

President's Message

Spearheading Support

By Harvey Blitz



The crisis in Israel continues unabated. The Hebrew word for crisis is *mashber*, from the root *shin-bet-resh, lishbor*, which means to break. A crisis is a breakdown of what is usually considered normal. And a crisis can often break those who have to live through it. But it can also provide them with a renewed sense of strength and purpose, and a chance to shine. (When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters; one represents danger, the other, opportunity.)

The crisis Israel has endured for nearly a year has presented Diaspora Jewry with an opportunity to show its unified support for *Am Yisrael* and *Medinat Yisrael*. The Orthodox Union (OU) is taking a lead role in generating this solidarity in four ways: prayer, messages of support, political action and travel to Israel.

This past summer, the OU created two programs—one for Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (co-sponsored by our sister organization, the Rabbinical Council of America), the other for Tisha B'Av—that galvanized the members of hundreds of OU synagogues to reach

out to their brothers and sisters in Israel. Thousands of people gathered on Shiva Asar B'Tammuz to recite *Tehillim*, to declare their support of both the Israeli people and their political leaders, and to request that our local political leaders stand together with Israel and pass meaningful legislation to help thwart our enemies.

Together with the RCA and the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the OU created a powerful video entitled "Israel: One People, One Family," which features messages from (among others) Israeli President Moshe Katzav, Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, top military personnel, families of victims who were killed or maimed by acts of terrorism, as well as "regular" Israeli men, women and children, exhorting Diaspora Jews to show their support of Israel in visible ways and especially to "come visit us in Israel." The widely-acclaimed video was shown at Shiva Asar B'Tammuz programs in over 300 *shuls* across the US and Canada.

For Tisha B'Av, the OU produced the third in a series of special videos that explain the fast day's relevance for today. The newest video features two renowned scholars—Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb (of Congregation Shomrei Emunah in Baltimore) and Rabbi Benjamin Yudin (of Congregation Shomrei Torah in Fair Lawn, NJ)—who specifically relate our national day of mourning to the current situation in Israel. Rabbi Weinreb, an acclaimed Torah scholar and teacher, as well as a respected clinical psychologist, addressed "Tisha B'Av Today: A Torah Response to the Crisis in Israel"; Rabbi Yudin, an

instructor in Talmud at the James Striar School of General Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, spoke about "Tisha B'Av 5761: Still Limping."

Giving testimony to our resolve to visit Israel, OU missions to Israel are being planned on a regular basis. The first highly successful mission, which drew over 100 participants, was held in August; other missions are being planned over the next few months, including one during the yeshivah intermission week, January 19 - 28, 2002. (Please join us on any of these missions. Call 212-613-8188 for information on one of the OU's planned missions, or to customize one for your *shul*.)

While some Jewish organizations canceled their summer youth tours, the OU is proud that through the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) and the National Council for the Disabled (NJCD)—Yachad, more than 300 youngsters traveled to Israel on six different OU programs. These youngsters not only safely toured the country, but they were also able to benefit from our extraordinary programs that combine Torah study with travel, and infuse our youth with what will hopefully be a lifelong love of *Am Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael* in *Medinat Yisrael*—a love of the people of Israel and the Torah of Israel in the State of Israel. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank all of the parents who entrusted their children to us this summer and express my gratitude to our exceptional staff, whose efforts made the programs such a success.

Our commitment to the strength and stability of *Eretz Yisrael*, and the

integrity of *Yerushalayim*, is greatly enhanced by the presence of the Seymour J. Abrams Orthodox Union World Center in Jerusalem. Seven days a week, from 9 A.M. to midnight, the Israel Center provides *shi'urim*, discussions, cultural activities, *tefillot* and *chizuk* to seniors, teenagers and *olim* of all ages. Through its Jewish Values Training Institute, the OU helps teachers from the United States and other countries around the world to grapple with the critical issues of the day through the latest and most effective teaching techniques.

For centuries, Jews the world over have known that Israel is our eternal homeland, promised to us by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* Himself. Even during those tragic times in our history when we were exiled from our land, we never lost our hope. We turned towards Jerusalem to offer our prayers of thanks, our prayers of supplication, and our prayers that one day we would be a people in our own land once again.

Today, we are privileged to be living in a time when those prayers have been answered. But with the privilege comes responsibility. We Jews in the Diaspora have the responsibility to do all we can to help bolster the beleaguered spirits of our Israeli brothers and sisters. Throughout

modern history, Diaspora Jews have relied upon the Israeli government to safeguard our homeland. We have relied on the Israeli Defense Force to defend our homeland. And they have come through for us through skirmishes and wars, through clashes and *intifadas*. They have never let us down, because nothing less than the survival of the Jewish State was at stake.

The stakes today are just as high. Now is the time for Diaspora Jewry to return the Israelis' dedication. Now is the time for us to show our solidarity with Israel. Yes, Israel is in our thoughts. Yes, she is in our prayers. Yes, we give generously of our financial resources. But the current situation calls for more. This time we must give of ourselves. We must fill the empty El Al seats. We must sleep in the empty hotel rooms. We must eat in the empty restaurants. We must shop in the empty stores. We must fill the empty hearts of the Israelis who feel that they have been abandoned by their fellow Jews.

We are now in the season of the Yomim Noraim, a time of introspection when we must do an honest review of our actions during the past year for ourselves, and account to the Almighty. Let all of us honestly appraise what we have done for Israel this past year and resolve to do even more *B'Shanah HaBa'ah*. 