

## Visiting scribe restores Adath Emanu-El's centuries-old Torah

By JAYNE JACOVA FELD Voice staff

Rabbi Moshe Druin, a sofer (scribe), is restoring Adath Emanu-El's more than 300-year-old Torah. With a Torah unrolled before him, visiting Rabbi Moshe Druin explained to curious Adath Emanu-El preschoolers what he was doing with the clearly damaged scroll and a quill pen made of a turkey feather.



"I'm a Torah doctor," the rabbi explained. "I'm the person that comes in to make the Torah feel good again."

In the course of a week, Druin, a Miami resident who has traveled the world writing and restoring sacred Jewish texts, would tell many accounts on different levels about the artistic and spiritual aspects involved in penning Hebrew lettering. He was brought to the Mount Laurel synagogue in late January to return a centuries-old Torah to its former glory.



A second-generation sofer (scribe), he was able to confirm what congregants long suspected: The scroll in question is from the former Czechoslovakia and more than 300 years old. It likely survived the Holocaust by being hidden away. And while some sections are in "absolutely stunning" condition, the parchment is ripped in other places; letters and whole passages are deteriorated to the point that they are unreadable. In its compromised state, the scroll is considered unkosher and therefore not suitable to be used for worship services. Still, in sofer terms, the scroll was in "medium" shape, he said.

Adath Emanu-El preschoolers Eric (left) and Ellie Costello learn how Rabbi Druin is repairing the Torah. Moreover, it is rare in the fact that it is a "Kabbalist" Torah, Druin said. While some letters are standard, some are more elaborately formed.



"It was written with a unique spiritual conditionality," he said, adding that not even master scribes have absolute knowledge about the meaning behind these mystical, standout letters.

The Torah is intriguing for other reasons as well. Adath Emanu-El Rabbi Benjamin David said that little is known about its history in the old country, how it survived the darkest days, and how it made its way to the Mount Laurel synagogue. While it has been used in the past as a teaching tool, congregants had long hoped to be able to once again use it for its intended purpose.

"By restoring the scroll, we really will be paying honor and tribute to those who came before us and sacrificed so much to ensure its survival," said David. "The fact that it will be used on Shabbat and at b'nai mitzvah services will lend those events even greater significance by connecting us in ways really profound to those who came before us. I think that story line became very powerful to people."

Congregants were also aware that the longer the Torah remained unusable, the more it would deteriorate, he said.

“The way to ensure the survival of a scroll is not keep it locked up in an ark, but to open it and let it breathe,” he said. “It’s a great metaphor for Judaism itself. If you don’t live your Judaism, it goes away.”

An anonymous donor is funding the restoration, which is expected to cost more than \$10,000, he added.

Druin, who made the trip with his seven-year-old son Yossi in tow, was able to work while being bombarded with questions about the restoration job and the work of a sofer.

A second-generation scribe, he followed the path of his father, Rabbi Gedaliah Druin. Growing up in Israel, he said he became fascinated with Hebrew lettering at a young age. Still, there is no set pathway for becoming a sofer. He studied in several Yeshivot and was ordained a rabbi in New York. He has apprenticed under master scribes in Israel, New York and Johannesburg.

“It’s not just about artistic ability,” he explained. “There are thousands of thousands of laws that have to be followed.”

Just as important, a modern scribe is charged with demonstrating the ancient art and inspiring people of all ages to appreciate the meaning and magic of Hebrew letters.

“The original scribes were not only responsible for repairing, maintaining and supplying Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzot, they were storytellers,” he said. “I’m a story teller.” .

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