



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

10 – 11 March, 2006

11 Adar, 5766

Parashat Tetzaveh
(Exodus 27:20–30:10)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

Jerry Seinfeld was asked by a crowd during a stand-up routine to perform his greeting for Newman. I assume you are all familiar with the show—Newman is Seinfeld's mean neighbor, who is always plotting mischief for someone's life, and when he would knock on Jerry's door, his entrance was always dramatically cold, mood altering, a bit frightening...foreboding. Seinfeld would answer the door and always say "hello Newman" in a particular way.

Seinfeld described what was involved in saying "hello Newman" from an actor's perspective: "Well, you just can't do a "hello Newman" at the drop of a hat. First, you have to sense the slight chill as the door comes ajar, and then you have to swing the door open wide to reveal Newman's girth, Newman in all his 'Newman-ness'. Then, you must think of all the evil and wickedness in the world. Only then can you say..."Hello, Newman".

The way Seinfeld greets Newman is similar to how we greet Purim.

It would be much simpler just to forget all the terrible travails of history—Amalek, Haman, the Roman conquest, the Inquisition, the Crusades, pogroms, the Holocaust... But no. Once a year the story of Purim comes knocking on our door, and we open it and encounter it in all its detail—how Haman plotted mischief against the Jews, more than mischief: genocidal annihilation, with the complicit aid of the state and its silent majority.

When we drown out the wicked man's name with our 'boos' and noisemakers, we seem, indeed, to try to blot out all the evil and wickedness of the world.

But like Seinfeld, it's all an act, a humorous routine: we dress in costumes, we let go of the real anger in there somewhere and have...fun, laughing at evil, as well as at ourselves. The rule is to drink enough so that you confuse whether to curse Haman and bless Mordechai or bless Haman and curse Mordechai. We, of all people, who have had so many rehearsals of this scene in our history, could never, ever, REALLY confuse the good guys with the bad guys and vice versa.

Purim thus serves as a humorous outlet for our fears, a way of focusing on the serious through the silly, a mirror for our timid selves that inspires confidence and bravery.

No one ever asks Seinfeld, I suspect, how he goes about, afterward, escorting Newman out the door. I'm sure Seinfeld has thought it through. Does he open the door for Newman or does Newman get left to let himself out? Does Seinfeld give him a nudge in the *tuchus* as he goes? Is the goal to so confound the wicked man's plotting that he becomes infuriated at his defeats and storms away by himself and stays away?

It sounds absurd, but these are real questions about how we defeat evil and dismiss it from our consciousness, about how we excise wickedness from our world.

The Jewish tradition does give us some direction in this regard. The *Megilla* reading ends with Mordechai in power, encouraging the Jews to be neighborly to one another—giving gifts to the poor and to one another.

The Jewish response to the presence of evil...is to be a *mensch*: 'Menschlekit' is the antithesis of Amalekite. In the face of evil, faith can only be restored through basic human goodness. Pirke Avot sums it up: When those about you are acting inhumane, strive to be a human.

This Shabbat is *Shabbat Zachor*, in which we remember the wickedness of the Amalekites and our mission to uproot evil from the world. Our Service and *Megilla* reading for Purim begins at 6:00pm on Monday night followed by fun, drinks, and dinner. Children's activities begin at 4:45pm.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Michael
9 Adar 5766

9th March, 2006