



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

26 – 27 August, 2005

22 AV, 5765

Parashat Ekev
(Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim!

It is wonderful to be back in Hong Kong and to be immediately absorbed into the warm comfort of our community here. I'm looking forward to seeing all of your familiar faces and to greet our new members. There is a tremendous sense of excitement among the UJC staff, Exco and other volunteers about the upcoming High Holidays, the opening of a new year at Shorashim, the beginning of our adult education classes, and the launching of a whole slew of fun social programs. Please join us for Shabbat dinner this week as we celebrate the return of Ben and Tzachi to help us get the year started.

This week's Torah portion, *Eikev*, records another wonderful speech by Moses to the People of Israel. "What it all boils down to is this," Moses seems to say as he tries yet again to explain the covenant and the way of life expected of the nation living free in its new land: "And now, Oh Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you? Only this: to revere (literally "fear") the Lord your God, to walk only in God's paths, to love God, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, keeping the Lord's commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you today, for your own good." (Deut. 10: 12-13).

This sounds pretty simple and straightforward. Centuries later, the prophet Micah was inspired to make a similar summary statement in which we hear the echo of Moses' words: "God has told you. Oh human, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you. Only to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

Again, this sounds pretty simple and straightforward: *Challenging, but not impossible. Hey, I can do this!*

Among the differences between Moses' and Micah's statements is a subtle, but important, change of perspective. Moses uses the word "*shoel*", what God asks of you. Micah uses the word "*doresh*", what God requires of you. Neither reverence, fear, or love can be produced on command, they cannot be "required". The Talmud states "Everything is in the power of heaven except whether a person will choose to revere God." (Berachot 33b). Should we say, then, that doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God are "required", that they can be produced on command?

Jewish life for us today holds both choices and requirements. The feelings of reverence, fear, love, and humility may motivate us to engage our Jewish heritage and explore how we can enrich our lives through Jewish practices. Our need for meaning - the need to serve for some higher purpose to our lives; our concern that there be a moral, ethical world; our innate passion for justice and our desire to set the world aright, for Tikkun Olam, are all mandated by the myriad of *mitzvot*, commandments and requirements, that our tradition invites us to explore. Our Jewish heritage calls out to us: Choose to manifest the path of God in your soul through your actions. Moses and Micah, at least, thought it was that simple...

B'vracha,
Rabbi Michael
20 Av 5765

25th August, 2005