



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

22 – 23 April, 2005 14 NISAN, 5765 Parashat Achare (Leviticus 16:1–18:30)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah from Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

One of the lines of the *Haggadah* that deserves particular attention at the Seder is this:

B'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo c'ilu hu yatzah mimitzrayim: In every generation one is obligated to see oneself as one who personally went out from Egypt. As it says, "You shall tell your child on that very day, saying 'It's because of this that God did for me when I went out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13:8).

Our "re-enactment" during the Seder, of the transition from slavery to freedom, is meant to help us know/feel/experience/internalize this most extraordinary event as an event in our own personal history. We taste the bitter taste of slavery and the bread of affliction, and then we recline as we dine in our freedom and drink wine in our joy of liberation.

We realize that if God had not delivered us from slavery then and there, we ourselves would still be slaves in Egypt today. If one or another of us had not survived the oppressions of the Inquisition or Crusades or pogroms or Nazis or Soviets...we, again, would not be able to celebrate our freedom today.

Physical redemption from slavery is cause for celebration but so is our spiritual redemption: "The Exodus from Egypt occurs in every human being, in every era, in every year, and even in every day." (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav) We experience redemption all over again on this night of Seder as we free ourselves from our self-imposed slaveries to our shortsightedness, stereotypes, hatreds, selfishness, ego, greed...

We Jews know, however, that redemption cannot be the end of the story, but only its beginning. The *Haggadah* continues: "Not only were our ancestors alone redeemed by the Holy One Blessed Be He, but even we were redeemed with them, as it says, 'God took us out from there **in order** to bring us and to give us the land God swore to our ancestors. (Deut. 6:23)"

We've learned that freedom, like the Land of Israel, is a conditional gift whose terms we must live up to. Maimonides, the famous Rabbi and philosopher, therefore inserts one letter—the letter "heh" (which is shorthand for God's Name)—into the *Haggadah*: "In every generation one is obligated to SEE ("lirot") oneself as one who personally went out..." reads as: "In every generation one is obligated to SHOW ("I'Harot") oneself as one who personally went out."

With freedom comes responsibility.

When we truly experience the redemption from slavery through our Seder, it changes who we are and how we behave in the world.

Chag Kasher v'Sameach!
Rabbi Michael
11 Nisan 5765

20th April, 2005