



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

4 - 5 September, 2009

16 Elul 5769

Parashat Ki Tavo
(Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Cantorial Soloist Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

There is no denying that this is a stressful time of the year for Rabbis. I sometimes think that we Rabbanim spend so much time preparing for the High Holidays that we forget to prepare for the High Holidays, if you know what I mean.

Here is a story from S. Y. Agnon's wonderful anthology Days of Awe that helps me remember what the Yamim Noraim are really all about:

Once a disciple of Rabbi Mordechai of Nardvona asked to be excused early from his studies.

"Why are you hurrying?," Rabbi Mordechai asked.

"Rosh HaShanah is coming and I am leading the davening. I must go through the prayerbook and get everything in order."

"The prayers are in the same order as they were last year," the Rabbi said. "It is better that you go through your deeds and get yourself in order."

The High Holidays are a time of transformation, but only if we exert ourselves. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are holy, but not magical. They will not help us if we do not prepare for them. The important work begins now. Now is the time for introspection. Now is the time for Heshbon Nefesh, the accounting of the soul. Busy as we are, in these last weeks before Rosh Hashanah we must slow down and get ourselves in order.

A bit of study will help. So mull over the story of Rabbi Mordechai and his frazzled student and this one of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, which you can also find in Agnon's little gem of a book:

It was Elul, the month of preparation that precedes Rosh HaShanah. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was standing in his window looking out over the street. A cobbler passed by and called up to him, "Do you have anything that needs mending?" Immediately Levi Yitzchak fell on his face and began to weep. "It is already Elul and I have yet to mend myself!"

Elul is fleeting by, but there is still time for soul-mending. When Rosh HaShanah begins, may we gather together with this critical work well under way.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
rabbizamek@ujc.org.hk

3rd September, 2009