

# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

1 – 2 April, 2011

27 Adar-II 5771

Parashat Tazria  
(Leviticus 12:1-13:59)

Rabbi Stanton M. Zamek  
Education & Programming Director Rabbi Martha Bergadine  
Cantorial Soloist/Programming Assistant Diego Edelberg

## From the Rabbi's desk

This Shabbat is Shabbat HaChodesh, the last of the *Araba Parshiot*, the four special Shabbatot that punctuate the spring calendar. This special Shabbat comes to announce the coming of Rosh Chodesh Nisan, the first of the month of redemption, the month of the Festival of Pesach. The arrival of Shabbat Hachodesh is a Pesach wake-up call. It tells us that it is indeed time to panic. Our Passover mobilization must begin. Time is running out.

The additional Torah reading for Shabbat HaChodesh is itself all about time. The reading begins: *"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you."*

In one sense, this passage from chapter 12 of Exodus is the true beginning of the Torah. Rashi, following the Rabbis, says as much in his commentary to Genesis 1:1: *"God need not have begun the Torah until 'This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months' because it is the first commandment directed to Israel."*

So Exodus 12 is where the Torah first becomes an explicit guide for our communal spiritual life. It is then enormously significant that the first matter taken up is sacred time.

The first and most fundamental question that must be answered in Jewish life is this: When am I? The things a Jew does, the texts a Jew studies, the foods a Jew eats, and the ideas a Jew is meant to contemplate are all driven by the calendar. We must always know when we are. The calendar is the Jew's GPS system, fixing our position in multiple dimensions, locating us in relation to our history, to our obligations to one another, and to the Holy One of Blessing.

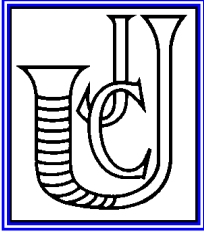
If we know when we are, then the rest is commentary which we can easily go and learn. If we are strangers to Jewish time, if we are not attuned to the flow of the calendar, then we easily become lost to Jewish life.

When we lived in self contained communities, the Jewish time frame was the only one we knew. Knowing when we were was as natural as breathing. In the diaspora today, the Jewish time map is not our sole means of orienting ourselves. It is crucial from a Jewish point of view to know that today is 25 Adar II 5771, but in navigating work, school, and social life, this knowledge will not help us very much. Our attention is necessarily divided between two often conflicting clocks — the sacred and the secular.

The problem is that secular time presses us so relentlessly that it is this ordering of time, rather than our own, that has come to seem natural. We must exert conscious and consistent effort to maintain our position in Jewish time. Without this kind of intentionality we drift away from an authentic Jewish life on the sea of secular time. Being unmoored from Jewish time in this way is the most serious spiritual challenge of the age we live in.

Fortunately, with small acts of attention we can swiftly and easily reacquire our position in Jewish time. Navigating Jewish time is not a complex science. All that anyone needs is a *luach*, a Jewish calendar, and the commitment to consult it daily. With this navigational device in hand it is impossible to get lost. Don't leave home without it.

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In this digital age, most of us use electronic calendars to run our lives. We can easily maintain our connection to Jewish time by the same means.

If you don't already have some form of digital *luach*, than I suggest that you go to [www.hebcal.com](http://www.hebcal.com) and use the website to create a free downloadable Jewish calendar. If you have any trouble with Hebcal drop me an email or give me a call. I would be happy to help. Hebcal calendars can be imported into Outlook and iCal. With this simple tool your blackberry, iPhone, or computer can become a very handy Jewish GPS system.

There are of course other Jewish calendar options. Use the one that is best for you. It does not matter how we know when we are, but is absolutely critical that we know.

Of course, acting on our knowledge of Jewish time helps us internalize the Jewish sacred clock. The rhythm of the Jewish week becomes more a part of who we are the more we consistently mark Shabbat. As Pesach approaches, we will know when we are in a much deeper way if we prepare the house for the festival. This year make a commitment to Pesach beyond the Seder by joining the UJC community at festival services. This will help us all experience the eight days of Passover as a true season of redemption.

You know when you can find me in the coming weeks — on Shabbat Hachodesh, on Seder night, and on the mornings of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> of Nisan for that matter. I look forward to seeing you soon. Like everything else in Jewish life, it is just a matter of when.

All Blessings  
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31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011