



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG

Celebrating 20 Years of Progressive Judaism in Hong Kong

SHABBAT SHALOM

16 - 17 October, 2009

29 Tishrei 5770

Parashat Bereishit
(Genesis 1:1-6:8)

Rabbi Stanton M. Zamek
Cantorial Soloist Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

Although Simchat Torah was last week, it is on this Shabbat that the true dance of Torah begins. This Shabbat is Shabbat Bereishit, the beginning of the sacred round of weekly Torah readings. It is this sequential reading cycle that is the source of the essential rhythm of Jewish life.

The “parasha” is not just the Torah portion read on a particular Shabbat. It is also a basic unit of Jewish sacred time. Each week belongs to and is named for its parasha. The heart and mind of the Jew are also within the gravitational pull of the weekly Torah portion. The tradition calls upon us to study *parashat hashavuah*, the portion of the week, before Shabbat arrives. We are meant to enter Shabbat already in step with the Torah's cadence.

One can enter the dance of Torah at any time. Each week issues an invitation to fall in with the beat. There is, however, something special about Shabbat Bereishit, the moment when the very first words of the Torah are read. This week we have the opportunity to join the dance as the song of Torah begins.

In this Year of Torah at the UJC, I urge you to merge the rhythm of your life with the rhythm of Jewish sacred time. This is easily done. Simply make the commitment to yourself to study the parasha of the week. How you do this is up to you. Quantity is much less important than commitment and consistency.

You may choose to get yourself a Torah commentary (I recommend the Etz Hayim edition, available from Amazon and Paddyfield) and read the entire parasha each week. If you spread the reading over the week, this is certainly achievable. You could also go to www.hebc.com, click on the name of the parasha, and read the text on your computer. As an alternative or in addition, you could turn to one of the many parashat hashavuah lessons available online. The Union for Reform Judaism has a very useful Torah study page (go to www.urj.org and click on the “Learning” tab). Here you can find brief Torah commentaries organized by parasha. You can even download audio commentaries into iTunes.

Private study is always enriching and often the only practical method. There is, however, unique joy in grappling with Torah in the company of other learners. If you have not been to our Saturday morning Torah Study you are missing one of the best things we offer at the UJC. So nu? This is the UJC Year of Torah. Please don't be shy. Come nosh on a homemade bagel and celebrate and struggle with Torah. We need you. We need your questions and insights. Torah Study is a good deal — breakfast, the search for meaning, and a shot of schnapps to wash it down, all for the low price of a bit of your time on a Saturday morning. What's not to like?

Our Sages taught: marbeh Torah, marbeh chayyim — the more Torah, the more life. Let this be a year of “more” for all of us. If you already study the parasha of the week, good for you. Now go deeper. Find more challenging commentaries and widen your view. If you have not yet joined the great dance of Torah, now is the time. Your shul is extending a hand to you and will gladly pull you out onto the floor and show you the steps. Listen to the beat and get up and dance.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
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15th October, 2009