



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

11 - 12 September, 2009

23 Elul 5769

Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelech
(Deuteronomy 29:9–31:30)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Cantorial Soloist Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

Hashiveinu Adonai eilecha v'nashuvah, chadeish yameinu k'kedem.

Help us to return to You O Lord, then truly shall we return. Renew our days as in the past.

These beautiful words from the book of Lamentations have found their way into our liturgy. When we gather together this Saturday night for Selichot, we will sing them together, expressing our hope that the Yamim Noraim will be a time of transformation for all of us.

This verse is a plea. We know we cannot close the gap that has opened between us and HaShem, between the people we are and the people we should be, solely by our own power. We need God's help. So we say: Return us HaShem, help us on our way back to you. Without God as an active participant in our redemptive drama, we would surely fail. Even so, we must move. We must make our way back. "Truly we shall return." Our tradition tells us that if we take those first faltering steps of *teshuvah*, God will meet us to take us the rest of the way home.

This does not mean our turning will be easy. True *teshuvah* is enormously difficult. We strew our own path with obstacles through the rationalizations we muster to excuse our failings. Preparation is required. Otherwise Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur will come and go before we gain enough clarity to see through our illusions. This is why the month of Elul has been pulled into the orbit of the High Holidays. The entire month is seen as a time of spiritual training for the great struggle for renewal that begins on the first of Tishri.

Our Selichot service is an opportunity to strengthen ourselves for task of *teshuvah* ahead. As much as I hope all of you will come, I expect we will be an intimate group. The service is quiet and contemplative. It is a chance to experience some of the High Holiday liturgy without the bustle of the entire UJC Community to distract you. Participating in Selichot may open your heart a bit wider and a bit sooner as we head into the season of repentance.

We will begin with a nosh and then study together. Come grapple with difficult questions on the duty of truthfulness. When must one speak the truth? Are there instances when one can or should withhold it or conceal it? After the program it will be time to pray. I hope it will be an evening that feeds the body, the mind, and the heart.

Whether you join us for Selichot or not, I hope you can take some time before Rosh HaShanah arrives to prepare. Try not to do a cannonball dive into the Days of Awe. Try instead to wade into their healing waters slowly and deliberately. In any case, my prayer for all of us is: Help us to return to You O Lord, then truly shall we return. Renew our days as in the past.

L'Shanah Tovah Tikateivu.
May you all be inscribed for a good year.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
rabbizamek@ujc.org.hk

10th September, 2009