



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

27 – 28 May, 2005

19 IYAR, 5765

Parashat Bechukotai (Leviticus 26:3-27:34)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz  
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

## D'var Torah from Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

While many of us at this season are focused on the end of the school or work year, our tradition would have us focus instead on new beginnings. We don't count down the days to the end of the year, but rather count up towards the holiday of Shavuot.

Shavuot is a holiday with a bit of an identity crisis. It is a harvest festival for the new grain of the spring planting cycle. It is the festival on which we mark the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. It is also called the 'Feast of Weeks', recalling the days and weeks we count, as I alluded to above, from Passover until this holiday. The Sages call this festival 'Atzeret', in recognition of both the gathering together of the community at this time and the sense of completion of the pilgrimage festivals. Lastly, Shavuot is known as the Festival of First Fruits, for the first fruits of the wheat harvest that were brought to the Temple by our People in ancient days.

How can we make this seemingly complicated and unfocused holiday speak to us today?

The relevancy of the harvest aspect of Shavuot has been rediscovered among the farming communities in the Israel over the last 100 years or so. New life has been breathed into the holiday both on kibbutzim, as well as in secular and religious communities seeking to understand what it means to "receive" Torah, for ourselves, for our local communities, and for the entire Jewish People.

At the UJC, we will hold a special Shavuot service this year, striving to capture—as best we can—the agricultural, Torah-giving, and communal aspects of this holiday.

Our UJC Caring Committee invites you to celebrate and give thanks for all things 'new' that our community has 'produced' during the last year: Have you become a new member of the UJC; completed a creative project; launched a new business; become a Bar/Bat mitzvah; graduated; or gotten married?

Please register your 'new grain' or gain with Nancy in the office (2523-2985) so that we can recognize and celebrate with you at our holiday service on Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 7:00 p.m.

Services will be followed by a customary dairy dinner.

Please help us celebrate ours and your year-end new beginnings!

Shabbat Shalom  
Rabbi Michael  
16 Iyar, 5765 31<sup>st</sup> day of the Omer

*25<sup>th</sup> May, 2005*