

Routine metaphysical

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Rabbis Gedalia Druin and Amy Perlin check Temple B'nai Shalom's Holocaust Torah scroll. "A scroll is a living, breathing document," Perlin says. Photo by David Holzel

In the strong, late afternoon light streaming into the sanctuary of Temple B'nai Shalom, the fully unfurled Torah scroll resembles row after black row of gently undulating fields. Rabbi Amy Perlin, who heads the Reform congregation in Fairfax Station, peers down at the animal parchment, covered with the word of God.

"A scroll is a living, breathing document," she says.

At her side is Rabbi Gedalia Druin, a *sofer*, or master scribe. To hear him describe his work he is more physician and metaphysician than a man whose trade is to write Hebrew letters in ink and re-sew pieces of parchment together. Based in Florida under the business name Sofer on Site, Druin is here to make a house call on B'nai Shalom's Torah scrolls.

The patient they are studying is a 125-year-old scroll, written in Votice in what is now the Czech Republic, which survived the Holocaust.

"I don't look to see what's wrong with it," Druin explains about what, in a person, would be a routine physical exam. "I

look at what's healthy with it. Healthy means that it works.”

The Votice scroll has some obvious dark spots. To the untrained eye, they look like mold. Druin and Perlin know better.

“Parchment is a balance of protein and fat,” Druin says. “It can be burnished or grayish. If it has more fat content, it becomes translucent.”

Their “partnership in Torah” goes back decades and transcends her identity as a female Reform rabbi and his as a Lubavitcher Chasid. “When you have Torah in common, great things happen,” Perlin says.

They met after a number of Torah dealers wouldn't show her scrolls that she might purchase for her congregation. Druin didn't dismiss her because she was Reform, a woman and a rabbi. “Every Torah I've bought has been from Rabbi Druin,” she says.

Over the years, they've bonded over the Torah as a living, breathing word of God. “When we sit together and study Torah together, we can tell if the Torah has been loved or not,” Perlin says.

In addition to repairing any scrolls that needed it, Druin appraised the scrolls for insurance purposes. He valued the Holocaust scroll at \$200,000.

Insurance aside, Druin approaches his work as a sofer as something mystical. “It doesn't have to do with writing,” he says of putting quill and ink to parchment, “it has to do with bringing something into existence.”

And as he checks the Votice Torah's vital signs, he says a Jew's relationship with the Torah runs two ways. “You can heal the Torah as much as it heals you.”

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