

**From Turnov to TAI**

5780

Our Year  
of Torah:

Renewing Our  
Commitment  
to Each Other

# Torah restoration project sets off a year of celebration

**Article by Ken Slepian**  
**Former TAI President**

**Photos by Randall Roorda**  
**TAI Congregant**

One of the paradoxes of the Shoah was that while the Nazis attempted the complete extermination of European Jewry, they also intended to preserve some “artifacts” to record the existence of and profit from “the extinct race.” Although approximately two-thirds of Europe’s Jews were horrifically murdered, the memories of their communities live on in their Torah scrolls. These scrolls, which had been looted by the Nazis during the Shoah, have been preserved by Jewish congregations throughout the world. Today, Temple Adath Israel is continuing this vital project of memorial preservation with a communitywide effort to restore its memorial scroll from the Czech town of Turnov.

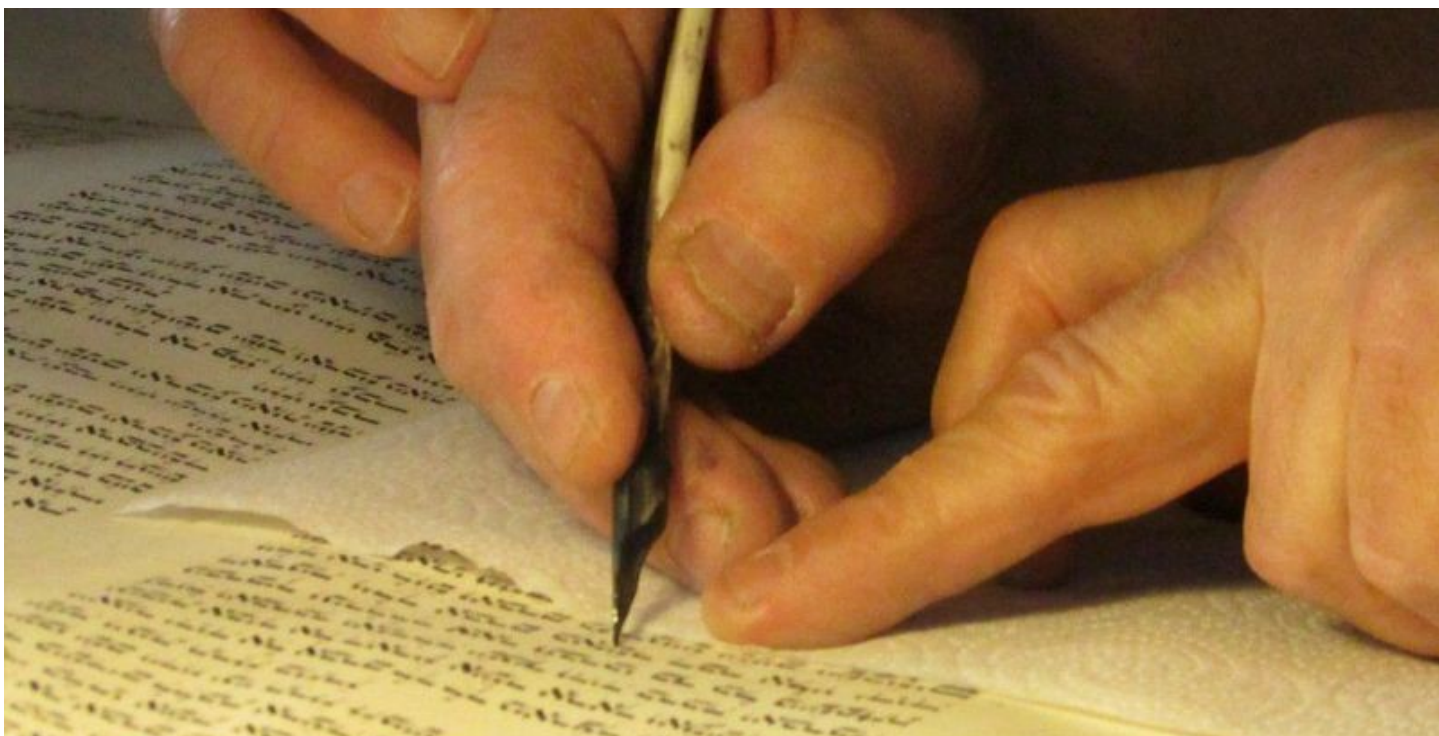
Jews had been a part of Turnov since at least the early 16th century. Yet it took the Nazis only a few years to destroy the community. In 1941 the Nazis stole the Torah scroll, the spiritual heart and soul of the community, and sent it to Prague, along with scrolls from countless other Czech towns and villages. Two years later, Turnov’s 450 Jews were deported, first to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and shortly later to Auschwitz. Only 19 survived the war. Historians dispute whether the Nazis intended to establish a “Museum of the Extinct Race” to celebrate the

**See SCROLL, Page 7**

**On the cover:** The Turnov scroll’s original cover



The current Turnov synagogue dates to 1719; three previous buildings were destroyed by fire. The first written references to the town’s Jewish community date to 1527; more than 400 years later, in September 1941, services there were banned. After World War II, the few surviving Jews from Turnov tried to resume their lives there, but most of them emigrated, and Jewish life in Turnov ceased. From the 1950s to 2005, the synagogue was used as a warehouse, and many building modifications were made. In 2005 the synagogue was purchased by the Town of Turnov. Reconstruction, at a cost of nearly \$14 million CZK, was funded partly by Norway.



Gloria Casas, The Courier-News, Elgin, Ill.

Writing in the Torah with Sofer Yerman involves resting your hand on his as he repairs damaged or faded letters in the Torah.

### **Scribe in the Torah With Sofer Yerman**

All congregants are invited to participate in the restoration of our Turnov Holocaust Memorial Scroll. There will be four opportunities to assist Sofer Yerman in writing a letter in the Holocaust Memorial Scroll. To ensure that there is adequate time for each person to write a letter in the scroll, it is necessary to sign up ahead of time. Signup sheets will be available before and after High Holidays services; look for the signs. The dates and times available are noted below; all participants must arrive at the start of the session.

If you are not able to sign up in person, please email Amy Gewirtz at [amysgewirtz@gmail.com](mailto:amysgewirtz@gmail.com) and indicate the session you would like to attend and the total number of individuals in your party who wish to scribe.

It is not necessary to sign up for sessions if you prefer to observe rather than write a letter in the Torah. All are welcome to attend any of the scribing sessions as well as the rededication ceremony as we join together to welcome the Turnov Scroll back to our community.

### **Scribing sessions (limited to 30 people each)**

#### **Friday, Oct. 25**

6-7 p.m.                      Open to TAI members

#### **Sunday, Oct. 27**

9-10 a.m.                    Open to TAI members  
11 a.m.-noon                For Religious School families  
12:30-1:30 p.m.            For Religious School families

# 5780 Our Year of Torah:

Celebrating our Commitment to Each Other

## YEARLONG SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**Oct. 22, 2019**

*Simchat Torah*

**Oct. 25-27, 2019**

### **Torah Rededication Celebration**

Write a Letter to Complete the Scroll

Torah Study led by Sofer Neil Yerman

Program about Turnov

**Nov. 16, 2019**

### **Hymson Congregational Dinner:**

Kickoff: A Year of Talking About Torah and the Restored Portions

Parsha Vayera: The Sacrifice of Isaac

### **Opportunities Throughout the Year**

Shabbat or Havdalah parshot dinners in congregants' homes (details on Page 5)

Ongoing series of Chavurah dinners

One-night-only dinners

Torah on Tap (details to come)

**Feb. 8, 2020**

### **Hebrew Union College Lecture Series at TAI:**

"The Importance of Text in Jewish Public and Private Life,"

Dr. Jordan Finkin, Rare Book and Manuscript Librarian at HUC, Cincinnati Campus

**Feb. 14, 2020**

**Rose Rita Wurmser Oneg**

**October 2020, Simchat Torah**

**Hymson Congregational Dinner**

Details to come

Vazot Habracah: And this is the Blessing!

# Let's eat: congregational and small group dinners

“More than Israel has preserved the Sabbath,  
the Sabbath has preserved Israel.”

~~ Achad Ha'am

Let us honor the Turnov Torah and the congregants who loved it by coming together as a community **on the Sabbaths that correspond with the parshot we will be restoring.**

## Hymson\* Dinner: Torah, Dinner & Havdalah, Nov. 16, 2019

Dine on delicious (complimentary) Mediterranean food, join a discussion table, and enjoy Havdalah as a congregation. Deb Flomenhoft will read from Vayera, The Binding of Isaac, from that newly restored parsha in the Turnov Scroll. To RSVP, call the TAI office at 269-2979 or email **Debrah.i.nelson@twc.com** to RSVP. (\*Funding for this event provided, in part, by the Maurice Hymson Adult Education Trust Fund)

## Ongoing Chavurah Dinners

Join a group of congregants with overlapping interests to share several home-hosted meals during the New Year. Registration will begin at TAI during the High Holidays, when you may indicate your interests (interfaith, social action, hobbies, professional interests, children of similar ages, etc.). Dinners can be as humble or fancy as each host prefers. Each chavurah group will receive a Shabbat/Havdalah kit, and booklets of blessings and Torah discussions guides. Email Mark Schachman at **endoshack@aol.com** with questions or to register.

## One-Night Dinners

Share a single meal in a congregant's home. Hosts will receive booklets of blessings and Torah discussions guides, and Shabbat or Havdalah items relevant to the dinner night. Look for more information about these meals as the dates approach. If you would like to volunteer to host a dinner, contact Deborah Nelson at **Deborah.i.nelson@twc.com**.

## About Sofer Neil Yerman

Sofer Yerman grew up in Brooklyn. After a career in the brokerage industry and advertising, he converted his lifetime avocation as an artist into a full-time career in 1984, specializing in works that combine calligraphy and art.

In 1987 he was asked by Temple Sinai of Roslyn, N.Y., to restore 10 Sifrei Torah. The assignment launched him on a career as a sofer

(scribe) and teacher of Torah.

A unique feature of Sofer Yerman's work is the educational experience he offers to the communities with which he works. A Master Teacher who is comfortable working with people of all ages and of all faiths, Sofer Yerman's educational focus is to foster a love for both the physical Torah and for the letters of wisdom it contains.



Sofer Neil Yerman

## 5780 Our Year of Torah

### Holocaust Memorial Scroll Restorations

<b>Genesis</b>	<b>Parsha</b>	<b>Date (Saturday)</b>
Creation Days 1 – 7	Bereshit	Oct. 26, 2019
Cain and Abel	Bereshit	Oct. 26, 2019
Binding of Isaac	Vayera	Nov. 16, 2019
Jacob steals Esau's blessing	Toledot	Nov. 30, 2019
Joseph forgives his brothers	Vayigash	Jan. 4, 2020
<b>Exodus</b>		
Chapter 1, 3-4	Shemot	Jan. 18, 2020
Song of the Sea	Beshalach	Feb. 8, 2020
Ten Commandments	Yitro	Feb. 15, 2020
<b>Leviticus</b>		
Holiness Code	Aharei Mot-Kedoshim	May 2, 2020
<b>Numbers</b>		
Priestly Benediction	Naso	June 6, 2020
Mah Tov (Balam)	Chukat-Balak	July 4, 2020
Moses strikes the rock	Chukat-Balak	July 4, 2020
<b>Deuteronomy</b>		
V'ahavta	Va'etchanan	Aug. 1, 2020
Ten Commandments	Va'etchanan	Aug. 1, 2020
Death of Moses	Vazot Habracah	Oct. 11, 2020

#### **5780 Holidays, Reform Calendar:**

*Sukkot: Oct. 13-20*

*Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah: Oct. 21*

*Chanukah: Dec. 22-30*

*Passover: April 8-15*

*Shavuot: May 28-29*

*Rosh Hahshana: Sept. 18-19*

*Yom Kippur: Sept. 27-28*

*(First date for holidays is the erev/eve)*

# SCROLL

Continued from Page 2

annihilation of the Jews or whether they wanted to profit from the selling of Jewish “artifacts.” In any case, the Turnov scroll, along with 1,800 other scrolls, survived the war, and in 1964 the Communist Czechoslovak government sold more than 1,500 scrolls to the Memorial Scrolls Trust, a London-based charity established to preserve and distribute the Czech scrolls to Jewish communities around the world.

At the initiative of Temple member David Wachtel, who had read about the Trust and its mission, the Temple applied for a memorial scroll and received the Turnov scroll in 1987.

As per the intentions of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, which, according to its website, “encourages all scroll-holders to use their scrolls for inter-and intrafaith work, as well as for ritual and education,” the TAI congregation reads from the Turnov scroll every Yom Kippur; the scroll remains an important presence in life-cycle events, such as bar and bat mitzvahs, and is also carried in the communitywide annual commemoration of Yom Hashoah. Although the Nazis tried to exterminate European Jewry, “they couldn’t destroy Judaism,” TAI Rabbi David

Preserving the scroll as best we can, sharing it whenever we can, is to participate in the sacred promise ‘we will not forget you.’”

— Rabbi David Wirschafter

Wirschafter observes. “When we say that we have the ‘Turnov Torah,’ we don’t just mean the scroll. We mean that we hold their memory to be holy. Preserving the scroll as best we can, sharing it whenever we can, is to participate in the sacred promise ‘we will not forget you.’”

The effects of time and repeated, loving use have taken their toll on the 200-plus year-old Turnov scroll. Proceeding on separate but parallel tracks, Eli Flomenhoft, as part of his bar mitzvah project with Rabbi Daniel Roberts, and Dr. Arthur and Marilyn Lieber and Dr. Louis and Judy Hersh alerted the Temple leadership to the need to restore the Turnov scroll. By fall 2018, TAI President Deborah Nelson organized a scroll restoration committee headed by Dr. Deborah Flomenhoft and Dr. Amy Gewirtz. Sofer (scribe) Neil Yerman, who had worked with Rabbi Wirschafter on earlier projects and has restored scrolls for more than 35 years, was invited to restore the scroll. He visited the Temple in January 2019 and appraised the condition of not only the Turnov scroll but TAI’s other two Torahs. During his visit he also led workshops for adult congregants and Temple youth.

As Sofer Yerman explains, Torah scrolls are not



**Top:** The original cover for TAI’s memorial scroll is in the ark in the restored synagogue in Turnov.

**Above:** The Jewish cemetery in Turnov dates to the 17th century. It now sits in the shadow of an overpass. The last burial took place in 1956.

inanimate objects but “living histories” of their past holders, whose individual letters embody the hopes, dreams and values of their original communities. When we read from a scroll we make real in the present what was

See SCROLL, Page 8

## SCROLL

Continued from Page 7

experienced in the past, and we pass down these values to future generations. To restore a scroll is thus both a work of remembrance of the lives of past communities, and an act of their continuation into our present and future. The scrolls contain, in the words of Sofer Yerman, “the teachings that nourish the eternal lives of the children of Israel.” As part of his restoration work, Sofer Yerman brings this concept to life by enabling congregants to hold the quill with him as he painstakingly traces over the letters. Nelson, the TAI president, adds, “Working with the Sofer to lay our loving hands on his while he restores the Torah and then later read from parshot (the portion of the Torah assigned for that week’s reading) that would have been read by the descendants of the Jews of Turnov is an act of love, faith, defiance and hope.”

The scroll restoration committee, under the energetic leadership of

co-chairs Flomenhoft and Gewirtz, sees the restoration project as an especially meaningful opportunity to engage the entire TAI community in temple life. In addition to the physical restoration of the Turnov scroll, Gewirtz notes, “the Torah Restoration Project is not just about restoring the Holocaust Memorial Torah Scroll. The return of the restored scroll to the TAI congregation will note the beginning of several events throughout the year related to the celebration and participation in Torah.”

Sofer Yerman will return to Lexington the weekend of Oct. 25 to continue his work restoring the scroll and to lead educational workshops. Congregants will have the opportunity to attend dinners at one another’s homes during the weeks that restored parshot are read. University of Kentucky English professor Randall Roorda will talk about his own travel to Turnov and share with the congregation his experience of the region. And at next year’s Simchat Torah, the entire TAI community will celebrate the restoration with

congregants standing next to the parshot with which they have a personal connection.

The Turnov restoration project has been generously supported by a number of donors from the TAI community, but more financial support from the congregation is critical. The scroll restoration committee has established a GoFundme page at [Gofundme.com/torah-fund](https://www.gofundme.com/torah-fund). Every donation, regardless of amount, is greatly appreciated. Flomenhoft points out that a contribution to the project is “a triple chai: a chai for our congregation, a chai for the people of Turnov, and a chai for the bridge and memory that connects us.”

Today in Turnov, tragically, the only traces of the 400-year-old Jewish community that once lived there are the buildings left behind and some fading memories. Yet the Turnov community’s soul and legacy lives on its Torah scroll, which, through the power of its words and spirit, provides new meaning, strength and wisdom for today’s readers and generations to come.

### **Torah Restoration Weekend at TAI Friday, Oct. 25 – Sunday, Oct. 27**

#### **Friday, Oct. 25**

6-7 p.m.

Sofer scribing

7 p.m.

Shabbat service

7:45 p.m.

Shabbat oneg and

“Photographic History of Turnov” by Dr. Randall Roorda

#### **Saturday, Oct. 26**

11 a.m.

Torah study led by Sofer Yerman

#### **Sunday, Oct. 27**

9-10 a.m.

Sofer scribing

11 a.m.-noon

Sofer scribing – Religious School families

Noon-12:30 p.m.

Bagel break

12:30-1:30 p.m.

Sofer scribing – Religious School families

1:30 p.m.

Rededication of the Holocaust Scroll