



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

13- 14 March, 2009

18 Shevat 5769

Parashat Ki Tisa  
(Exodus 30:11–34:35)

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Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

This week I passed another important milestone with the UJC—my first Purim. Many thanks to the cast of our Purim schpiel, Sheitel, the Twelve Tribal Love Shlock Musical. Many thanks as well to Cheryl Blanco whose sourcing talents enabled me perpetuate an important personal Purim tradition. I refer, of course, to the throwing of rubber chickens. It just wouldn't be Purim if I didn't throw lots of tchotchkes to (not at) the congregation. This year, if you were lucky enough, you might have caught a plastic snake or newt, although the chickens were obviously the most highly prized item.

This hurling of nearly worthless, yet strangely desirable objects was not an act of hostility. You have to remember where I came from. A little Mardi Gras rubbed off on my Purim after all those years in Louisiana. So I taught the congregation to say, "Throw me somethin', Adoni!" and let fly. From this year forward, Purim at the UJC will bring with it a rain of rubber chickens.

It is natural that some Mardi Gras would bleed into Purim. They are quite similar in tone. Both festivals involve turning the rules of normal behavior upside down, imbibing a bit, or more than a bit, and wearing masks and costumes. Like Mardi Gras, Purim is about getting one's yayas out in preparation for a more serious time to come. Just as Christian revelers at Carnival are preparing for the sober period of Lent, so Purim can be seen as preparation for the still joyous, but much more serious holiday of Pesach.

There is a certain genius in the Jewish calendar. Pesach falls almost exactly a month after Purim. This symmetry highlights the difference between rescue and redemption. The celebration of Purim is so riotous and intemperate in part because the reprieve the Jews achieve in the Purim story is temporary. Other enemies have arisen and our wits and good fortune have not always carried the day. The deliverance of Purim is exhilarating while it lasts, but when it wears off and we sober up, we realize that the world is not any different than it was the day before. Haman still could be out there somewhere. That is what we drink to forget.

The deliverance we celebrate on Pesach is of a very different order and so the celebration has a very different tone. We do have wine, which as the Psalmist says, gladdens the heart, but we drink it not to forget, but to remember. The four cups of wine stand for the Torah's four great promises of redemption. This redemption is meant to be total. Slaves become free people who choose to covenant with their Redeemer for all time. This does not mean we are insulated from the Hamans of today or tomorrow. But redemption from slavery is seen as a foreshadowing of the ultimate redemption of the entire world. Pesach speaks as much about the hoped for future as the distant past. It speaks of a time when a Haman would be inconceivable.

So I hope you let the good times roll on Purim (Heb., laissez le bon temps rouler). It is fitting to act the fool on Purim and put aside, for a day, the reality that we live in an unredeemed world. But now it is time to get serious and prepare for Pesach. Before long we will sit at the Seder table and say: "Now we are slaves. Next year we will be free." We no longer serve any Pharaoh, but our redemption is not complete as long as any are in bondage to want and fear. We have much freedom, but we are not free in the ultimate sense until the world is free of Hamanic hatred and oppression. At every Seder we look back to the Exodus as assurance that this time will come. B'karov b'yameinu. Speedily and in our day.

All Blessings  
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*12<sup>th</sup> March, 2009*