

The Journey Ahead



I am extremely grateful to the officers and the Board of Directors of the Orthodox Union (OU) for re-electing me to my third (and constitutionally last) term as OU president. I feel blessed every day that I have the opportunity to lead this most magnificent organization. It is now four years since I assumed the helm of the OU, and I still find myself amazed at the depth and breadth of its scope: There is hardly any segment of the Jewish world that we are not involved with in some way.

The OU is the umbrella organization for Orthodox Jews in North America, and we accept this responsibility with humility and, at the same time, pride. Humility because we realize that so many people depend upon us and that it is only through our deep faith in Hashem that we are guided along the correct path. And pride because as Orthodox Jews we are a light unto the nations and are looked upon by both Jews and non-Jews as the traditional heirs of Torah values and principles.

This became even clearer to me during my recent visit to the White House just before Rosh Hashanah, when I led a delegation of key OU leaders to visit with President George W. Bush. It was a unique experience for us; we were able to spend meaningful time with the president without the presence of the press, conversing about the significance of faith in our lives. The deep respect the president has for us as the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was evident. He accorded us more time than his aides had arranged, and kept telling them what a wonderful time he was having with us. It was apparent to all of us that day that wearing a yarmulke is a badge of honor, one that comes with a commitment to conduct ourselves in the most moral, honest and ethical manner.

At the meeting, we presented the president with a reproduction of the letter sent by President George Washington to the Jewish community in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790. (The synagogue in Newport, the Touro Syn-

agogue, which happens to be an OU shul, is the oldest active Orthodox shul in North America.) In the letter, President Washington assured the Jewish people that America would be

Wearing a yarmulke is a badge of honor, one that comes with a commitment to conduct ourselves in the most moral, honest and ethical manner possible.

a country in which bigotry would have no home:

For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under

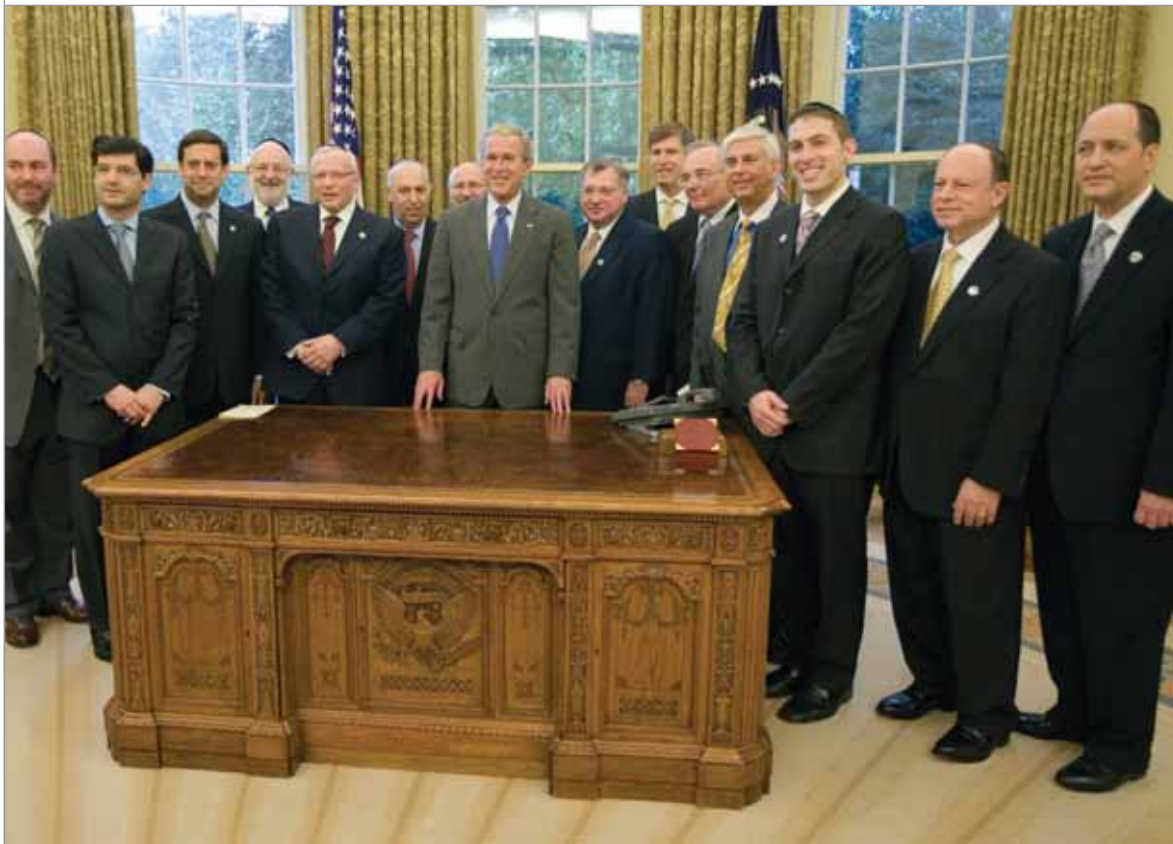
its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

President Bush was very moved and expressed sincere thanks for this meaningful token of our appreciation.

nities and events to solidify the relationships that already exist.

We also have to find a solution for the growing singles crisis. It's hard to see so many wonderful people struggling with this painful issue. We will

concentrating on in the future. Furthermore, with the economic crisis gripping the country, we are in the process of organizing ongoing programs to support those coping with financial distress.



Orthodox Union leaders met with President George W. Bush in the Oval Office on September 25, 2008, in advance of Rosh Hashanah and to acknowledge the OU's 110th anniversary. The group presented President Bush with a framed reproduction of President George Washington's letter to the Newport, Rhode Island, Jewish community extolling religious freedom in the United States. From left to right: OU National Vice President Mitchel R. Aeder; OU Executive Vice President Designate Rabbi Steven Weil; Director of the OU Institute for Public Affairs (IPA) Nathan Diament; OU Executive Vice President Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb; OU President Stephen J. Savitsky; OU Chairman of the Board Harvey Blitz; OU National Vice President Dr. Steven Katz; US President George W. Bush; OU Senior Vice President Allen I. Fagin; OU National Vice President Roy Spiewak; OU National Vice President and Chairman of the OU Publications Commission Gerald M. Schreck; OU Senior Vice President Stanley Weinstein; OU Associate Vice President Charles Harary; OU Board Member Bill Tenenblatt and OU Senior Vice President Emanuel J. Adler. White House photo by Joyce N. Boghosian

Even during economically stable times, living an Orthodox Jewish life can be financially overwhelming. We are, therefore, working to find creative ways of subsidizing yeshivah education on the city, state and federal levels. We are also hoping to collaborate with Jewish philanthropists to ensure that Jewish education is both high quality and affordable.

Though the OU deals with issues affecting Orthodox Jews throughout North America, we have a tremendous responsibility to the broader Jewish world. Addressing the perils of assimilation and intermarriage has been the OU mandate for decades. Unfortunately, time is against us. With each generation, thousands of Jews are lost forever to the Jewish world. In the short

As I plan for the next two years of my presidency, I do so with great excitement and enthusiasm. We at the OU have worked hard to reorganize our lay leadership structure so that decisions can be made more quickly and efficiently. What are the challenges I see as priorities for us? First, we must find better ways of working with our vast network of synagogues throughout North America. While each OU synagogue is different, we need to find the right blend of programs, opportu-

continue to try and find an effective response to this serious challenge.

It is no secret that I have an affinity for smaller Jewish communities, and I will continue to provide them with the tools they need to remain vibrant forces in Jewish life. At the same time, larger communities are always looking to the OU for programs and speakers to motivate their constituent base. Our programs on parenting, marriages and coping with illness are prime examples of innovative ideas that we'll be

run, I fear that diminished demographics will lead to diminished influence in the Diaspora. In the long run, I fear that it will threaten the very survival of the Jewish people.

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will be a major challenge for us at the OU; doubling the size of NCSY entails finding the appropriate personnel and raising the necessary funds. In this vein, one of our latest initiatives is developing tracking programs to help us keep in touch with the tens of thousands of young people who have been touched by NCSY. Over the next two years, we will devote more resources to help keep us connected to those who have come into contact with the OU world.

During the coming years, the OU will strive to reach out to every Jew who is interested in learning Torah. Through our web site, www.ou.org, we have the ability to touch Jews in every corner of the world. We must work hard to make our web site even better—more engaging and more user friendly—than it is already.

Our commitment to Eretz Yisrael is obvious. Our many, varied programs, run by the Seymour J. Abrams Orthodox Union Jerusalem World Center, enrich the lives of thousands of *olim* and native Israelis. Additionally, our outreach programs for Israelis are helping to make the OU a major *kiruv* organization in Israel. Two years from now, I hope we will have encouraged thousands more Israelis to embrace Torah Judaism. Our slogan "Making Israeli Jews Jewish Israelis" is more relevant today than ever before.

I have developed dozens of new ideas that I hope to implement over the next two years. I know that it will be hard to accomplish all of them, but if one is persistent and believes in the future of the Jewish people, anything is possible. To help actualize these ideas, I recently instituted a new budget process that will allow us, for the first time, to analyze all of our costs and to set priorities well in advance of the next fiscal year.

During the past few months, every OU department has made a major presentation to our Steering Committee. Each OU program is being analyzed and a full report on all of our programs will be delivered to our Executive Committee for review. My goal is to have our priorities for the next fiscal year, beginning July 2009, established by January. This will give us time to plan and coordinate all OU activities. With so many critical issues facing us, we must determine which

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will be given priority. It would be wonderful if we had unlimited resources, giving us the ability to fund and develop many new and exciting programs that are needed for Klal Yisrael. But unfortunately, this is not reality. We must therefore critically analyze all of the OU programs and determine how we can have the most impact on the Jewish people.

The next two years, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, will be interesting, challenging, exciting, fun and rewarding. Every day I welcome the opportunity to serve the Jewish people as president of the OU. I begin the next two years with tremendous *hakarot hatov* to God and pray that He gives me the wisdom and leadership skills necessary in the journey ahead. ■



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