

The Talmud, in Tractate Shabbat, says, “Adorn yourself before G-d with good deeds; make him a scroll of law for his sake with suitable ink, suitable pen, an expert scribe and wind handsome ribbons around it.”

We are here tonight in fulfillment of this requirement.

Tonight we celebrate the rededication of our new Torah. I say rededication—not dedication—for this Torah has had a long life already. It was originally written around a hundred or so years ago in Poland, and it must have served communities and congregations in Poland well for many years. Eventually it made its way, as have many of Eastern Europe’s Torahs, to Israel, and from there to Los Angeles. There we were fortunate, because it found its way to the elderly scribe who Rabbi Hale describes as his most reliable source of all things scribal. Thus, he, and we, were able to acquire it.

The Torah itself is 42 lines and vav amudim (which means that most columns begin with the letter vav). Rabbi Hale carefully repaired the lettering, patched tears and resealed loose or broken seams, and finally he detached the Torah from its rollers for transport, and sewed it back together after he got to Charlotte, so that we could have it here with us tonight.

So first, I would like to say that we really, truly, enthusiastically thank you, Rabbi Hale. We would also like to thank the congregation of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church for the use of their fellowship hall, without which we really could not be a congregation, and are particularly pleased that Reverend Jim McQuiston and his wife Ann are with us tonight.

### **What does the rededication of this Torah mean to us as a congregation?**

1. First there are just the practical implications: all the letters are there and legible—so we will be able to read every word of every parsha, and life will be much easier for our Torah readers.
2. We have rallied around this Torah in the way we do when our havurah is at its best. Although we are not wealthy, the pledges to

raise the funds for the Torah came pouring in—there was no begging. And in the end 34 families or individuals gave between \$18 and \$1000, each one a statement of commitment not only to the Torah but to the group.

And just look around you. Who would have thought that we would have such a turnout for a service on a week night? It is a statement of our belief in our future as a congregation. As one of our members said, “this Torah solidifies our commitment to each other.”

3. This Torah is a Kosher Torah, written with every letter just as it should be, and, with many thanks both its original scribe and to Rabbi Hale, written in the proper frame of mind. It is a statement of our maturity, our permanence, and our commitment to participatory, communal Jewish ritual. As one of our members said, “I see this as a commitment by our congregation to the essence of Judaism, as Torah is the foundation for all branches of our faith. A Torah can remain kosher and serviceable for generations, and so it is also an expression of our trust in the future, l'dor va dor.”

4. Our use of the wedding chuppah symbolizes the marriage between Havurat Tikvah and the new Torah. As with any marriage, as we rededicate this Torah, we also make a commitment to it: to care for it, to study it, and to use its lessons and commandments to renew ourselves as Jews and as human beings.

### **What does it mean to each of us individually?**

On this day of dedication for our new Torah, to truly appreciate the magnitude of this event, each one of us must place this moment into the unique context of our own lives. For each one of us, the dedication of a new Torah scroll has unique meaning. So I ask each of you in this room to think of how Torah has touched you, and how you have touched Torah.

Some of you may remember dancing with miniature “toy” Torah scrolls as a child. I will share with you what this ceremony brings forth for me:

First, though this process I learned that my paternal grandfather was a Torah scribe, a sofer who repaired Torahs. He died before I was born, so I never knew him, and until now, I did not know he had been a sofer. But this process has made me feel connected with him in a different way than I ever have before. Through my part in our efforts to have this Torah repaired and put back into our use, I feel like I am actually carrying forward my grandfather's personal contribution to Judaism.

Second, I grew up in a congregation in which girls were not taught to read, or even allowed to touch, the Torah. So I remember the first time, when I was in my mid-30's, at a havurah summer institute, that during a service the leader passed around the Torah, and I was allowed to hold it. I distinctly remember the deep impact holding that Torah for the first time had on me. Now we are receiving and rededicating this Torah, which we will all be able to hold. I will not only be allowed to hold it, but I will be honored to read its first lines. This is an honor that as a child I could not imagine—and that I find at once humbling and overwhelming.

So take a moment. What does this Torah Dedication mean to you? What memories does it evoke? What hopes does it raise?

One Rabbi said, "We do not idolize the Torah, but we honor it as our tangible link to God. You can't touch things like 'love' or 'spirituality.' But [you can touch the Torah.] With the Torah you can bridge that gap between the material world and the spiritual world."

So as we read this Torah tonight, for the first of hundreds of times, as we raise it, and as we danced with it, make a notch in your mind for this day, placing it in the continuity of your own life and in the life of our havurah. Let us touch this Torah, and let it touch us, so that this Torah, our Torah, will be a bridge for all of us between the material and spiritual worlds, a bridge that leads us to being better Jews, both individually and communally, and better human beings.

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