



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

12 - 13 September, 2008

13 Elul 5768

Parashat Ki Teitzei
(Deuteronomy 21:10–25:19)

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Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

I don't know about you, but I am still exhilarated from the weekend of learning we just experienced with my teacher, Avram Davis. Avram presented important and challenging ideas about the fundamental nature of reality from a mystical point of view. His teachings are powerful and moving, but they are not easy to grasp. I was so impressed with the way this *kahal* (community) was willing to embrace and engage Avram. It became even clearer to me that the UJC is a very special congregation.

My head was still in the heavens when I went to the Chumash this week to review the parasha. The experience was a bit jarring. There is almost nothing theoretical about parashat Ki Teitzei. This pasuk is typical of the gritty practicality of the parasha:

"When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it."

How do we square such a nuts and bolts mitzvah with the teachings on the radical oneness of the universe that we heard last weekend?

We must understand that this mitzvah is not just a provision of an ancient building code. It is in essence a practical application of the very deep truth that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the divine image. As such, the life of each image of God is precious beyond measure and is under our care and protection. Building a parapet or correcting any dangerous condition on premises under our control (as the Rabbis expanded the mitzvah) is a way to live out our spirituality in the material world.

The mitzvah of building a parapet is a concrete example of the workings of one of the "four protections" Avram mentioned in his teachings. In addition to the stability provided by our living teachers, our community, and our own *sechel* (common sense), there is also the grounding provided by the Torah, the normative tradition itself. In our zeal for spiritual pursuits we could easily forget our duty to protect our own physical well-being or, even worse, see the welfare of others as secondary to our own spiritual development. The tradition prevents this through the mitzvot. Thank God. What good would our *mochin gadlut* (enlightenment) be if, while contemplating the One, we walked off the roof? And of course, to be careless about the psyches and safety of others is a *chilul HaShem*, a desecration of God's name. If we can only do one thing; if we only have the capacity to build parapets or to pray or meditate, we are much better off building parapets.

The scope of Jewish tradition is truly breathtaking. It ranges from the deepest mystical and philosophical insights to all the seemingly mundane details through which a decent, Godly life is constructed. We should thank God for it all ---- for the ability to fly with the angels and to walk the earth with dignity.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z

11th September, 2008