



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

28-29 November, 2008

2 Kislev 5769

Parashat Toldot
(Genesis 25:19–28:9)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

Last week by chance I learned that a significant UJC anniversary had just passed and that another was coming next month. I am referring, of course, to Charlene Hsia's 4th anniversary at the UJC, which was observed on November 22nd, and Nancy Lui's 5th UJC anniversary which occurs on December 9th.

This poses a bit of a problem. How do we adequately mark these significant dates, given they come so close together? I think I have a solution, based on the calendar of Federal holidays in the United States.

In 1880 George Washington's birthday, February 22nd, was designated as a Federal holiday. Washington certainly deserves the honor, but because another great American President, Abraham Lincoln, was also born in February, the holiday is popularly known as Presidents' Day and honors the both of them. To be absolutely fair, the date of the observance is not on either George or Abe's birthday, but on the third Monday in February.

So here is the proposal: On a convenient date, say in late November, we should henceforth observe "Narlene" (or Charlancy?) Day in appreciation of these two wonderful ladies and all they do for the UJC.

OK, so I am half-joking about establishing a holiday (but only half), but not about the "wonderful" part. That part I mean in all seriousness. I only started with an attempt at humor because I know that despite the pride Charlene and Nancy take in their work, they are modest people. I had to ease into this. As it is, they won't like what I am about to say. But I am the Rabbi and they're not. End of argument.

Because of the aforementioned modesty and the seamless way they work, it would be easy to take Nancy and Charlene for granted. Please, let's not do that. Nancy and Charlene are so good at what they do that it may seem that the UJC is automated. Given the perspective I have; watching them hustle every day, I can tell you that it is not. The UJC works because of Nancy and Charlene's attention to the details. They know what was, what is, and often what will be at the UJC. It is a little spooky, actually.

My appreciation of them is not just for their efficiency and competence, but for the spirit they bring to their work. Nancy and Charlene clearly care deeply about the UJC and their good humor and positive attitude make it a pleasure to come down to the office. When I try to thank them for some incredibly helpful, kind, and/or amazing thing they have done for a member, or for me, or for my family, they say (and at times they really are a kind of hive mind), "We are just doing our job." Borscht, as my mother would say. I have worked with people over the years who "just do their job." What they do is so much more than this.

So Nancy and Charlene, for all that you do — for knowing what I am going to ask for before I ask for it, for cranking through the amount of work you do every day without breaking a sweat, for being the glue that holds the whole operation together, and for so much more— thanks ever so much.

I am not sure that the Hong Kong government is going to go for this idea of another civic holiday. Sorry ladies. But if it will make them feel better I will start calling Nancy and Charlene "Abe" and "George".

Even if we don't get them on the calendar, I hope that all of you in the UJC mishpacha will take their anniversaries as a good opportunity to express your appreciation. These ladies are treasures.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z

27th November, 2008