

LOCAL NEWS

Yom Torah: Hevreh Celebrates the Restoration of its Torah Scrolls



Sofer Neil Yerman and Rabbi Jodie Gordon hold up a restored Torah scroll

GREAT BARRINGTON – During the autumn months, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire was deeply engaged in the restoration of its two Torah scrolls. This effort included the meticulous weeks-long work of the congregation's sofer (scribe) Neil Yerman, the adorning of letters by congregants of all ages, the creation of new curtains for the ark, and generous contributions from across its community. These efforts culminated in the Yom Torah celebration on November 17. In conjunction with Yom Torah, over 25 congregants gathered with Judaica textile artist Nancy Katz to create new curtains for the Ark (parochet). These curtains symbolize the holiness of the Torah to the congregation,

while also offering the opportunity to add to the beauty of the sanctuary with congregants' own hands and hearts. Rabbi Jodie Gordon and Neil Yerman led the event. "From generation to generation," more than 100 members, both young and old, participated in the mitzvah of writing Torah. Religious School families, as well as adult congregants, learned about the traditions of Torah writing, and the spiritual significance of the letters and the words contained in the scrolls. Then, each person, with the sofer's guidance, had the thrilling opportunity to write a letter in a Torah scroll. In the afternoon, attendees also enjoyed hands-on learning opportunities, including Hebrew calligraphy practice and clips from The Messenger, a film by Berkshire filmmaker Michael Shocket that tells the story of Hevreh's Holocaust scroll. Hevreh's first Torah was acquired in 1980. A second Torah, the Holocaust Memorial Trust Scroll, is approximately 250 years old and was rescued from Czechoslovakia after World War II. Since 1986, every Hevreh b'nai mitzvah student has read from this Torah. This scroll has been passed down through generations of Hevreh's clergy, families, and leaders. Both Torahs were proudly carried through the streets of Great Barrington in 1999 when the congregation moved to its present home at 270 State Road. A generous participation challenge match, led by Shira Nichaman, Amie Angerman, and Lisa Sloane, encouraged donations large and small to help fund the Torah restoration. Rabbi Jodie Gordon shared, "This project not only restored our Torahs but also deepened our sense of connection as a community. It's a powerful reminder that the Torah is not just a sacred object, but a living part of our congregation's story."