



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

3 – 4 February, 2006

6 Shevat, 5766

Parashat Bo
(Exodus 10:1–13:16)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

It may have been sunny in Hong Kong for Chinese New Year, but serious storm clouds are gathering over our Jewish heads: the landslide election of Hamas is a dangerous development, and the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran grows more frightening – and likely – by the day.

What do these developments mean for Israel and the Jewish People? This will be the topic of our Bagels and Bina discussion this Sunday morning at 10:15am in the synagogue. All are welcome.

“The Palestinian people have spoken and their voice has been heard,” said Gershon Baskin, one of Israel’s most ardent workers for peace and co-leader of The Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, “[Last week’s] elections in Palestine produced disastrous results – both for Palestine and for Israel. It is difficult for me, the perennial optimist to see anything positive about the outcome of this democratic process. I can only hope that I am wrong.”

Those are the sentiments of the extreme political Left in Israel at this time. On the Right the feelings are pretty much the same, except that there was less hope held out to begin with.

While “politics” remains the stage on which these developments play themselves out, the drama is Jewish history itself. Similarly, we read in this week’s Torah portion about the last of the “negotiations” between Moses and Pharaoh and about the plague of death visited on Egypt as a result of their leader’s hardhearted decisions. The result of our Exodus from Egypt is the conditional political freedom we gained in order fulfill God’s task for us in the world: the task of manifesting God’s Presence in our lives and in our nation through the enduring, world-historical set of moral values recorded in the Torah that we understand from our experience of slavery in Egypt and our emergence to freedom in the Promised Land.

In contrast to Hamas, (a word that appears in the Bible to describe wickedness and violence that led to the Flood in Noah’s time), we Jews must embrace the rule of law and the aspiration for justice. Hamas has shown over and over again where their values lie as they glorify the death of their murdering terrorists, desecrate the Name of God by shedding blood in God’s Name, and (along with Iran) they falsify the truth of the Holocaust and the rest of Jewish history – thus condemning themselves to a world-view that, Nazi-like, will imprison them in hatred and horror.

The rise of Hamas to power is a challenge to us Jews to be, now more than ever, unified as a People battling for peace, righteousness, justice, and truth.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
4 Shevat 5766

2nd February, 2006