



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

13 – 14 January, 2006

14 Tevet, 5766

Parashat Vayechi
(Genesis 47:28–50:26)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

As I was studying this week's Torah portion, I was reminded of the prayer that appears below (which is one of those email chain-letter items that I normally erase; This one however was - quite uncharacteristically - sent along to me by my wise and respected grandfather-in-law Rabbi J. Haberman).

Jacob is old, ill, and on his deathbed. He summons his children, saying "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come." However, instead of telling their future, he speaks to each child about their character, their deeds, their talents.

Why didn't he tell the future? The midrash proposes that perhaps the spirit of prophecy departed from Jacob at that moment. We can only wonder why it did. One commentator suggests that the prophecy of our future is in fact a description of our character and our abilities: for the choices we make and the way we use or abuse, neglect or manifest our God-given talents, circumstances, and opportunities is the future we are destined to create.

If we take that lesson to heart for ourselves, how much the more so should we be understanding of the perceived shortcomings of others:

"God, Help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

"Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

"Remind us, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

"Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year that they go shopping together.

"Dear God, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. It is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear. Open our hearts not just to those who are close to us, but to all humanity.

Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love."

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
12 Tevet 5766

12th January, 2006