



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

5 - 6 June, 2009

14 Sivan 5769

Parashat Nasso
(Numbers 4:21–7:89)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

This Shabbat is my Bar Mitzvah. Parashat Naso was the Torah portion read on the Shabbat of my ordination. As this is easier to remember than the actual date of ordination, it is the benchmark I use to calculate how long I have been in the Rabbinate. So in Rabbi years I am 13. Of course, it is also Rabbi Martha's Bat Mitzvah. She in fact is a bit older than me as we were ordained in alphabetical order. This is why you sometimes hear Rabbi B. refer to herself as my "senior colleague." I have to admit, this is still a bit of a sore point.

After my wedding and my kids' various simchas, ordination was the most moving ceremony I have ever experienced. I did not expect it to be. At the ordination rehearsal we were all a bit blasé and cracked many jokes at Hebrew Union College's expense. It felt like we were preparing for Wagnerian scale college graduation and we behaved in an accordingly juvenile manner.

The moment the actual ordination service began, I realized that this was not a thing like graduating from Michigan State. The doors swung open at the back of Plum Street Temple and we walked through the packed sanctuary. My cynicism instantly evaporated. When my turn came to stand in front of the Ark and receive my *smicha*, I could barely speak. I felt the weight of tradition when Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman made me a Rabbi in the way that Rabbis have always been made; he put his hands on my head and gave me the authority to go and teach. I had studied for five years, fulfilled all the course requirements, written a thesis, but none of that mattered at that moment. The *smicha* had to be conferred by a Rav. And then I knew. The Shalshet HaKabbalah, the chain of tradition, is real. I felt it.

These words of blessing from the parasha made Shabbat Naso the perfect day for ordination:

The LORD bless you and keep you!
The LORD deal kindly and graciously with you!
The LORD bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!

Being a Rabbi is at times difficult, but it is always a blessing. Pursuing this path has taken me to fascinating places. I am not sure I would have even visited Hong Kong, much less live here and serve the holy community of the UJC, had I not been given the gift of *smicha*. I have had extraordinary teachers. I have had the privilege to share in the most joyous moments of peoples' lives and have been allowed to be of use when lives are shattered by sorrow. My job allows me, in fact requires me, to study, contemplate, and write about what matters most to me. It is not a normal life. It is not pain free life either. But it is a blessed life.

It is a particular blessing to celebrate my Bar Mitzvah with all of you. At least this time my voice won't crack.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
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4th June, 2009