



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

21 – 22 October, 2005

19 Tishrei, 5766

Parashat V'zot HaBrachah  
(Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz  
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

## D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

A scientific convention was held a few weeks ago at the prestigious Royal Institution in London, the latest in a 200-year series of lectures that has included scientific giants such as Faraday and Dewar. For the first time ever, scientists discussed what makes people *Happy!*

Our Jewish tradition has been working to “up the Happiness quotient” for a long time already: The Torah tells us three times to “be Happy” and rejoice during the festival of Sukkot. The holiday is also referred to as “Zman Simchateinu” – ‘the time of our happiness’. On Monday night we will celebrate “Simchat Torah”, literally the “Happiness of Torah”. Of course, “simcha” – happiness, is a theme of other holidays and life-cycle events throughout the year. This season of Sukkot and Simchat Torah, though, are the happiest. Why is that?

Science may suggest an answer. Research shows that people actually become happier when they make real changes in their lives and attitudes. This is the model we find in our tradition as well. Last week on Yom Kippur we sat in *shul* focusing on who we are and what changes we are going to make in ourselves. Suddenly, this week we are Happy during Sukkot!

Other factors surely contribute to our happiness on these holidays as well: During Sukkot, we release the stranglehold that the ego has on us by leaving our homes, our familiar surroundings, and the illusion that we control our lives. We go live in the Sukkah’s simple structure, under the eyes of God and at the mercy of the elements, exposed as well to the eyes and ears and unexpected visits of guests and neighbors. We build the Sukkah anew with our own hands (ideally), each year—nothing in this world is permanent, neither misery nor joy.

We find our place on the great, never-ending cycle of eternity when we dance circles around the Torah on Simchat Torah even as we, like so many generations before us and after us, complete the year’s Torah reading and begin again at the beginning—at the genesis of all, Creation.

Sukkot is a festival for our senses, and we rejoice in our way of connecting with the natural world. We sit under the green *schach* and watch the stars (when was the last time you stargazed?!), we feel the lulav on our fingers, hear its rustle reminiscent of the sound of rain, smell the myrtle, see the bold gold etrog. The scientists agree that people who visit nature are happier.

Moreover, psychologists know that increasing the number of our social contacts is the best way to cheer us up: It is not too late to invite *ushpizin*, guests, into the Sukkah. The UJC Sukkah is open to all for this whole week. You can join us for Shabbat dinner this Friday night in the Sukkah - bring a friend you’d like to reconnect with, or a new friend!

Our community also invites all of you to our Simchat Torah celebration, featuring Torah dancing, music and drumming with Ben Fox-Schwartz and cantor Julie, a bar, and a great dairy pot-luck dinner! Isn’t having fun part of happiness too? The scientists are still checking into that one...outside the lab.

Chag Sameach – Happy Holiday!  
Rabbi Michael  
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20<sup>th</sup> October, 2005