



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

26 - 27 September, 2008

27 Elul 5768

Parashat Nitzavim
(Deuteronomy 29:9–30:20)

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Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

The High Holidays are unusual in the cycle of the Jewish year because the “action”, for the most part, takes place in our heads and our hearts. In general, Judaism shuns abstractions. We express the joy of Shabbat with light and the sweetness of wine. Sukkot and Pesach are rich sensory experiences. We taste both slavery and freedom through the foods we eat at the seder and we literally shake with gratitude for what the good earth produces when we take up the lulav and the etrog.

Of course we have the sound of the shofar during the *Yamim Noraim*, but it is really the liturgy and our quiet introspection that dominate the religious atmosphere during the Days of Awe.

This is part of the reason that the High Holidays are so spiritually demanding. We are undertaking the very serious task of renewing ourselves with seemingly little ritual support. There are however some simple things we can do to ease the process. I will suggest just three.

1. Study or review the liturgy before Rosh HaShanah begins. The power of the prayers of the Days of Awe is greatly enhanced if we have the time to consider their meaning. So here is a shameless plug. Come to Bagels & Binah at 10:00 AM this Sunday to explore the origin and message of key sections of the High Holiday liturgy. If you join us you will walk into services this High Holidays equipped with spiritual Cliffs Notes.

2. Wear white to High Holiday services. White is the color of the Days of Awe. It symbolizes the purity to which we aspire. Wearing this color expresses externally what we hope is happening inside. Through Isaiah God assures us, “Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white; Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece.” The physical act of wearing white helps us feel the truth of Isaiah’s words. This can make all the difference.

3. Wear non-leather shoes on Yom Kippur. According to the Sages, leather, being luxurious, should be given up for Yom Kippur. This is a small and easily accomplished act of penance. We humans are constructed to respond to ritual. Even the simplest physical cue can shift the soul in the right direction. Wearing Crocs or canvas trainers with our shul clothes sends a message from our feet straight to the heart that Yom Kippur is a time of unique spiritual power and an opportunity for change not to be missed.

The Days of Awe are like no other days of the year. They can, as the Sufis say, break the glass that encases the heart. Days like these are worthy of preparation.

L'Shanah Tovah Tikateivu
May you all be inscribed for a good year.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z

25th September, 2008