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Torah Siyyum  
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## A Love of Torah

Our community's love of sofrut – the world of Torah scribing – began in 2012 when we invited Reconstructionist rabbi and sofer, Kevin Hale, to spend a weekend with us and make repairs to our Torah. He enchanted us with the traditional practices of Torah-writing, with his demonstrations of Hebrew calligraphy, with his belief that liberal Jewish communities could and should take responsibility for their sacred objects.

He was thrilled with our do-it-yourself approach to Judaism, with our desire to learn from knowledgeable teachers *and* to take ownership of traditional Jewish rituals and practices and make them our own. He showed us how to clean our Torah, and we gathered over several mornings to carefully wipe dust off each of its pages. He taught a couple of our members how to make basic repairs to our Torah. He inspired us to see our Torah not only as an ancient text but also as a living text, as well as a sacred object of our community.

Our community's connection to Torah is varied – we respect its history; we chant its words on Shabbat; we debate the interpretations of its teachings; we gravitate to its aesthetics; we commit to living by its principles. Over these years I have seen over and over the deep connection that our members have developed for Torah – and how being in community fosters that love of Torah.

No wonder that commissioning a Torah was such an important undertaking for our community. Too often in Jewish life only a select few decide who will write the community's Torah. In our congregation the decision was a lively, communal process, which allowed us to clarify our values and ultimately make a decision that reflected those values.

We wanted someone who was skilled in sofrut, but honestly we wanted more than that. We wanted someone who could be our guide – who might not agree with our practices, but who would have enough respect for us to meet us on our journey of acquiring a new Torah.

I've had a sense for some time that we are quite compatible with our soferet, Yonah Lavery-Yisraeli. Our Jewish practices are very different, and the assumptions upon which those practices are based are also very different. But I realized this weekend that we share some fundamental values – the importance of intellectual integrity, a deep respect for the creative process, and the willingness to break boundaries when they are inconsistent with our beliefs and lived experience.

This is what Torah is all about. I believe that Torah can inspire us to think carefully, critically, and wisely. I believe that Torah can inspire us to develop a sense of mystery, of engaging and elevating our spirits and to see beauty in the midst of a world plagued by war, poverty, and hatred. I believe that Torah can inspire us to challenge the world that is and to fight for the world as it ought to be.

Yonah, I am so honored to be on this path with you.

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It is a great honor to fill in one of the last letters of the Torah. In many communities this honor goes to the people who give the most money. This practice, however, is not consistent with our values, so we decided to raffle off the honors. All of our members were invited to enter a raffle, and they could buy up to five tickets only, to win the chance to complete the Torah.