

The Changing of the Guard



Change, the theme of the Obama administration, is inevitable. Indeed, it's been said that the only thing that's constant in life is change. Organizations choose to make changes for many reasons, but sadly, challenging the status quo is often a painful and divisive process.

At the Orthodox Union (OU), we are very fortunate to be embarking on a path of change with the smoothest of transitions. This is because we are not undergoing a dramatic change; rather, we are working to modify the existing structure in order to ensure that we use the talents and strengths of our top administrators in the best possible way.

The transition of Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb to the position of executive vice president emeritus allows us to take advantage of his extraordinary teaching and communication skills to the fullest. Over the past seven and a half years, Rabbi Weinreb, who came to this organization during a time of crisis, has worked hard to bring credibility, respect and integrity

to the OU. He is a rabbi's rabbi and is sought out by innumerable *rabbanim* for guidance in the most difficult of situations. Rabbi Weinreb has helped bring the organization to new levels of success in so many areas, and we are grateful that in his new position he will continue to use his gifts to en-

forward to a continued warm relationship with Rabbi Weinreb.

After working closely with an outside management consultant, and following a six-month national search, our search committee selected Rabbi Steven Weil, the former rabbi of Beth Jacob Congregation in Beverly Hills,

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hance our work. In his new role, Rabbi Weinreb will continue to be the master teacher and a major spokesman for the OU. Furthermore, this new arrangement will enable him to concentrate on his scholarly projects without the burden of running the OU's day-to-day operations. I look

California, to assume the position of executive vice president. On April 1, Rabbi Weil began his official tenure at the OU.

Our new executive vice president grew up on a cattle farm outside Buffalo, New York. His parents realized that despite their strong attachment to

Judaism, it was not possible for their son to lead a Torah-observant life without having a solid Jewish education. They sent him to Ohr Torah High School in New York, where he flourished. Rabbi Weil attended Yeshiva University, obtained *semichah* at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and studied in its *kollel* as well. At the same time, he pursued a master's degree in business at New York University and demonstrated great talent in the financial and business world. He had a calling, however, and gave up many of his business aspirations to enter the rabbinate. Rabbi Weil served as associate regional director of the Upper New York/Har Sinai Region of NCSY, forming a deep connection to the international teen organization. Later, he assumed the pulpit of the Young Israel of Oak Park, Michigan, where he revitalized and grew the synagogue and community. He was quickly labeled a rising star in the Jewish world. So it was no surprise that Rabbi Weil was selected at the tender age of

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thirty-five to lead Beth Jacob Congregation, an OU-member shul and one of the most prestigious Orthodox synagogues in the Diaspora.

During his tenure at Beth Jacob, the size of the congregation doubled and its financial foundation was solidified. But Rabbi Weil did much more. He was able to fuse the various worlds of Judaism together and established both a Lakewood *kollel* and a Torah MITzion *kollel*. He ignited the spark of Judaism throughout the community.

Rabbi Weil, who is married to Yael and has seven children, is beloved by his congregants, who see him as a role model for their children and grandchildren. He transcends the various divisions within the Jewish world and is equally at home serving as a scholar-in-residence for Federation and giving a *shiur* to young men in *kollel*.

As president of the OU, I hope to work hand in hand with Rabbi Weil as we move forward to meet the ever-changing realities of the Jewish world. There is no question that the high cost of living an observant life must be dealt with. Not every Orthodox Jew can be in the top 5 percent of the economic spectrum. We must find a way to make Orthodox Jewish life more affordable. We need to deal with the major issues of assimilation and intermarriage, and find ways of strengthening those who are already committed and providing them with a more meaningful spiritual life and closeness to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. It is imperative that we continue to maintain the highest standards of *kashrut* supervision, because the Jewish community depends upon and trusts us.

This is an exciting time for the OU. A new leader always brings innovative ideas and fresh energy, and Rabbi Weil is no exception. He has already begun to shape the agenda of the OU for the coming years. While ideally we should ad-

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dress the innumerable facets of Jewish life, it is not possible to do so. We must concentrate on those areas that provide the greatest benefits to the Jewish people, using our limited resources to accomplish those goals. Over the next twelve months, we will be reevaluating every component of the organization and setting priorities regarding achievable goals. Change is not always easy. It comes with a price, but we must look at the big picture and think strategically.

I would like to thank my fellow officers and board members who supported me during this process of transition—which is never a simple process—with special admiration for the chairman of our search committee, Dr. Simcha Katz, and the board members who worked with him: Mark Bane, Michael Elman, Allen Fagin, Charles Harary, Isabelle Novak, Gerald Schreck and Stanley Weinstein.

We have every expectation that, with Hashem's help, the OU will build upon the giants who preceded Rabbi Weil. I have had the personal privilege of working with Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, Rabbi Raphael B. Butler and, of course, Rabbi Weinreb, each of whom brought his own unique talents and genius to the service of Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Weil now takes his place as the leader of this most dynamic organization and will be challenged to take the OU to new levels. I wish him the very best of luck and extend to him a firm commitment from myself and from my fellow officers and board members that we will work together with him to enhance and enrich the Jewish people.

May we all go from strength to strength. ■