



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

17–18 February, 2006

20 Shevat, 5766

Parashat Yitro  
(Exodus 18:1–20:23)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz  
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

## D'var Torah by Rabbi David Kopstein

In this week's sidra Moses ascends Mount Sinai to encounter the Divine. When he returns to the people from this divine encounter, "He was not aware that the skin of his face had become radiant with beams of light." \* In other words, Moses now had an aura about him of which he was unaware.

Like Moses, we are often unaware when light shines from us. At times, a single glance or encouraging word can make a significant difference in someone else's life. The most powerful impressions are often those we make without intending to make them.

Consider, for example, the story of one famous rabbi's disciples. Following their rebbe's death they were asked what his greatest teaching was. They responded, "The way he tied his shoelaces." Even a little detail like tying shoelaces was done by their rabbi with such care and consideration, and with such kedusha—holiness—that the disciples learned a great deal from that small, insignificant act.

Psychologists tell us that the most important influences parents have on their children are those that are subtle and implicit. Contrary to what parents might hope, lasting influence is not necessarily generated by the parent who calls the child aside for a heart-to-heart talk. The deepest marks we make on our children's lives, it seems, are not made by our lecturing or preaching to them. Our greatest teaching, instead, comes from the simple daily actions which comprise most of what we do: the words that drop almost unconsciously from our lips, the talk around the dinner table, the way we speak to people over the telephone, the way we speak about others, in short, by the way we tie our shoelaces.

Let us remember that what was true in the case of Moses is true for each of us. Just as Moses was unaware that beams of light shone from his radiant face, so we ordinary human beings often fail to recognize how much light and influence can radiate from us. Each of us can have a lasting impact on those closest to us and upon the community of which we are a part. Just as a single stone's splash can ripple through a pond, so one little act of ours can enlighten an entire society.

After all, it is our destiny to become "a light unto the nations," and we can become so one splendid mitzvah at a time.

Rabbi David Kopstein  
Yitro  
18 Sh'vat 5766  
\*Exodus 34:29

*16<sup>th</sup> February, 2006*