



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

7 – 8 April, 2006

10 Nissan, 5766

Parashat Tzav  
(Leviticus 6:1–8:36)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz  
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

## D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

Which is more important in Judaism generally, and at the Passover *seder* in particular: stories, or questions?

If you say stories, you could say that the Torah itself is the story of the Jewish People and that the Jewish story (not “*history*, but *our* story!) continues into our own day. The book we use for the *seder* is called the *haggadah*, which means “the telling”. The *haggadah* is a guide for telling the story of our Exodus from Egypt, which we do four times at the *seder*! (See if you can count them at your *seder*!)

If you say that questions are more important, you could of course cite the Talmud to support you, which is a book full of questions and debates about the answers to those questions which in turn generate even more questions. The four questions, the *ma nishtana*, is a critical part of the *seder*. We do not tell the story until someone asks “Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Asking questions at the *seder* is essential not only as a catalyst for telling the story. Questioning is part of the drama of our redemption and freedom that we reenact each year, no less important than sitting on pillows, reclining, and drinking four cups. We are **free** to question and to discuss. Our questions are not the meek questioning of an inferior to a superior. A slave is not consulted, a slave accepts without questioning, a slave has no horizon and no hope to wonder about, nor time to inquire.

“An essential characteristic of free people is that they notice the world around them, make distinctions and search for meaningful patterns. They want understanding, not inscrutability. For a slave mentality, nothing is “different” – all tasks are part of the same meaningless arbitrariness. There is no point in asking if no one answers, no place for questions in a world where the master’s arbitrary orders are the ultimate justification for the way things are. In beginning the *seder* with genuine (not rote) questions, the Rabbis show that we not only **tell** the story of freedom, but we **act** like free people.” (*A Different Night haggadah*)

What questions do you have about our world? What questions about the meaning of being free will you ask at your *seder* this year? A suggestion to enliven your *seder* is to challenge your table guests to come up with four questions about the meaning of being a free Jew in our world today and how that must impact how we live our lives.

Have a happy and chametz-free Passover!

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Michael  
8 Nissan 5766

6<sup>th</sup> April, 2006