



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

24–25 March, 2006

25 Adar, 5766

Parashat Vayakhel
(Exodus 35:1–38:20)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom chaverim,

It was Oscar Wilde who noted that “Life imitates art far more than art imitates Life.” And so it is with the art of living a specifically Jewish life.

Whether you see yourself as a Jew who religiously observes the *mitzvot* to do God’s will, a Jew who is so immersed in the culture and values of the Jewish People that your sense of who-you-are is necessarily Jewish, or a Jew who is seeking to understand what it means to be a Jew (or any other way you might think of yourself as a “Jew who...”) we are all, inescapably, patterned tiles of a great a work-in-progress: the mosaic of Jewish life and history.

Is it irony or art that inspired us to call Israel’s leading art school the *Bezalel* academy, after the hero of this week’s Torah portion, *Vayakhel – Pekudei*, who was expert in design and craftsmanship of every kind? Is the upcoming Passover *sefer* a mere ritual we perform annually, or is it part of the drama of who we are in our lives when, each year at this season, we relive the root experience of going from slavery to freedom? Would you say that the anomalous Jewish passion for justice and concern for those who need help is a direct result of our experience each Passover? Is it a cultural or genetic trait going back to Abraham and his worry for the potentially righteous residents of Sodom and the Torah’s insistence that we care for the poor, the widow and the stranger?

Is it chance or destiny that this week’s Torah portion discusses the need for every member of the entire congregation of Israel to come together and contribute their own unique talents and gifts to the community in order to make it whole, while this week as well Dr. Debbie Wachs, a UJC member and professor of art history, will treat us to a lecture on Jewish Identity in Art?

The art of living Jewishly is a craft that must be learned, a skill that needs cultivation and practice, a wisdom that requires study. Please join us this Sunday at 10:15 am for “Bagels and Bina” to learn more about the ways in which Jewish identity is explored in the works of famous artists.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
23 Adar 5766

23rd March, 2006