



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

17 - 18 October, 2008

19 Tishrei 5769

Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot  
(Exodus 33:12–34:26)

Rabbi Stan Zamek  
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

As I was sitting having lunch in the sukkah on the first day of the festival I was struck by the dissonance of celebrating a harvest festival in such an urban environment. Living in suburban Baton Rouge was not like living down on the farm, but by comparison it felt closer to "the land" than my present address. In reality, of course, no matter what human made accretions we impose, we all live on the land as we are sustained by natural processes utterly beyond our control. Sukkot surely has special resonance for Jews who directly make their living from the soil, but it remains relevant for all of us. We may think we live at a remove from nature, but life is still ultimately about sun, rain, and soil. The ancients did not need to be reminded of this fact, but we do. For our ancestors and for us, Sukkot is a celebration of the bounty of the earth. But for us it serves another purpose-- a reminder that the human (*adam*) is still of and dependent upon the earth (*adama*). This teaching of Sukkot takes on a new urgency as we come to grips with the consequences of our unwitting attack on the ability of our planet to sustain life.

Sukkot is called "*z'man simchateinu*," the season of our rejoicing. It is though, a very autumn-like joy. It comes with a hint of melancholy, for as much as Sukkot is about abundance it is also about fragility. The sukkah itself must be a temporary dwelling. When we sit in it, we are meant to be subject to the elements. The rain should be able to fall through the sukkah. We decorate the sukkah to beautify the holiday, but almost as soon as we are done, the wind and the rain and the sun began to dismantle our work. The sukkah is a physical representation of the ephemeral nature of all things of this world. Our world is precious and beautiful, but it does not last. Perhaps that is why it is precious and beautiful.

Like so many of our observances, the traditions of Sukkot come to refocus us on truths that we might otherwise avoid. Sukkot particularly undermines the illusion of solidity. Even though we should know better, we believe that the institutions and structures we have built are, if not eternal, at least permanent. Before there were banks to fail or credit to dry up, our tradition knew better. And yet in spite of making us face the inherent fragility of life, Sukkot says "rejoice!" Rejoice that despite all the uncertainties of life, we are somehow sustained. Rejoice that even though it is always in the process of passing away, yet the world is filled with heart-stopping beauty. Rejoice that at the heart of all that is temporary there is always the Eternal. These are very uncertain times, to be sure, but this was true yesterday, last year, and a thousand years ago. The tradition at all times tells us two things: Understand that impermanence is the nature of the world and --- rejoice!

All Blessings  
Rabbi Z

16<sup>th</sup> October, 2008