

In 9/11 talk, Orthodox leader urges lifelong process of spiritual growth

by **Debra Rubin**
NJJN Bureau Chief/Middlesex

Tying the theme of spiritual growth to the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, a national Orthodox leader spoke Sept. 11 at Congregation Ohr Torah in Edison.

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, addressed participants in the Achieving Change Through Torah program, a project of six Raritan Valley Orthodox synagogues.

Weinreb drew an analogy between evolving growth in prayer

and the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

"There is also this growth in the way we confront the world," he explained. "We used to think, 'I'm okay. No event can touch me. I'm in America.' Five years ago, our eyes were opened up. I cannot say anymore that everybody is at peace. We all have anxiety caused by change. So too does our *tefilla* [prayer] have to change and adapt to our concerns."

Befitting a program dedicated to spiritual growth and action, Weinreb described the observant life as one committed to deepening spirituality.

"From the age of 18, 28, or 68 there needs to be deepening growth in *tefilla*," said Weinreb, whose organization represents 1,000 synagogues nationwide. "The Torah you learn at 18 is not the same as the Torah you learn at 38."

Such growth, meanwhile, is both intellectual and spiritual, and Weinreb encouraged his listeners to heed the meaning of each prayer they say in order to enhance their *kavana*, or focus, during worship.

"Saying the words in Hebrew doesn't mean knowing what the words mean," Weinreb said. "To understand *kavana* you must understand the meaning of the words."

Weinreb also praised the organizers of ACTT, a project to promote character development through a combination of Torah study and good deeds.

"The search for self-improvement and asking people to get together for a speech on growth and development is in itself very commendable," he said.

Synagogues involved in ACTT in addition to Ohr Torah are Congregation Ahavas Achim, Congregation Etz Ahaim, and Congregation Ohav Emeth, all in Highland Park; Congregation Poile Zedek in New Brunswick; and Young Israel of East Brunswick.

Rabbi Yaakov Luban, religious leader at Ohr Torah and executive rabbinic director at the Orthodox Union, called it "a religious experience just to hear" Weinreb speak.

To register for ACTT or for information, contact 732-993-5376 or info@actt613.org or visit www.actt613.org.



Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, presented "Changing our Lives Through Meaningful Prayer" Sept. 11 at Congregation Ohr Torah in Edison.

Debra Rubin can be reached at drubin@njewishnews.com.