



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

30 September – 1 October, 2005

27 Elul, 5765

Parashat Nitzavim
(Deuteronomy 29:9–30:20)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom chaverim,

Last year at this time, I had just arrived in Hong Kong and had barely met a fraction of you in the UJC. Nevertheless, looking ahead to *Rosh Hashana* I wrote in the **Shabbat Shalom** my assumption that “Many of us at this time are searching for spiritual fulfillment.” My statement was, and is, true only because it is so broad and all encompassing.

Today, I know that the “spiritual fulfillment” we seek is bound up with our search for meaning in our personal and professional lives; our work to improve our attitude and our practical skills for coping with the everyday; our need for security in our jobs and in our families and in our wider world. We struggle to negotiate a path between our responsibilities to ourselves, our families, our community, our offices, and to balance our time between loving the ones we love and taking care of their needs. We seek happiness and relief, forgetfulness and remembering, hope, love, sympathy, and concern. We seek to give all those, and more, too. We want redemption.

A year from now, this statement too will be too broad to really mean anything.

The High Holiday season rolls around year after year because year after year we have to mark where we have been and where we could have been and where we need to aim for now. We account for how we have managed and mismanaged our lives, and redirect ourselves to make a better go of it in the year to come.

I find other words I wrote in that same **Shabbat Shalom** still useful in my own efforts to make *cheshbon nefesh*, to take an account of myself:

“The spirituality we are looking for is in the thoughts, words, and deeds of our everyday life: Do we keep our promises? Do we speak with kindness to our partner? Do we *listen* with kindness to our partner? Do we conduct business honestly? Do we give *zedaka*? Do we take, and spend, our leisure time in a way that we’re proud of? Do we show our appreciation? Do we count, or say, our blessings? Do we get involved in our community? Do we act on our concerns for the global community? Do we use the world’s resources modestly? Do we, do we, do we...Judaism emphasizes what we do or don’t do and is less concerned about what we believe or don’t believe.”

Practicing what you preach is still the soundest educational tool. It’s also probably the most difficult to uphold. Don’t begin with dogma, but with *doogma* – Hebrew for “setting a personal example.”

If you want a *mensch* around the house, BE a *mensch* around the house.

During this season in particular, the month of *Elul*, we prepare for the High Holidays by examining our *deeds* of the past year.

Yom Kippur atones for sins we commit against God, but the sins we commit against our fellows are not atoned for until we go and reconcile with those whom we’ve caused to suffer. There can be no forgiveness on high until there is forgiveness down low.

May our deeds in the coming year be worthy of emulation by our children, may they lead us to spiritual fulfillment, and may they sanctify life and set us on the pathway to peace.

**L’shana Tova u’Mituka,
Rabbi Michael**

29th September, 2005