

Embarking Upon Change

By Stephen J. Savitsky



Soul searching can be a difficult process. But we are fortunate that Hashem gives us the ability to cleanse ourselves once a year and to start anew with a fresh balance sheet. From time to time organizations, too, must look themselves squarely in the eye and decide what they are and where they are going.

I never cease to be amazed at the extraordinary breadth and scope of the Orthodox Union's programs and activities. From providing relief efforts to the Jews in Sderot to serving the needs of Jews who are deaf, to supporting major policy initiatives in Washington, DC, the OU has a great deal to be proud of. We service the largest number of Orthodox synagogues in the Diaspora,

and through our vast resources, we play a vital role in strengthening and fortifying hundreds of Jewish communities, from Charleston, South Carolina to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Nevertheless, serving the *klal*, the community, demands that we constantly evolve so that we are relevant, effective and able to meet the continually shifting needs of the Jewish people.

Thus, this past July, I invited twenty-two OU senior officers and commission chairs along with eighteen members of our senior professional staff to a management retreat, under the guidance of Dr. Craig Dreilinger, a noted management consultant. These three days of workshops and intense discussions marked the first step in a process that will lead the OU into becoming an even more efficient and more focused organization.

A good friend of mine once told me that the only thing in life that's constant is change itself. How true that is!

At our July retreat we looked at each OU program and department to determine whether or not it meets the organization's overall mission. Although this is a painful process, it is necessary to achieve our short- and long-term objectives.

What exactly is the OU mission? To me, it is clear. We have two major goals. First, to strengthen the core constituent base of Orthodox Jews by pro-

viding them with services, Torah education, kosher products, and initiatives to enhance and enrich their quality of life—that is, *lechazeik et hakerovim*—to strengthen the core.

At the same time, we have to reach out to those who have not yet tasted the beauty of Torah and the Torah-true lifestyle, to be *mekarev et harechokim*. With assimilation and

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The Dallas Yachad chapter will be directed by Mr. Jay Weinstein, who holds a Masters in Special Education with a concentration in Mental Retardation and Autism from Teachers College, Columbia University, and has earned his NY State License in Special Education.

Jay Weinstein will utilize his expertise to provide ongoing Jewish programming and experiences in educational, recreational and social settings for children and young adults with disabilities in Dallas. All Yachad events will be mainstreamed and include Yachad members and their non-disabled peers from local Yeshiva day schools.

To find out more about activities and weekend retreats in Dallas or to get involved in more than 30 chapters across North America and Canada, please call:
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harechokim. With assimilation and intermarriage challenging the very fabric of Jewish life, we can't sit idly by and watch as the Jewish people in the Diaspora disappear.

This will take an all-out effort that will incorporate many of our divisions, including NCSY, Community Services, the Pepa and Rabbi Joseph Karasick Department of Synagogue Services, Young Leadership Cabinet, the Israel Commission and Financial Resource Development. We must launch a large-scale war, and we will not be successful if we leave it strictly to "kiruv professionals." Our definitive strategy is still being fine-tuned, but time necessitates that we move rapidly. The goal of reaching out must become a priority in the Orthodox Jewish world because time is against us. All OU members must take it upon themselves to reach out to the unaffiliated and, with the OU's help, find a way to bring them back to traditional Judaism. Goals are dreams with a timetable—our timetable must be now; we have no choice.

Another central focus of our retreat was resolving an ongoing challenge: How do we continue to have lay leaders stay involved and committed at a point in time in which the OU has thousands of employees and advisors throughout the world? In the fast-paced world in which we live, organizations must be capable of responding quickly and efficiently. The OU has always been an organization with substantial involvement on the part of our *ba'alei batim* (lay leaders). While this level of involvement has served us well in the past, it doesn't always enable us to respond rapidly to ongoing challenges.

We are blessed with an incredible professional staff, dedicated people who are proud to work at the OU and to serve Klal Yisrael. At the retreat, we also sought to answer the following: How do we allow these professionals to grow and develop leadership skills that are necessary to meet the challenges of the next decade?

As we move toward becoming a more professionally driven organization, the need for strong lay leadership and an effective checks and balances system is even more vital. The strength of our organization is that we have many committed lay leaders who play a pivotal role in determining the overall direction of the OU. This cannot and will not change. Managing the fine balance between lay leaders and staff, each person knowing and understanding his or her role, will be one of my priorities in the coming years.

With this retreat, we have taken the first step in a process that will make the OU an even more dynamic and responsive organization. I pray that the New Year will be one of great personal growth for each and every one of you, and that it will also be a year in which the OU meets its challenges and therefore enhances and enriches Jewish life throughout the world. 



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