish to learn.”

In this issue, we celebrate the remarkable success of the *teshuvah* movement and explore Jewish outreach in the twenty-first century. In his thought-provoking article on “The New Face of Jewish Outreach,” journalist Steve Lipman asks some intriguing questions: What are the trends in *kiruv* today? How do the *kiruv* programs of today differ from those of decades ago? What are some of the challenges facing *kiruv* professionals today, and how are the leading *kiruv* organizations responding to them?

While we generally prefer not to “toot our own horn” in the pages of *Jewish Action*, in this issue, we cannot help but highlight the Orthodox Union's inestimable contribution to Jewish outreach. A pioneer in the world of *kiruv*, the OU began addressing rampant assimilation in 1954 with the creation of NCSY. While many believed the youth group was doomed to fail, today NCSY is a household name in the Orthodox world, reaching almost 35,000 Jewish teenagers throughout North America annually.

In recent years, the OU has also begun to reach out to Israelis, who are not immune to assimilation and Jewish apathy. Michael Freund's article, “*Kiruv* on the Frontlines,” spotlights

OU Israel's highly successful Mashiv Haruach program, which aims to strengthen Jewish values among young Israeli soldiers.

But our outreach efforts are not only directed toward the individual; we focus on the collective, the *klal*, as well. In the pages ahead, we applaud a few young rabbis and their families for leaving cities where Orthodoxy is strong and vibrant for the challenges of life in small, struggling Jewish communities. I am sure that you will find their personal stories of sacrifice genuinely inspiring.

Additionally, we pay tribute to Yona Baumel, who passed away this past Shavuot. Yona was the father of Zecharya Baumel, an Israeli soldier who has been missing since 1982. Yona, whom I met a year or two after his son went missing, never stopped searching for his son, and despite the searing pain he lived with day in and day out, he never stopped believing in a compassionate and caring God.

This phenomenal issue also includes articles on health, kosher recipes, Jewish books and more. As always, I look forward to your e-mailing me at ja@ou.org. Best wishes for a happy Chanukah! ■