



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

14 - 15 August, 2009

25 Av 5769

Parashat Re'eh
(Deuteronomy 11:26–16:17)

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Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

It is good to be back in Hong Kong. Actually, my body arrived late last week and was here for Shabbat. Due to jet lag, however, my mind only arrived on Monday. It seems to be settling in well. I am not responsible for anything I did or said prior to its arrival.

As many of you know, we spent our holiday in the American Southwest, my adopted homeland. Taos, Tulsa, and the Texas Hill Country were our main bases of operation. This part of the US is a very friendly place. Strangers tend to make conversation in shops and restaurants. We all got a kick out of being asked where we were from. Usually we would have to say "Hong Kong" twice as the information would not register the first time. People seemed impressed. Somehow Hong Kong has a cachet that Baton Rouge never had. I am not sure why.

It was a splendid holiday. Just what the doctor ordered after a wonderful, but intense year in Hong Kong. Taos, where we spent most of our time, is about as different from here as you can get -- quiet, laid-back, spread-out and a very small town. In the morning we were awakened by the ravens and magpies. At night we could hear the coyotes howling and yipping out in the sagebrush. The mountain air was clear and cold at night, perfect for tracing the path of the Milky Way across the sky or watching the shooting stars.

I spent part of almost every day sitting on our back patio and gazing across the sagebrush at Taos Mountain. I watched as the sun rose behind its bulk, as its flanks turned gold at the end of the day, and as afternoon storms masked it in gauzy veils of rain. The mountain has a way of filling the mind, so often I did much more seeing than thinking. Other times I thought about Hong Kong and the UJC --- about the exciting year we have ahead of us, about what I need to say to you this year at the High Holidays, and about what we will learn together this year.

Having spent so much time sitting by "my" mountain, I understand better what Georgia O'Keeffe meant when she said of Pedernal, her beloved mountain, "God told me if I painted it often enough I could have it." It is strange to feel a personal relationship with such an ancient and immense mass of landscape, but there it is. I meditated by the mountain, contemplated it, read for hours sitting before it, and so now it is my holy place. It was a blessing to be there.

It was a blessing to come home too. What a joy to walk in for my first Shabbat of the year and see friendly faces. How nice not to be starting from scratch, but to pick up my work from where I left off. How good that Hong Kong and the UJC feel comfortable and familiar.

For the first few days after we returned we stayed close to home. On Sunday, however, we truly re-entered Hong Kong. We went to Causeway Bay for lunch and to do a bit of shopping. Of course the streets were packed and the neighborhood was humming with the city's characteristic electric energy. It felt good to plunge back in.

What a world we inhabit that has the bustling streets of Hong Kong and other-worldly mountains and empty sagebrush plains. What a blessing to love it all.

All Blessings
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13th August, 2009