



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

12 - 13 December, 2008

16 Kislev 5769

Parashat Vayishlach  
(Genesis 32:4–36:43)

Rabbi Stan Zamek  
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

*Rabbi Chanina said, "Much Torah I have learned from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but from my students most of all." Ta'anit 7a*

As the UJC Academy of Adult Learning kicked off over the last two weeks, the truth of Rabbi Chanina's words have been demonstrated to me once again. My greatest reward from teaching has always been the learning that results. Even covering the most familiar ground invariably leads to new discoveries. There is no such thing as old material when I am privileged to study with new people.

This was certainly the case in my Introduction to Judaism class this week. I was teaching the *b'rachot* over various kinds of foods and I mentioned that as bread symbolizes all food, if one recites the *motzi* and eats a piece of bread, the *b'racha* "covers" the whole meal. Bread is so central to the idea of sustenance in Jewish tradition that the word "*lechem*" in Biblical Hebrew means both "bread" and "food." I cannot count the number of times I have taught this particular lesson, but this time, because of who I was teaching I learned something new. I learned that in Chinese, "*fan*" means both "rice" and "food," because, as in Jewish tradition, to have one's staple food is to have sustenance. I am sure you already knew this, but I didn't. Knowing this one fact enriches my understanding of my tradition.

That same evening, while studying the full traditional text of the *Yotzer* prayer with my Pathways through the Prayerbook class, I noticed a divine epithet that had never registered before. Near the end of the prayer, God is praised as "*Oseh Chadashot*," the Maker of New Things. How marvelous. How fortunate to have worked through this text with a diverse community of learners and so come across this gem. It moves me to praise HaShem, the Maker of New Things.

I would never discourage anyone from studying alone, but these discoveries show that there is something precious about studying with a community. To gather together over a sacred text is to take part in the great conversation of the Jewish people; a communal search for truth that circles the globe and spans thousands of years. Sitting around a table with our paper cups of coffee, hunched over our books, our study may not look like much, but as we talk to one another we are also in dialog with Akiva, Maimonides, Heschel, and all those who have ever applied their minds to understanding this great tradition. We join our ancestors in the process of Torah, adding our insights and concerns to the ever expanding body of tradition.

It is a joy to be part of the UJC's community of learners and searchers. I still enjoy private study and my profession requires it, but it is not nearly as satisfying and much more rarely leads me to unexpected places than when I study with you.

If you have not yet joined this holy conversation, the door is open. You should join us, not because it will enrich your life, although it will; not because it is a mitzvah, although it is; but because there is Torah that can only be brought into the world by you. Come and share it with us.

All Blessings  
Rabbi Z  
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