



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

16 - 17 January , 2009

21 Tevet 5769

Parashat Shemos
(Exodus 1:1–6:1)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

In a much more communal environment and a much less self absorbed time, Hillel felt compelled to admonish: "Do not separate yourself from the community." I suppose even in his day there was a need to confront the natural human impulse to retreat into one's own world, away from the irritations and compromises that are always the price of engagement with others. In our time Hillel's words have an even greater significance than when they were first spoken. We have a much greater ability to wall ourselves off from much face-to-face engagement with others and to create customized, on-demand worlds in which to spend most of our time. Although in reality we are starving for community, we are less and less tolerant of the inefficiencies and inconveniences of creating and sustaining it.

Given these cultural facts of life, the synagogue is an anomaly. To be involved in synagogue life is choose engagement over isolation. Affiliation is a step out of our carefully constructed, predictable private worlds into the wonderful chaos of Jewish community. This is a quite counter-cultural move.

If it is against the grain of modern life even to go to shul, to volunteer to help lead a synagogue is an even more radical stand for connection and community. Those who choose this path willingly take on burdens that could easily be avoided and commit to sacrifice their time; the most precious commodity in this pressure-cooker world we live in. Synagogue leadership is a complicated and emotionally fraught task, touching as it does on people's spiritual hungers and deepest questions.

So why would anyone willingly do this? Why, given all the other demands on their time, did our ExCo members agree to serve? Although each would articulate their reasons differently, at base I believe that they all understand that they have been called to a sacred task. To be the steward of a synagogue's mission is unlike any other role a person might undertake. While there are inevitably mundane issues of finances and management involved, there is always a dimension of the holy in their work. In the end, no matter what issue the ExCo is dealing with, the goal is always to nurture the sacred and advance the cause of Torah.

To express our gratitude to our ExCo members for their commitment and to articulate the sacredness of their task we will formally install them in their positions at services this Friday night. This is a beginning, I hope, of an annual UJC tradition. While the installation ceremony will be simple, it is an important event in the life of the UJC. Please join us as we thank ExCo for accepting the responsibility and the honor of synagogue leadership and ask HaShem to strengthen their hands for the work ahead.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
rabbizamek@ujc.org.hk

15th January, 2009