

The *Shofar*

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On 27th May 2011, the UJC held a special Shabbat program entitled, **Embracing our Mission: The UJC Today**. The evening was a celebration of the completion of our new mission statement. The full mission statement is printed below. You will also find commentary from the Rabbi and from your fellow UJC members on this important document.

OUR MISSION

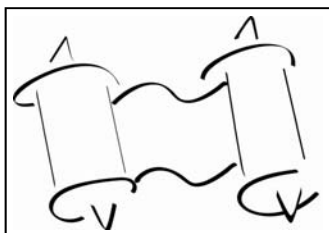
The United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong is a welcoming, Progressive synagogue that is home to a diverse community of Jews from around the world.

We are committed to seeking a relationship with God through community prayer; life-long Jewish learning; observance of mitzvot; and the pursuit of Tikkun Olam.

We seek to deepen our Jewish identity and build a meaningful relationship with Israel; promote the growth of Progressive Judaism throughout Asia; and create enduring connections with current and former members around the world.

Of Special Interest:

- UJC Mission Statement
- UJC Photos
- August & September Calendars



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UJC PROGRAM AREAS

UJC Connect	Samantha Kriegel Ria Nova	Membership	Barbara Thomas
External Community Relations	Sharon Ser David Weisner	Programming	Cheryl Blanco
Fundraising	David Zeiden Clayton Carol Jonathan Kriegel	Ritual	Jonathan Kriegel Jordan Potash
Gala	Cheryl Blanco Gina Roth O'Donnell	Shorashim	David Weisner
House	Adam Nelson	Tikkun Olam	Andrea Vidars Laurie Constantinides

If you are interested in getting more involved in UJC activities, contact the office or one of the UJC members listed above.

RABBI'S MESSAGE

BY RABBI STANTON M. ZAMEK

(Excerpted from a drasha given by Rabbi Zamek at the Embracing our Mission Service, 27th May, 2011—Parashat Bemidbar)

It is significant that the very first action that is taken as Parashat Bemidbar begins is a census. In the second verse of Chapter 1 of Numbers, God says, “take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head.” The aim of this census is to assess Israel’s military readiness. The consciousness that a new era has begun, one that will present new

dangers, prompts this taking stock.

If we were assessing our strength in this way, we would obviously count women as well as men. Even so, if we filter out this ancient bias, there is much to learn here. We see an example of what thoughtful leaders do when they are conscious that they are entering a new era. They pause, they reflect, and they take stock.

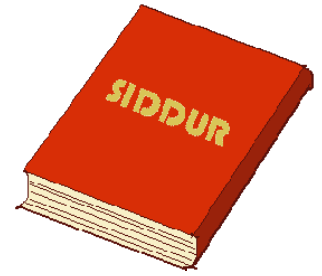
For the UJC it was not a crisis that prompted the reflection that resulted in our new mission statement, but the approach of a milestone, a

round number birthday — our 20th year.

The leaders of the UJC recognized the dawning of new era. They understood that at 20 years old, the congregation is no longer new and it is no longer an experiment. It is no longer a long-shot. It is no longer, thank God, wondering how it will survive, but asking how can it thrive. And so in the fall of 2008 a process began that tried to answer this question:

What does a mature congregation do?

(Continued on page 4)



FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY BOB COOPER

At the UJC Annual General Meeting held on 13th June, the 2011-2012 Executive Committee was elected and I had the honor of being chosen as its President.

As I look forward to the challenges, and opportunities, of leading this great congregation, I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to thank immediate past President, Jonathan Kriegel, and the ExCo Boards that served under his leadership these past three years.

Jonathan led us through our 20th anniversary activities, the writing of our new Torah and the development of the UJC's Mission Statement — all exciting and dynamic events that will help sustain our future growth.

As I begin my role as President I am guided by three

words — Structure, Inclusiveness and Support.

Structure is easy to understand — updated communication systems, new financial controls and the development of new programs and services.

But Inclusiveness and Support require your help.

While the ExCo Committee consists of fifteen dedicated individuals, the real strength of our congregation's future lies in the wealth of talent, professionalism and dedication that lies within our membership.

In the spirit of “Inclusiveness” I call upon each of our members to give something of yourself towards sustaining our growth.

Find your interest and support your congregation — there is

something for everyone that will fit your lifestyle, family and professional commitments — communications, security, membership, special events, ritual practices, UJC Connect, fund raising and social action.

Let us know where your interests lie. Don't hesitate to contact me or the Rabbi — the first step may be the toughest but it will be one of the most gratifying you'll take while providing a great service to the UJC and the Jewish Community at large.

With your help, together, we can make the UJC's future as bright as it's past.

Bob

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RABBI'S MESSAGE (CONT.)

(Continued from page 3)

This is a very Bemidbarish question — it is not a question that would have been appropriate for us to ask when our founders were struggling for recognition and respect — our “let our people go” stage — or in those early years when our patriarchs and the first ExCos managed to part the waters so that we could pray, study, and celebrate together. It is rather a question for the long haul — it is a question for the trip to the Promised Land.

From the time when we first discussed having a special Shabbat to introduce and celebrate the new mission statement, a particular verse from Proverbs has been rolling around in my mind.

בְּאִין חָזוֹן יִפְרָע עִם

B'ein chazon, yipara am.

Older translations render the proverb like this: *Where there is no vision, the people perish.* I like the pungency of this. It is certainly a motivating translation — get the mission statement done or we are doomed — but to be honest, this is not as faithful to the Hebrew as it should be. A better rendering is: *For the lack of vision, the people lose restraint.*

I do not take this to mean, that if we do not formally clarify our values, if we do not articulate our vision in a few paragraphs, that we will run riot one Yom Kippur and start eating lunch in front of the open ark. For me this is not the “breaking away” that the Proverb is worried about. The danger of a lack of an articulated vision is that when we are under pressure, it is the fundamentals, the most basic things, the Mom and Apple pie values, that we drift away from.

I don't need to tell you that Hong Kong is a pressured, relentless place. Your work lives are incredibly demanding and the stress this places on family life is very difficult to bear. At the same time, the work of the congregation is demanding, for lay leaders and for those of us who have made it our life's work alike. All this stress, all this pressure, can induce a kind of amnesia. We forget what a synagogue truly is and what it is not. We easily default to instrumental, corporate ways of thinking about synagogue life, because it is so much easier to do this than to relate to an institution that operates entirely according to its own rules, that is an alien misfit, thank God, in this world.

And here we come to the value of the mission statement. If we keep these words in front of us, if we glance at them before meetings, if we reflect on them and revisit them from time to time, we then abide in a place of vision. We are restrained from throwing off the frustrating, inefficient, spiritually demanding norms of synagogue life for the more familiar, but ultimately soulless, rules by which the rest of the world operates.

So say we are in an infuriating, endless meeting, revisiting the same issue it feels like we have dealt with a hundred times before. When we are about to give up on the Torah's way of doing things and slash through the thicket with a corporate blade, we read: *We are committed to seeking a relationship with God through community prayer, life-long Jewish learning, observance of mitzvot, and the pursuit of tikkun olam.*

And then we remember — we are not in a corporate boardroom. This is no zero sum

game. People's feelings matter. Compassion and forbearance are the most vital skills here.

The mission statement is a map. It guides us back to the true path when, inevitably, we stray from it.

Without vision, the people lose restraint. The word used here for “vision” is important. The word is “chazon” which means “prophecy” as well as “vision.” It is not any vision that keeps on the right path, but a vision rooted in the Divine. So for me the heart of our mission statement is: *We are committed to seeking a relationship with God.*

This is the mission within the mission, the engine that drives the entire enterprise. There are many ways of seeking, there are many kinds of relationships that can be sought, and there are many conceptions of God within the tradition. All these choices are up to you. It is the commitment that matters. We are a community of committed seekers. Together we create the essential nutrient of the human soul, an ethereal substance without which we die from the inside out. The true mission of this community of seekers is to create holiness in an otherwise unhallowed world. This is the sole measure of success or failure that applies in the alternate universe that is the synagogue.

Without this vision, we truly do perish. With this vision, a gathering of individuals becomes a community and this very place becomes a sanctuary for us and a dwelling fit for the Holy One.

All blessings
Rabbi Z

The true mission of this community of seekers is to create holiness in an otherwise unhallowed world. This is the sole measure of success or failure that applies in the alternate universe that is the synagogue.

SHORASHIM & PROGRAMMING

BY RABBI MARTHA BERGADINE

Our UJC Mission Statement contains a sentiment that I consider to be uniquely Jewish. In the second paragraph, the mission statement reads, "We are committed to seeking a relationship with God through . . . life-long Jewish learning . . ." While many other faiths, and indeed Judaism itself, seek the Divine through prayer and contemplation, our tradition teaches that study is an equally valid path to the Holy.

Through The UJC's educational programs we have sought to make the path of learning a holy path for all our members. This year we introduced Havdalah Pajama Party, a monthly program for our three-year-old congregants and their parents. Thanks to Patricia Sindel's spearheading efforts and the support of several other parents, we were able to introduce our youngest learners to holiday and Shabbat celebrations. Watching the joy of these little ones as they sang a song about havdalah or made their own mini-Torahs, was an opportunity for all of us adults to freshly experience the wonder in the world.

Thanks to our wonderful faculty, our Shorashim students learned that study can be fun and engaging, and were able to experience a growing sense of community. Whether it was acting out the story of Abraham and the Angels with Claudia Kohn or listening to stories and visiting the JCC Library with Kelly Abramowitz, our younger students came to realize that there are many wonderful ways to learn about our tradition. Older students began making connections to the wider Jewish world: Rotem Schwartz's class became pen pals with a third grade Religious School class in Pennsylvania, and Andrea

Viders' class learned about, and then taught our other students about, our unique Hong Kong Jewish community.

Our B'nai Mitzvah students went beyond learning the skills needed to read Torah and lead a service. With Diego's guidance they explored questions like What is prayer and to whom do we pray? What are mitzvot and what does it mean to be commanded? What does it mean to be a Jewish adult? With their growing maturity, the B'nai Mitzvah students were able to take all that they had learned previously and use it to find their place in relation to their community, their people, and their God.

Our madrichim continue to learn *through* teaching the younger students. Watching them patiently help a student with a project, or mediate a spat, or craft a Purim shpiel, is also watching them grow as future leaders of our community. All of them, Matthew, Ayelet, Ezra, Hannah, Max, Noemi, and Hannah, are beautiful Jews.

I am very excited that virtually all of our teachers and madrichim will be returning to Shorashim, and I look forward to a joyful and enriching year of learning for our children.

As our mission statement says, Jewish learning should be life-long, so we have tried to offer opportunities for adults to continue to grow Jewishly. Bagels and Bina, The UJC Academy of Adult Learning, the One Congregation, One Book reading of *These Are the Words*, and guest scholars such as Prof. Reuven Firestone have provided both traditional and informal learning opportuni-

ties for adults.

Next year we look forward to creating even more opportunities. Of course Bagels and Bina and formal classes will meet again, but will explore new topics. There will be a new One Congregation, One Book for us to read as a community and we are also lining up visiting scholars. We will restart the Bookhers, The UJC's book club. Our first book will be *To The End of the Land* by David Grossman and we'll meet on Wednesday, 14th September, to discuss it. Finally, the Rosh Chodesh group will begin meeting again on Monday, 29th August, giving UJC women an opportunity to share and learn together.

Human beings have an intellect vastly different and superior to that of all other creatures. Our unique abilities are truly a gift from God. Just as our worship, prayer, and acts of tzedakah and loving kindness are acts of praise, so are our study and learning expressions of gratitude and thanks.

Come listen, discuss, read, argue, share and join us in our mission as a community of life-long learners.

Just as our worship, prayer, and acts of tzedakah and loving kindness are acts of praise, so are our study and learning expressions of gratitude and thanks.





Chanukkah 2010



Purim 2011





Discover Passover 2011



Gala 2011

B'NAI MITZVAH REFLECTIONS

BY DIEGO EDELBERG

I always tell my students that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not an *event* but a *process*. The real Bar/Bat Mitzvah starts the moment the Big Day is over. In fact we don't *do* the Bar/Bat Mitzvah but we *become* a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We prove that we have become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our daily lives the moment we step out of the *shul*. In simple words: the Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be considered a part of our Jewish life and not the end of it. We should continue engaging in community events and keep on studying Torah, learning more every day. Post-Bar or Bat Mitzvah teens should be encouraged by their parents to regularly attend and help lead synagogue services and become *madrichim*, thus letting them use what they learned and transmit that learning to a younger generation.

I really enjoy the process of growing with every single one of my students. Each of them represent a whole world to me. I love when they challenge me with the most difficult questions. Part of becoming adults for them is to try to win every single debate, showing that they know more than I do. In this way they attempt to separate themselves from us, showing there's a new Universe out

there we will never understand because we are *old*. This is not a problem for me, on the contrary I love saying *I don't know but I will look at it and let you know*. It teaches them that even we, the *old guys that have experienced it all*, still have much more to learn and it shows them they are actually growing which is of course a Blessing!

We should celebrate that our kids are growing and becoming self-sufficient. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a dual process affecting not only *them* but *ourselves*. We, parents and teachers, should use this moment to get closer to Hashem trusting he will always be there for them as he has been for our ancestors. If we want our love to grow, we mustn't be afraid of letting go. What's education all about? It is about giving young people the tools to become "owners" of their own destiny.

Parents and children should ask themselves "Why are we doing this? What does it all mean?" If these questions are not addressed the result is a ceremony that essentially is a performance, a demonstration of rudimentary linguistic competence in an ancient language. I'm not afraid of telling my students

that in the long term they will remember reading the Torah and delivering words of Torah more than the party that comes afterwards.

Finally I must say that what I most love about teaching Bar/Bat Mitzvah kids is seeing what happens after the Big Day is over. They are completely transformed. They start looking at me with different eyes. They finally can understand that I'm not the ogre I was when pushing them to study harder and harder. They realize now that I'm not part of their daily routine anymore. They have grown up. They don't *need* me anymore. But the beauty of this is that they see now their *old* teacher the way we see our parents the day we become adults or parents ourselves, recognizing all the patience they had, how they celebrate each little step and how proud they are of us.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is about becoming a full member of the Jewish community, it is about moral responsibility, connecting to Torah and to the highest form of existence we human's can achieve: getting close to Hashem.



UPCOMING EVENTS

ROSH CHODESH GROUP

Monday, 29th August 2011 at 8:30 PM, at the Rabbi's apartment

THE BOOKHERS—The UJC's Book Group

Wednesday, 14th September 2011 at 7:30 PM, at the Rabbi's apartment



MISSION STATEMENT COMMENTARIES

BY RIA NOVA, ANDREA VIDERS, JOSH NOVA, AND ADAM NELSON

(At the dinner following the Service on Embracing our Mission Shabbat, several UJC members were asked to comment on key aspects of the mission statement. Their commentaries are printed below.)

From **Ria Nova**

“The United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong is a welcoming, Progressive synagogue.”

Many of us are a long way from home and crave a slice of familiarity and comfort that we find in the thriving community that is the UJC.

When Josh and I were en route to Hong Kong 4 years ago, we thought that our Gramercy Park congregation in New York City was incredibly unique. We attended services in a quaint converted brownstone that housed one hundred member families and marveled at all the interesting people we met. Little did we know our Hong Kong experience would trump it.

To say our congregation at the UJC is a unique one would be putting it mildly. Look around during services; you can immediately see how dynamic our community is — Jews by choice, mixed religion marriages, expatriates. We are blessed by the revolving door in Hong Kong that enables us to interact and learn from visitors and residents from all over the world.

So naturally, we chose the word “welcoming” as part of our Mission Statement.

Recently Josh and I celebrated a wonderful simchah — the birth of our son, Oliver.

Without going into all the gory and logistical details, for you newcomers, I should share that unlike New York City, mohels are no where to be found in Hong Kong, evidenced by not one www.mohel.hk bumper sticker or magnet on the entire island. So instead of the home ceremony we both had envisioned, we ultimately decided to have the brit milah at Matilda Hospital on the Peak. Given the Jewish mother I am, you can image the anxiety I had. Would we have a minyan, would our non-Mohel pediatrician have a steady hand and make a respectable cut, etc.? But all my apprehensions dissolved when I looked around and saw Rabbi Stan and Rabbi Martha and 20+ friends from the UJC community who schlepped up the peak during rush hour to join us for our son’s bris. I thought to myself, how truly lucky we are have such a wonderful supportive community so far away from home. How blessed was Oliver to have this warm congregation to welcome him to the world.

It was our vision as we were drafting the Mission Statement to make all those who walked through the doors of the UJC feel embraced and welcomed into our community. And as members of UJC, we hope you will share this important commitment with us.

From **Andrea Vidars**

“We seek to deepen our Jewish identity. . .”

Jewish identity is how we perceive of ourselves as Jews and how we relate to being Jewish. A positive identity can be a source of comfort, strength, values, and deeds. I posit that the description of

our congregation — progressive, diverse, and welcoming — infuses the way we define our relationship to Judaism and to our community.

I think that Rabbi Stan might have asked me talk about Jewish identity because of my perspective as a teacher of 10 and 11 year-old Shorashim students. When I see how engaged the children are in Jewish learning, how kind they are to each other, and how much they enjoy the occasional pizza or ice cream party, I feel that we have succeeded in creating positive emotional associations for them.

This past year, the students have had the opportunity to learn about the Jewish community of Hong Kong and to reflect on its uniqueness. One of the highlights was when Bob Green and Chuck Monat, two of the founders of the UJC, talked to us about how the congregation came to be and how amazed they are by what it has become. Their parting message was that if you believe strongly in something — in the need for a progressive congregation — you can make it happen. Their powerful talk made us realize that we and our families have benefited in so many ways because of the hard work and vision of Bob, Chuck, and so many of the people here tonight.

Another highlight was when Ria Nova visited the class and talked about the diversity of the UJC community and how we can all make it a welcoming place. Her message resonated for us as we realized how diverse our families truly are.



How truly lucky we are have such a wonderful supportive community so far away from home.

Ria Nova

(Continued on page 10)

MISSION STATEMENT COMMENTARIES (CONT.)

(Continued from page 9)

Several weeks ago, I asked my class to rate what is most important in Judaism. The overwhelming response was: Being kind to others, making the world a better place (tikkun olam), being part of a Jewish community, and Jewish learning. It seems clear that our children have a good understanding about what it means to be progressive Jews and that they understand the values of the UJC. I think it's a real testament to the clarity and sincerity of our message as parents and as a congregation.

From **Josh Nova**

"And create enduring connections with current and former members around the world."

When Ria and I left New York in 2007 to move to Hong Kong, we never imagined how rich the experience this chapter in our lives would turn out to be. Four years later, we have created truly enduring connections that have anchored us here longer than we initially planned. At the heart of this experience is our relationship with this very dynamic UJC community.

Two months into our first year in Hong Kong, Ria and I were lamenting another couples date gone wrong. We wondered if we would ever find the same kind of friends and meaningful relationships, community and warmth that we had back home. After hearing about the UJC, we decided to attend Shabbat services.

That first night, after proving our Jewish credentials to the crack security team at the front door, we met one of our first friends in Hong Kong and

felt the same warmth, joy and sense of community in this small congregation that we had left behind in New York. Four years later, the UJC continues to define our sense of community in this very transient city. We've shared in moments both joyous and sad. We've welcomed new life and celebrated incredible milestones together. While friends have left to return home our friendships endure. It's been a remarkable journey that continues to evolve through the wonderful relationships, new and old, that we continue to make with this dynamic community.

From **Adam Nelson**

"We are committed to... Tikkun Olam."

Tikkun Olam is not Charity — the term means "Repairing the world."

Our tradition has a long history of Tikkun Olam. It began when Adam was charged with tending to the Garden of Eden and the animals and took on societal prominence when the ancient Prophets challenged Israel to live out God's commandments in their relationships with one another and the world. It's as important an aspect of Judaism as anything else in our tradition.

Personally, there were many aspects that drew me to Judaism — and I would say that the idea of Tikkun Olam in the Jewish sense was something major. I remember reading early on during my conversion process about the ideas behind Tikkun Olam

Rabbi Isaac Luria taught that God created the world by first withdrawing into Godself, thereby creating a space for

the world to exist. The space of God was perfectly balanced and harmonious and a new world could not come into existence in that system. After this act, God began to create the world by pouring Divine Light into vessels, but those vessels shattered, they could not hold the Divine Light. The shards fell into our world, trapping the Divine Light. Luria taught that Tikkun Olam involves two acts — one inner and one outer. First, Tikkun Olam involves service to society by helping those in need, the second, involves freeing our inner spark.

Rabbi Stan has already talked to us about both of these ideas and will continue to do so, but I'm happy to see that we are a congregation that values Tikkun Olam as a central mission of synagogue life and that this value is specifically listed in our mission statement.

I look forward to seeing you in synagogue, as we work on the liberation of the sparks within us, through prayer, meditation, study, and comradeship and the second gathering of divine light through service and social action.

Having Tikkun Olam so prominently placed in our mission statement is an indication of the importance this value plays in the life of the UJC. I hope that we can all live up to this ideal.

We are a congregation that values Tikkun Olam as a central mission of synagogue life.

Adam Nelson



BRUKHIM HABA'IM WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Please extend a warm welcome to the new members of our congregation. If you have a common background or interest, reach out to help them find all that our congregation has to offer. Our newest members include:

If you have met newcomers to Hong Kong who might be interested in joining the UJC (or those who have been here for some time, but are not affiliated), encourage them to attend a UJC service or educational or social event, or put them in touch with our membership chairman, Barbara Thomas.

TODAH RABAH

The UJC would like to thank the following members for making a donation in support of our congregation in the past year:

Daniel and Kelly Abramowitz	Howard and Elena Krotman
Helen Amos and Andrea Marks	Peter and Marjorie Lasky
Ilan and Koni Bar-Nathan	Gahl Leddel and Doris Chan
Melvin and Paulette Bazerman	Paul and Marjan Levy
Jacob and Sofia Berman	Leslie Lewis
Martin and Else Berman	Lizzie and Sean Livingston
Jeff and Dale Biteen	Michel and Deborah Lowy
Robert and Sherri Dorfman	Henry and Alicia Messing
David Butts and Ellen Friedlander	Andrew Miller and Gym Tan
Dominique and Karen Chouchana	Marc and Mary Ann Morrison
Amy and Francois Cohas	Suzanne and Melvin Oliver
Joshua Cohen	Ilan and Honest Ozer
Julian Cohen	Robert Meyer
Laurie and Simon Constantinides	Jordan Potash and Adam Nelson
Joe Craven and Aili Huang	Dorri Ramati and Dev Kohol
Sergio F. de Lima	Jonathan and Louisa Ross
Wayne and Anita Edelist	Ana and Eddie Scherer
Andrew and Agnes Effron	Sharon Ser
Joshua and Ilene Frankel	Patricia Sindel and Gal Dymant
Howard Friedman	Belinda and Mark Skurnik
Scott and Nydia Gaynor	Jonathan and Yuki Solomon
Matthew Ginsburg and Joanna Fung	Stuart Spencer and Debbie Wacks
Joshua and Lauren Goldman-Brown	Garry Stein
Andrew and Pattie Gordon	John Sutton
Miriam Greenfield	Marc Wathen
Karen and Michael Joseph	Matthew Wolf and Sarah Garner
Daniel Kirwin	David and Nan Zeiden
Jonathan and Samantha Kriegel	David and Joy Zweig



BRUKHIM HABA'IM WELCOME NEW MEMBERS (CONT.)

