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Temple Jeremiah members create Torah scroll

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The five books of Moses -- known as The Torah -- is comprised of upwards of 80 combined sheets of parchment and more than 300,000 Hebrew characters.

Creating one is a massive undertaking, yet all Jews are asked to take a part.

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Alan Kessler, left, and his wife Nancy scribe the Torah with the help of Rabbi Moshe Druin at Temple Jeremiah in Northfield on Jan. 5. (Allison Williams/Staff Photographer)

Perfecting the artistry and creating a Torah scroll consumes much of a scribe's time. As part of Temple Jeremiah's 50th anniversary celebrations, however, the Northfield synagogue has inspired its members to combine their efforts to create their own sacred text in roughly a year's time.

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(From left) Members of the Ford family Dana, 14, Jim, Rachel, and Julie read a prayer Jan. 6 with Sima Brown after washing their hands before scribing the Torah with Rabbi Moshe Druin at Temple Jeremiah in Northfield. (Allison Williams/Staff Photographer)

During the last few months, a Hebrew scribe, or *sofer*, has guided Temple Jeremiah members as they ink letters and passages into the scroll.

The Jewish faith requires that its members participate in writing a Torah scroll. It's referred to as the 613th commandment, or mitzvah.

Because the process is complicated and requires a unique skill set, the obligation can be difficult to meet, Temple Jeremiah

Rabbi Paul Cohen said. The synagogue recruited *sofer* Rabbi Moshe Druin to help its membership comply with the commandment.

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Rabbi Moshe Druin, right, talks about passages from the Torah with Jani Harris, her husband Steve and two sons Alec, left, and Marc before they scribe the Torah at Temple Jeremiah in Northfield on Jan. 5. (Allison Williams/Staff Photographer)

"The congregation is able to actually fulfill the mitzvah, the religious obligation of writing a Torah, without necessarily having the same kind of training," Cohen said. "He guides us. We hold onto the quill as he helps us fill in the letters."

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In October, Druin hosted the first scribing session, and he will continue until April.

The process involves using a set of outlines for Hebrew letters. The *sofer* typically would be the one to write directly onto parchments, but for this process, he guides participating congregates.

Part of the scribing process is done locally, and some is done by a *sofer* in Israel.

Once the scroll is completed, it will be used for regular Sabbath services at Temple Jeremiah, where readings span the five Hebrew books of Genesis through Deuteronomy.

It also will be used for special religious ceremonies, such as bar and bat mitzvahs.

Temple Jeremiah hopes that all of its members will participate in the scribing process, said John Maeglin, co-chairman for the project.

"We're using this as a way to bring the congregation together, and to have a unique experience with the end result of having a new Torah scroll for the congregation in time for the 50th anniversary celebration," Maeglin said.

He described the scribing project as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Temple Jeremiah members. The Torah will be the first that local members have helped to create, and he hopes it might last for generations.

The process has had a huge spiritual impact on Temple Jeremiah already, he said. And Maeglin said he's been touched by how families have embraced the mitzvah.

"In some cases, it's multigenerational, where you'll have grandparents, their children and their grandchildren all doing this at the same time," Maeglin said.

He encouraged Temple Jeremiah members to sign up for upcoming scribing sessions, Feb. 21 and 22; March 9, 10, 16 and 17; and April 11 and 12.

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