

## A Weekend To Remember

### Reflections on the OU's Marriage Retreat

By JUDY and DOVID LANDMAN

"You're going where? That sounds interesting. What is it?" This response we received from friends when we mentioned our plan to attend the Orthodox Union's Marriage Enrichment Retreat this past July reflected the very same questions we were thinking. And it was with those thoughts that we went to the retreat – interested but unsure of what exactly we were getting into. A nice hotel, no kids, good food... and maybe some interesting workshops.

Having been married for some 16 years, we decided to do something a little different from our standard summer one-night, two-day getaway and ventured into this idea of "making a good marriage even better."

The ride up from Baltimore to Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey alone was worth it as we had four hours of uninterrupted time to just *talk*. With anticipation, we pulled up to the Hilton and began noticing the other participants carrying their hat/*shetel* boxes and rolling suitcases.

After checking in and receiving our nametags (detailing where we were from and the number of years married) we strolled to the welcoming buffet. Sitting down in the comfortable room to a wide array of appealing food, we began to get a taste of the beautiful and inspiring weekend that was about to begin.

At this point, we were still somewhat nervous about what the weekend would entail. Was this retreat for older married couples? Was it for couples with serious relationship issues? Would we agree in terms of *hashkafa* with the topics and the speakers? Nevertheless, it was with an open mind and satiated stomach that we got ready for Shabbos.

*The Landmans live in Baltimore where they are busy raising their children who range in age from 4 to 15. Judy is a preschool morah at Talmudical Academy and Dovid is a CPA and bar mitzvah rebbe.*

The choices of workshops and topics ran the gamut for all ages and stages of marriage – including remarriages and blended families. With topics like "Learning to Grow Together...and Not Apart, Actualizing Emotional Closeness", "The Overscheduled Marriage: Finding Time for Each Other", "How to Fight Fairly", "Communication: I'm Listening...Are You Still Talking?", and "Paving Newer Steps: Creative and Fun Ways to Still Court Your Spouse," it was sometimes tough to choose which of the workshops to attend. We mutually agreed on the ones most fitting for our situation and attended the same workshops where possible. For the separate sessions on intimacy we parted ways and then compared notes afterward.

Back-to-back sessions left little time for us to discuss what we learned, but we certainly came away with lots of food for thought for the four-hour journey home.

Our fears of *hashkafic* discordance went unfounded as we saw and heard the high caliber of the speakers and were treated to some beautiful *durvei Torah*. We came away relaxed and rejuvenated both physically and spiritually and were ready to synchronize all that we had learned.

There were also unexpected benefits. Most inspiring was the array of people who attended the retreat. There was every color of the "Jewish Rainbow" present – truly a sense of *Mach louv olalacha Yachov*. The *Kabbalas Shabbos* service was quite uplifting and set the tone for the rest of the weekend. Mealtimes (and snack times) offered the opportunity to mingle and meet others in a relaxed and friendly environment. After all, we were all here for the same purpose, no matter what hue you represented in that rainbow.

As the retreat unfolded and we were able to meet more people, we saw there were both young and old

in terms of ages and stages.

We were glad the participants were asked to sit at different tables for each meal, which afforded us the opportunity to meet more couples. We sat with people married for less than a year and with couples together for 20-plus years; people marrying off their first child and people who had married several children. Some of the best advice and conversation came from these couples at spontaneous discussions throughout the different meals.

Listening to all the potential and actual problems that arise during marriage was a real eye-opener to us and gave us new appreciation for our own marriage, for what we have as a couple, as separate individuals and, ultimately, as a family, *baruch Hashem*.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our *hakaras hatov*, which we experienced on many levels. First, to the OU, especially organizer Frank Buchweitz; then to the caterer and the hotel staff for their high level of professionalism and sensitivity. No detail was overlooked in terms of luxurious comfort and the more sublime aspects of *davening*, *kashrus* (of course, it's the OU!), and *shmiras Shabbos*. We also wish to express *hakaras hatov* to the speakers for their obvious dedication in preparing for the multiple workshops and for the time they set aside for private consultations.

We could go on and on about this special Shabbos. To sum it up, we learned that marriage is an endeavor that requires effort, *tefillah* and creativity. There are many aspects to a marriage that need to be constantly nurtured, evaluated and reevaluated, especially when there are so many outside forces – money issues, children, aging parents, illness, etc. – that can severely weaken even a good marriage.

The weekend turned out to be not only very educational but a great getaway as well. We look forward to going back to the next one.