



## A Whole New World

By Harvey Blitz

It is my honor and privilege, as president of the Orthodox Union, to officially welcome Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb as the OU's new executive vice president. As 2001 comes to a close and Rabbi Weinreb assumes his new position, I would like to reflect upon the events of the past few months.

Jews living in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have attained unparalleled success in the social, political and economic spheres. Never before have we had the career opportunities or ability to influence the leaders of our country as we do today. As recently as 50 years ago, it would have been almost unimaginable for a Jew—not to mention an observant Jew—to run for vice president of the United States or serve as the American ambassador to Egypt. And yet, despite these freedoms, September 11<sup>th</sup> showed us how vulnerable we are both as Americans and as Jews.

The OU, located just six blocks south of the World Trade Center, was directly affected by the attacks as many of our employees were trapped inside

the OU's office building while debris and flaming ashes engulfed our street. Luckily, some of our employees managed to return home before getting to the city while others were able to escape the area prior to the collapse of the Twin Towers. Thankfully, no one was physically hurt. The OU offices were closed until after Rosh Hashanah; upon reopening, therapists were made available to the staff to address their fears and concerns.

We are now confronting a new and frightening evil. Everyday responsibilities such as opening the mail or going to work are no longer carefree tasks. Unfortunately, this kind of horror is not new to those living in Israel. In August of this past year, I had a first-hand look at the fear and terror our Israeli brethren live with on a daily basis. Together with more than 150 people, I participated in the OU's Solidarity Mission to Israel, a mission whose purpose was to demonstrate to the Israeli people our unyielding commitment to the State of Israel and its

future. During our mission, we visited with many families who lost fathers, mothers and children to terror, and met with the courageous men and women who live in settlements and face a constant barrage of gunfire and assaults.

One of the most memorable experiences took place during an address by Pesagot's Mayor Pinchas Wallerstein. The mayor mentioned that one of the region's only schools for children with special needs did not have the money to buy transportation that was both armored and wheelchair accessible. Touched by the story, our group raised—within minutes—the \$30,000 needed to purchase a van with a frame strong enough to support the sheer tonnage of the armor. (The cost of armoring the van is paid for by the Israeli government.) We set out on this solidarity mission hoping to help out in some small way; being able to hand over a check that will ensure the safety of so many children was a magical moment for many of us.

As I returned to the United States, I carried with me the memory of the pain and anguish wrought by terrorism. These feelings were only compounded by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Since the attack, the OU has endeavored to address the concerns of the entire Jewish community while providing whatever comfort and aid we can to those searching for guidance. We have co-hosted, together with Yeshiva University and the Rabbinical Council of America, a one-day *yom iyun* attended by more than 700 people on "Coping with Catastrophe and Crisis—Halachic, Psychological and Community Considerations." Additionally, we made a handbook on security issues for Jewish institutions available online ([www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)) and issued a call to our *shuls* nationwide to take the time to thank the firefighters, police officers and EMT workers who were called into action on September 11<sup>th</sup> and have been protecting our religious institutions ever since.

As we struggle to cope with our newfound fears and the threats to our very

existence, we must understand that dealing with this tragedy and moving forward can only be achieved if we maintain our *emunah* in *Hashem* and confront our problems together as a community.

Looking ahead to the future of the OU and the impact it has on the Jewish community, we are extremely excited about the arrival of Rabbi Weinreb. His background as an educator, speaker, psychologist and spiritual leader, combined with his visionary ideas, promises to bring a new and exciting future to our organization. Rabbi Weinreb has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that we will continue to be a world leader in all of our endeavors. I have no doubt that he will lead this organization with the same creativity, open-mindedness and efficiency he exhibited in his community in Baltimore.

As we confront a world of increased uncertainty and danger, let us all be *zocheh* to live our lives in peace and prosperity with a hopeful eye toward the future. **JA**

*Is your son or daughter  
going to college?*

The Orthodox Union cares  
about

**Jewish students!**

We will provide a  
subscription to

**Jewish  
Action**

*free of charge*

to students living away  
from home (in the U.S.A.)

To receive a subscription form,  
contact

[ja@ou.org](mailto:ja@ou.org)

212-613-8129