



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

9 – 10 June, 2005

3 SIVAN, 5765

Parashat Naso (Numbers 4:21:7:89)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah from Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

Rabbi Israel Najara was a 16th century poet, liturgist, kabbalist, and Biblical commentator. The best known of his poems is *Yah Ribbon*, sung on the Sabbath by Jews around the world. Najara was criticized by some luminaries of his day for describing the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage. One such poem reads like a *ketuba* and is recited in many traditional Sephardic synagogues on Shavuot. God, the bridegroom, betroths Israel, the bride.

Our mystical tradition doesn't stop with the imagery of the wedding ceremony itself. As is often the case in the *Zohar* (the classic text of Jewish mysticism), religious experience gets expressed in erotic terms in an effort to convey its intensity. The giving of the Torah itself on Mount Sinai on the day of Shavuot would be the moment during which the marriage between God the groom and Israel the bride was consummated.

The tradition of staying awake all night in preparation for this great event became the basis for our practice of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* – the nightlong study session following the festive, dairy Shavuot dinner. The *Tikkun* is the functional equivalent of the *mikve* ceremony, a ceremony of cleansing and spiritual purification performed before husband and wife are reunited. Our study during the night culminates seven weeks of counting the days until the holiday and is our way of adorning the bride (us!) with ornaments worthy of our big moment with the groom (God). (*Zohar* III, 97a)

At the UJC's *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* this year, we will explore the religious quality of the racy secular love poems and drinking odes of Middle-Age sages like Moses Ibn Ezra and Shmuel Hanagid. We'll discuss, with help from Ben Fox-Schwartz, the not-so clear boundaries of domain between God and humans on earth and in heaven. Tzachi Rechter will challenge us with questions about the model of Shavuot celebration in Israel and the Diaspora. The book of Ruth, a brief exploration of the *kabbalah's* idea of Torah study, and other topics will accompany our indulgence of cheesecakes, blintzes, and other dairy dessert treats (along with good hot coffee as the hour advances)!

All are invited! The *Tikkun* will be held in apartment 3C (Rabbi's Apartment) following our Shavuot service (6:30) and a pot-luck dairy dinner organized by the UJC Caring Committee.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Michael
2 Sivan 5765
46th Day of the Omer

9th June, 2005