

From: OU Public Relations
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**OU DEPARTMENT OF SYNAGOGUE SERVICES LAUNCHES PROGRAM,
ACHIEVING CHANGE THROUGH TORAH (ACTT),
BEGINNING SHABBAT, SEPTEMBER 20**



“Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit,” a verse from Psalms (34:14) and a message that is heard three times a day, paraphrased, in synagogues across the world, will be the guiding sentiment for **September 20**, prior to *selichot*, a Shabbat the **Orthodox Union** has designated as **National Day of *Lashon Hara* Awareness**.

Lashon Hara is speaking evil of others; the goal of eradicating the trait will be the theme of the first component of a new OU program for synagogues, **Achieving Change Through Torah (ACTT)**, sponsored by the **Pepa and Rabbi Joseph Karasick Department of Synagogue Services**. The initiative will make available to congregants, through their shuls, a packet containing material and activity sheets centering on a specific *middah*, or character trait.

Appropriately, the first packet will center on the theme of *Shmirat Halashon*, or guarding one's speech.

The shul-based *middot*-development program was initially organized by a consortium of New Jersey synagogues. These include the **Young Israel of East Brunswick**; **Congregation Ohr Torah** in Edison; **Congregation Etz Ahaim**, **Congregation Ohav Emeth** and **Congregation Ahavas Achim** in Highland Park, all OU member shuls; **Congregation Poile Zedek** in New Brunswick and **Congregation Ahavas Yisrael** in Edison. The organizers of the ACTT program approached the OU about making it available to a wider audience. You can see more of the original ACTT materials on its web site, www.actt613.org. The OU plans introduce its own web site at which people participating in ACTT through the OU can interact with one another.

The program is designed to reinforce positive traits through study, practice and mutual support. Four times throughout the year, the Department will offer a new module on a different *middah* for congregants to better incorporate into their lives. Future themes for modules include *Bitachon*, or trust in God; *Kavanah*, or sincere devotion in prayer; and anger management.

Rabbi Bini Maryles, OU Director of Synagogue Services, stated, "At this time of year, when we spend so much time using our mouths to beseech *Hashem* through prayer, we can and should consider how we speak in general and improve our words and tone. ACTT is a proven program for character improvement. We believe that value is added to our membership, synagogue and communities and that the Jewish religious experience is enhanced when we strive to improve as Jews and as human beings."

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz, Associate Director of Synagogue Services and coordinator of the program, declared, "September 20 is an especially appropriate date for the National Day of *Lashon Hara* Awareness, as that night we start saying *selichot*, special prayers of forgiveness. People typically work on refining certain character traits during this time, as we approach *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. It is our hope that the ACTT modules provide people with material to utilize so they can become more aware of their negative traits, and to help develop their positive traits."

Each module will typically contain the following:

- A program overview with a stated goal, duration, and to-do list;
- A variety of educational articles;
- A commitment form by which program participants will indicate what they intend to accomplish;
- Practical ideas for participants to improve on the current *middah*;
- Activity logs, by which participants will mark off daily that they have read from the recommended text, and indicate activities they have done to improve on the current *middah*, and
- A glossary of terms.

The OU will send the packets to the shuls in PDF format; administrators will then have the option of distributing it to congregants via electronic or paper format. Shuls are encouraged to appoint a chairperson to coordinate the program; have regular meetings of ACTT participants (a kind of *middot* "support group"); host speakers of interest, and have participants share materials with one another. The OU will be providing or facilitating supporting materials, as well as the recommended texts at a discount price.

For more information, contact Rabbi Abramowitz at synsvcs@ou.org or 212-613-8366.