



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

22 - 23 May, 2009

29 Iyar 5769

Parashat Bamidbar  
(Leviticus 16:1–20:27)

Rabbi Stan Zamek  
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

Shavuot, as we know it today, is a monument to the creativity of the Rabbis. They realized that the Torah's sacred calendar was missing something. There were ritual commemorations of the Exodus (Pesach) and of the wilderness period (Sukkot), but there was no ceremony marking the giving of Torah at Sinai. The third of the great pilgrimage festivals, Shavuot, was a purely agricultural festival, as far as the Torah was concerned. The Rabbis filled the ritual gap by fixing the date of Shavuot as the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, the traditionally accepted date of Ma'amad Sinai, the Standing at Sinai. The festival was then reshaped as a predominately historical festival. Only a vestige of its agricultural roots remains today.

While Shavuot is equal in status to Pesach and Sukkot, it is still somewhat of an orphan holiday. It is symbolically impoverished compared to Pesach and Sukkot, which are both rich in visceral, physical ritual. Given the importance of the Sinai narrative to the entire enterprise of Judaism, there just does not seem enough to do on Shavuot.

This is true only if we fail to avail ourselves of an innovation that comes to us from the mystic circle of Tzfat. (We are an ancient tradition, so it is fair to call a 16<sup>th</sup> century practice "an innovation".) These teachers devised a late night study vigil, called Tikkun Leil Shavuot, to recapture some of the drama of Sinai, much in the way that Pesach is meant as a reenactment of the Exodus. We gather together on this night to symbolically study the totality of Torah as a way of being at Sinai once again and accepting the Torah afresh.

In truth Sinai was not a one-time historical event. Like the entirety of the sacred drama of Jewish tradition, it is a present reality. Creation is an ongoing process, we are continually freeing ourselves from Egypt and seeking the Promised Land, and we are always standing at the foot of the Mountain of God.

Ritual is the "magic" the tradition employs to make religious history live in the here and now. This is why I urge you to join us this year for the Tikkun Leil Shavuot. We may appear to be just a room-full of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hong Kong Jews studying and questioning ancient texts, fueled by coffee and cheesecake, but when we come together in this way, with the right holy intention, we are much more. On Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> May, the UJC will become Sinai. Come stand with us at the mountain.

All Blessings  
Rabbi Z  
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*21<sup>st</sup> May, 2009*