



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

28 – 29 October, 2005

26 Tishrei, 5766

Parashat Bereshit
(Genesis 1:1–6:8)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Here We Go Again: Studying the Weekly Torah Portion

With this week's Torah portion, *Bereshit*, we begin yet another round of reading the Torah through. But why must we start all over again? Did we forget what we studied last year? Have the words of the Torah changed or been amended?

Hopefully, we have not forgotten what we studied last year, but as our knowledge has increased, so have the quality and quantity of our questions. Learning is the process of becoming aware of how much we do not know. We are not starting the Torah *again*...we are still studying it for the "first" time.

The words of the Torah have not changed nor been amended...but *we ourselves* have changed and grown from last year to this. We are only able this time around to greet another one of the 'seventy faces' of the Torah: an understanding we missed last year; an insight that is crucial to grasp now in order to be who we are and to become who we need to be; an aspect of Torah that we may never be able to make sense of ever again.

Still, the Jewish People's commitment to study the Torah all over again each year is a bit uncanny. Are we locked into a sort of 'orbit' around the Torah, no more able, even if we should want to, to free ourselves from the eternal rotation of Torah readings than the earth, whose creation is discussed in this week's portion of *Bereshit*, is free to cease circling around the sun?

Our tradition holds that the Torah was the blueprint of Creation. Once a house is built, you can throw away the plans and the house will remain standing. But you need to keep the plans in order to know how to restore the house to its original perfection, to know how to fix things when they (inevitably) break down, to know which alterations and additions will improve the house and which will weaken it. Our task of 'Tikkun HaOlam', Restoring/Repairing/Completing the World, requires our knowing the plans backwards and forwards, inside and out...and working with God the original Contractor and Architect of our home, the physical and moral universe.

Moreover, our *siddur* affirms that God 'renews the work of *Bereshit*, creation, again and again, day by day.' Would then, the world grow stagnate and cease to evolve if we stopped studying the Torah, would physics fall apart and the universe unravel? No, the world would not atrophy physically. But we would wither spiritually and morally, and *that* will destroy the world eventually.

We who believe our human and Jewish task includes 'Tikkun HaOlam', Perfecting the World, must maintain a humble recognition that our understanding of the moral universe is not much greater than our understanding the physical universe. We advance in knowledge all the time, and that advance leads to yet more questions, more wonder, more awe—more of a need to return to *Bereshit* and begin our study all over again.

Now is the perfect time to give the UJC's Saturday morning Torah study a try. You can begin now and make your way through the entire cycle of the yearly Torah reading! Apt. 3C, One Robinson Place at 9:30am – 11:00am. No experience or Hebrew reading necessary. Breakfast served. "Enlightenment" not guaranteed, but camaraderie on the path to wisdom assured.

Rabbi Michael
24 Tishrei 5766

27th October, 2005