

# The healing light - The Santa Fe New Mexican: Magazines

By Sharon Niederman

Posted: Sunday, November 23, 2014 12:15 am | Updated: 11:30 pm, Sun Nov 23, 2014.

## Torah restoration project resonates with Hanukkah

As Adam Sandler sings in his satirical holiday tune, when Hanukkah is mentioned, a series of presents immediately comes to mind. In second place might be lighting the menorah, spinning the dreidel or eating latkes.

Most Jewish baby boomers grew up receiving a Christmas present or two in addition to those eight presents, because their post-World War II parents were concerned their children might feel left out as they tiptoed the fine line between their Jewish identity and the annual crush of carols, Christmas trees and trips to the mall. Yes, Jewish kids sat on Santa's lap, too, and tracked Rudolph's travels from the North Pole.

Somehow, simply lighting an additional candle for each of the eight days and saying a prayer didn't seem very exciting compared to the Christmas festivities going on all around us. But we learned in Hebrew school that we were celebrating the miracle of light — that after the Maccabees won their revolt against Antiochus (who tried to impose his customs on the Jews) in the second century B.C. and the Second Temple was rededicated, there was only sufficient sanctified oil to last one day. Miraculously, it lasted for eight. The demonstration of God's miracles and the victorious preservation of our religious freedom would carry us through the season.

Fast-forward a half-century from this baby boomer's childhood. Hanukkah is now understood as a burgeoning of light and all that the growing brightness symbolizes during the darkest time of the year. As Rabbi Berel Levertov of Santa Fe's Chabad Jewish Center said, "It is a time for light, for family and for spreading the light to the outer world."

Gifts — typically handmade — are still exchanged, but music, dance, food, celebration and the warmth of family and friends balance the national reflex of commercialism. We have come a long way in returning to the original meaning of the holiday, one never intended as a display of consumerism.

## A mitzvah of the heart

A significant rededication project that resonates with Hanukkah is Temple Beth Shalom's recently completed, yearlong Holocaust Torah Restoration Project. This Torah, an approximately 300-year-old parchment scroll that survived World War II, is on permanent loan to the Santa Fe synagogue from the Memorial Scrolls Trust, Westminster Synagogue in London. About five years ago, the Torah suffered water damage during a severe Santa Fe thunderstorm.

In the early 1940s, according to their plan to build a museum to a vanished race, the Nazi hierarchy allowed Czech Jews to collect and deposit their holy artifacts before the people were sent to extermination camps. The Torah housed in Santa Fe has been written in a combination of calligraphies that identifies it as the work of a Kabbalist scribe. It comes from Mladá Boleslav, a Bohemian town just north of Prague, from which 1,041 Jews were shipped to the camps.

The Temple Beth Shalom community engaged a world-renowned sofer, or scribe, Rabbi Moshe Druin, of Sofer on Site in Miami, to complete the restoration. For a year, he visited the Santa Fe temple as the congregation engaged with the process of restoration.

Jews are given 613 mitzvot, or commandments, to follow during their lifetimes. The final mitzvah is to write a Torah: "... write for yourselves this song ..." (Deuteronomy 31:19). Writing even one letter is considered the fulfillment of that mitzvah, equal to writing an entire Torah. Holding the quill as Rabbi Druin inscribed a sacred letter is as intimate a spiritual connection as a Jewish person can hope for.

In addition, the restored scroll serves as a memorial to the Jews of Czechoslovakia and all those who perished in the Holocaust and a reminder that, despite the best efforts of the Nazis, the Jewish people continue to persevere.

When the Torah is removed from the ark on Friday, Dec. 19, at Temple Beth Shalom for Hanukkah Shabbat services and community menorah lighting, members of the congregation will no doubt feel a special glow from their own rededication.

For more information on this project, see the moving [YouTube video](#) on the Santa Fe Temple Beth Shalom Holocaust Torah Restoration.

*New Mexico writer Sharon Niederman's forthcoming book (with photographer Kitty Leaken) The Plate of Enchantment: New Mexico Farm to Table will be published in the spring of 2015, by The Countryman Press.*

© Copyright 2014, [The Santa Fe New Mexican](#), Santa Fe, NM. Powered by [BLOX Content Management System](#) from [TownNews.com](#). [[Privacy Policy](#)]