



B'NAI SHALOM V'TIKVAH
NEWSLETTER

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November 2019 Edition

Welcome to the November 2019 Edition of our Newsletter! In this edition:

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Message from the Editor

Please note that there will be no edition of the BSVT Newsletter for the month of December. Publication will resume for the January 2020 edition. Wishing you all a *Happy Hanukkah, Season's Greetings and a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful 2020.*



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Messages from the President – Ron King

Hanukkah Happenings 5780

Hanukkah begins on the 25th of Kislev (first night is Sunday December 22nd)

THE HANUKKAH TOY DRIVE is already underway. B'nai Shalom V'Tikvah has a proud tradition of donation boxes full of new, unwrapped toys to the Jewish Family and Child to be distributed to needy Jewish children during Hanukkah. The toy drive continues until DECEMBER 8TH.

THE KIDDISH AT OUR SHABBAT SERVICE ON DECEMBER 21ST WILL FEATURE OUR ANNUAL LATKE CHALLENGE. Never in the history of latke baking has so many latke varieties been created by so small a congregation.

CARE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LATKE CHALLENGE AND CLAIM THE B'NAI SHALOM V'TIKVAH LATKE TROPHY????

Simply contact Ron King – king838@gmail.com or 905-493-0167 and enter your latke for the competition.)





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Feed the Need Concert – December 15th

A host of performers (including **OY to the World** – Roz and Warren Keyes and Koren Kassirer) are performing two concerts 3:00 p m to 5:00 pm (**Oy to the World** is performing in this concert) and 7:00 to 9:00 p m. Both concerts take place on Sunday, December 15th at Bowmanville High School – 49 Liberty Street North in Bowmanville.

The concert is in aid of Feed the Need Durham and is presented by the Rotary Club of Bowmanville with all proceeds going to 62 agencies across the Durham Region. Tickets are \$25 per concert or \$15 for children (sixteen years and under).

Bridges to Unity – World Religion Days 2020

You may notice that the title reads **days** rather than **day**. Why? This year the Durham District School Board is joining with Multi-faith Durham to present the theme BRIDGES TO UNITY.

School children from across the Durham Region will be making presentations on Friday, January 10th that express their understanding of the importance of valuing each other irrespective of differences in appearance, clothing and physical or emotional needs.

On Sunday, January 12th Multi-faith Durham (a committee of eight different faith groups from across the Durham Region) will continue this theme. With the help of the City of Oshawa and Mayor Dan Carter we will be organizing inclusive activities, entertainment and an informal social time to encourage members of our congregations and the general public to meet to engage with each other and in the process express our belief in the mutual respect for the diversity of faiths and cultures in our community.

Information about time and location to follow soon.



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Shabbat with Rabbi Printz – December 7th Yes! That's December 7th!

If you have been referring to your service schedule over the past year you may be gazing at the December dates and note that the first service in December is noted on a different date.

Well, sorry for the mix-up but...the first Shabbat Service in on December 7th!

No need to elaborate on the reasons for the change; just know that you are most welcome to attend Torah study at 9:00 a. m. and that our worship service begins at 10:00 a m.

If there is a congregant who wishes to sponsor the kiddish for the December 7th service please contact Ron King – king838@gmail.com or 905-493-0167.





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Recognitions Club – Paula Rudner

Dear friends,

As I sit here tonight, finishing off this column, my mind is wandering. I'm thinking...well, we've already had one snowfall, or was it two? I can't even remember...lol! And yet, the sun is still coming out, and the sky is often blue. And from what I've been hearing all day, it was quite beautiful out! Hopefully, we may still have a few more days like this one was. But then, the real winter will indubitably show up, with Chanukah, and snow, and the cold! And this cold that will come is a hint for you - in this Newsletter we are honouring December birthdays and an anniversary! No Yarzheits for December.

To date, I have not heard anything about any snitches, but you can be sure they will be included as they happen, with the details provided by you. Please don't forget to let me know when you have one you'd like to share :)

If you would like to be recognized in future Newsletters, but have never submitted yours, your children's, grandchildren's, or great-grandchildren's information, please read the "Reminder" below for details.

Paula Rudner, Ad Hoc and Recognitions

Warmest Birthday Wishes to:

December 01: Nathan Angulo, grandson of Gayle Kahn

December 02: Beryl Apelbaum

December 16: Maya Rudner, great-granddaughter of Bryna Rudner and great-niece of Paula Rudner

December 18: Wenda Abel, our illustrious BSVT Newsletter Editor



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December 19: Sam Apelbaum

December 22: Paula Rudner, your BSVT Ad Hoc and Recognitions guru

December 26: Sera-Lynn Marks, daughter of Aviva King, and granddaughter of Ron King

December 26: Mikayla Rothman, daughter of Elaine Penman and Brian Rothman and granddaughter of Elliot and Barbara Rothman

December 29: Michael Gertler

December 29: Sabina Thompson

A very Happy Birthday to all of you!

Congratulations on your Wedding Anniversary:

December 21: Raphael Benaksas, grandson of Bryna Rudner and nephew/godson of Paula Rudner, and Ashley Benaksas (1 year)

Happy Anniversary! Wishing you many more years of happiness together!

Reminder: If you are interested in joining our 'Recognitions Club', and allowing us to honour your immediate family's birthdays, anniversaries or Yartzheits in the monthly Newsletter, please email me at pmrudner@rogers.com. It's so easy to do! Just send me the names and dates* for yours, your children's, your grandchildren's or great-grandchildren's birthdays; yours and your spouse's names and the full date of your anniversary; the name, relationship to you, and the full Gregorian date of the person for whom you have Yartzheit (both the Gregorian or Hebrew date should be provided, but it's not a problem if the Hebrew date is unknown - we'll gladly convert it for you). *There



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is no need to provide the year for birthdays unless you wish to - just the month and day will used, but as noted, the year must be provided for anniversaries and Yarzheits.

Simchas, including births, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, engagements or weddings, are limited to you (i.e. BSVT members), your children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Details for each specific simcha are as described in the email headed "**Recognizing your Simchas**" that was distributed on December 9, 2017. If you have a simcha, but you no longer have a copy of the December 9th email, nor do you recall the details needed for publication, please email me, and I will be very happy to provide them to you.

Please remember that all names should be provided how you would like them to appear in the Newsletter. We'd love to honour you and yours!



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Always of Interest...

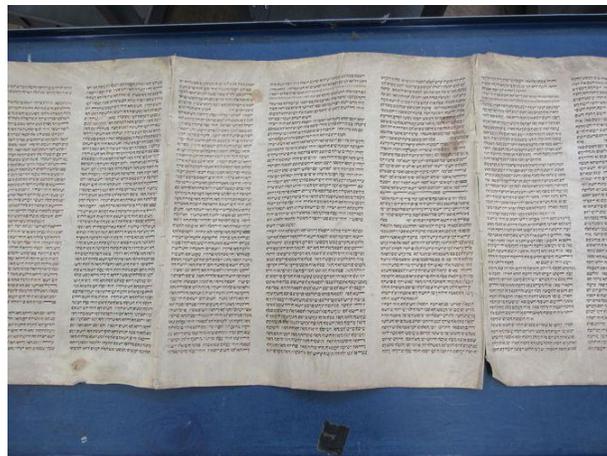
Article submitted by John Stocker

An intriguing mystery...solved in the article that follows!

This Torah Was Dropped Off at a Va. Thrift Store...Can You Help Us Find Where It Came From?

By Ari Feldman
November 6, 2019

<https://forward.com/news/national/434356/mystery-torah-goodwill-williamsburg-virginia/>





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A couple hundred bucks can get you a variety of things on Goodwill's online store: Tory Burch boots; a metal detector; a Burberry duffel; a collection of Furbies.

Oh, and a Torah.

Until Tuesday, you could bid for a scroll — sacred, if tattered — at ShopGoodwill.com. First listed at \$200, bidders quickly pushed the price to \$456.

You've heard of the Gutenberg Bible? Call this the Goodwill Torah.

Its story is full of mystery and unanswered questions. It involves a donor possibly shrouded in priestly robes; an iconic Southern town known for its colonial reenactment; a Ukrainian village whose Jews were nearly all killed by the Nazis; and an anonymous buyer who thought he could flip the Torah for a profit. Three days of dogged investigation have yielded a detailed accounting of the Torah's last three months, but virtually no solid clues of its age, provenance, or rightful ownership.

"There's gotta be someone out there that is missing this Torah and wants it back," said Mordechai Sidell, the Website manager for a Hasidic synagogue in New Jersey whose connection to this story will be explained in good time.

The Torah came to Goodwill late one evening this August, when a man wearing a cassock donated it to a store in, of all places, Williamsburg, Va., where colonial times are still unfolding. No one at the store even realized what it was, because the nearly four-foot tall Torah was wrapped in a nondescript comforter, bundled with other unremarkable textiles, and left in the back room overnight, said Michael Luckey, the manager of the store.

The next morning, employees discovered the scroll, clothed in a traditional mantle of dark-blue velvet embroidered with the stone tablets bearing the Ten



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Commandments, flanked by two golden lions. Above the tablets is a large crown, and the words *keter Torah*: the crown of the Torah. Underneath is one word, the name of a town in Ukraine.

The staff knew the item was Jewish, but that was all. They stuck a \$500 price tag on it and put it with the other oversized items, next to a music mixing board that may have come from a recording studio.

“It’s obviously not something that you see appear at a Goodwill store,” Luckey said.

Indeed, a Torah is not something you generally see outside a synagogue or school.

Told this odd story, Jesse Abelman, the curator of Hebraica and Judaica at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., said he has never before heard of a Torah showing up, origins unknown, in a secular setting in the United States.

Torahs are valuable, sacred objects that take a trained scribe about a year’s work to produce. If even one of the more than 300,000 Hebrew characters in the scroll is inked to the parchment improperly, it is considered unkosher — unusable. So while a used Torah can [sell for \\$13,000](#), a new Torah can cost more than \$40,000, and some with historical value have been auctioned for up to [a quarter of a million dollars](#).

Though they contain the five books of Moses, such scrolls are not used for regular study, generally only for ritual reading a few times each week. They are kept in special armoires known as an *aron kodesh*, or Holy Ark. When ferried from place to place, they are supposed to be carried angled toward the right shoulder, wrapped in a prayer shawl. Tradition dictates that if a Torah is dropped, everyone who sees it hit the floor must fast during daylight hours for 40 days.



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And yet the Goodwill Torah has appeared out of nowhere, and been handled not unlike your grandmother's china or last year's overcoat.

Torah for sale

Here's what we've learned so far about what happened that August night. A man in a cassock — a full-length garment generally worn by Christian clerics — put a bulky object wrapped in fabric down outside the store in the spot designated for donations, said Sean McInerney, a Goodwill employee. It was about 8:30 p.m., close to the store's closing time, and too dark for its external security cameras to pick up any identifying details. The lone store employee who saw the man recalled him wearing a cassock.

The Forward contacted three churches in Williamsburg: one Byzantine Catholic, one Roman Catholic and one Eastern Orthodox. The pastors of all three said they knew of no such Torah, and one said he didn't know of any clergy in Williamsburg that would wear a cassock outside of church.

The Torah sat on the shelf next to the music-mixer for almost two months.

"We did have people who were very inquisitive, because it was a very unique item," Luckey said. But no one ever tried to buy it, or even asked to take a look under the mantle and examine the scroll itself.

Then, in mid-October, another mysterious man — Goodwill says it has no record of his identity — bought the Torah. A week or so later, the Torah was returned, for a full refund, to a Goodwill store near Richmond, about an hour away.

Luckey says that when the man bought it, he said he planned to try and give the Torah to a temple that could use it. But McInerney said that from what employees at the Goodwill near Richmond were able to gather, the man was



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just a reseller, and returned the Torah when he couldn't find a website through which to quickly flip it.

The manager of the store near Richmond, recognizing that this item would more likely sell on a nationally used website, gave the Torah to McInerney's office, which ships online orders for items donated in the central and coastal Virginia region. McInerney is an assistant manager of e-commerce there, and he posted the listing, starting the price at \$200. Bids started coming in, and so did outraged emails and phone calls from Jewish people around the country.

"They were obviously kind of irate that we had the Torah," he said.

One caller accused Goodwill of handling the Torah improperly; indeed, the listing shows the scroll unfurled, which Jewish law prohibits without saying the proper blessings.

On Monday, after receiving enough irate messages, McInerney got in touch with the rabbi of a Richmond synagogue, who alerted Temple Beth El, the sole synagogue in Williamsburg. On Tuesday, the synagogue's rabbi emerita, Sylvia Scholnick, and its office administrator, Jill Hyman, drove an hour to the e-commerce office to collect the Torah for safekeeping.

Scholnick did not respond to telephone calls Wednesday, but McInerney said she and Hyman told him the synagogue may hire someone to determine whether the scroll is still kosher. If it is not, they plan to bury it in a Jewish cemetery, the traditional fate of things that have the name of God inscribed in them but are no longer fit for use in rituals.

Rabbi David Katz, the head rabbi of Beth El, said that thrift stores in the area have

But nothing like this," he said.



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A long way from Berdichev

The Torah itself offers tantalizing clues to its origin.

Most prominent is the one word embroidered on the Torah's mantle — "Berdichev." Two hours by car from Kiev, Berdichev is a small city, part of the historical Pale of Settlement, where Jews were allowed to live in the Russian Empire. Before World War II, Jews made up more than a third of its population. But the Nazis killed nearly every Jew in Berdichev, according to the [Encyclopedia Judaica](#).

There are a few theories as to why a Torah might bear the Berdichev stamp.

One is that the Torah was associated with a society of Jews from Berdichev. Called a *landsmanshaft*, these communities of people from the same town in Eastern Europe flourished around the United States in the early part of the 20th century, primarily in New York.

In 1938, there were at least eight Berdichev societies in New York, said Daniel Soyer, a professor of history at Fordham University and the author of a book about Jewish immigration societies. Though Soyer said that none of these societies were religious, it was common practice for a *landsmanshaft* to sponsor the creation of a Torah on behalf of their hometown. That means the scroll could have belonged to a congregation that had no connection to Berdichev, but did have a connection to someone from there.

Alternatively, it could have been the property of someone whose name was Berdichev, Soyer said.

Another theory centers on Hasidim, ultra-Orthodox Jews whose tend to live in insular societies led by charismatic rabbis or their descendants.



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Berdichev — unlike towns such as Lubavitch, Samir and Bobov — never gave birth to a Hasidic dynasty. However, there are a small handful of “Berdichever” synagogues in Hasidic enclaves around New York. These synagogues are most likely a remnant of the time when immigrant Jews created congregations with their countrymen, said Samuel Heilman, a professor of sociology at Queens College and a scholar of Hasidic Judaism.

Calls to Keter Torah Berdichev, in Monsey, N.Y., and to Berditchev Kloiz, in Lakewood, N.J., yielded no missing Torahs (or missing Torah mantles).

“For sure not,” said Shea Seidenfeld, Keter Torah’s rabbi. “I would know.”

Seidenfeld and his family live above the synagogue, which is in a townhouse on a suburban street in the predominantly Hasidic town. He did not have a cell phone, so the Forward texted pictures of the Goodwill Torah to his synagogue assistant. Neither recognized it.

In Lakewood, Sidell, the website manager for the Berditchever Kloiz, a synagogue with Orthodox Jews of many backgrounds, said their Torah collection was also intact. The Forward shared images of the Torah with Sidell. He noted the mysterious discrepancy between its torn scroll and luminous mantle.

“From the cover, it doesn’t look so old,” Sidell said.

It also could be that this Torah is left over from an old Berdichever synagogue from somewhere around Virginia, though there is no evidence yet that such a congregation exists.

“It’s likely that what it is, is a remnant of a small community that lived in the South, that came from Berdichev, and this is all that’s left of it,” Heilman said. It may have had as simple a name as “Anshei Berdichev” — people of Berdichev.



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The Torah keeps the score

There may be more clues on the Torah that are not visible in pictures, or that could most likely be uncovered by an expert scribe, said Abelman, the curator at the Museum of the Bible. The back side of the animal hide on which the words of the Torah are written could have notes from scribes that have certified its kosher-ness in the past. The rollers bearing the scroll might have an inscription with the identity of the Torah's donors. If it crossed the Atlantic sometime in the 20th century, it could even bear a customs stamp.

The Forward was unable to reach the Beth El rabbis Wednesday morning for an update on the Torah, and how they plan to examine it. It is likely that the Torah is in poor condition, based on images of the partially torn and faded scroll shared with the Forward by Goodwill.

"Temperature, humidity or even just physical mishandling can cause the ink to come off the parchment, and if even one letter is missing or damaged, then the scroll is unkosher," and therefore unusable for prayer services, said Rabbi Joshua Heller. His synagogue, Congregation B'nai Torah in Atlanta, recently decided to have a scribe re-certify their scrolls as kosher every year; Heller said that if a Torah is left unattended to for decades or more, it would "definitely deteriorate."

But Abelman, the museum curator, said that remains to be seen.

"Especially if it's just been sitting around closed for a long time, it wouldn't shock me if it was completely kosher," he said.

Correction, 11/7/19, 6 p.m. - This article has been updated to reflect that Jesse Abelman suggested the Torah may still be kosher if it were "closed," not "in clothes." His original statement was misheard.



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Ari Feldman is a staff writer at the Forward. He covers Jewish religious organizations, synagogue life, anti-Semitism and the Orthodox world. If you have any tips, you can email him at feldman@forward.com. Follow him on Twitter [@aefeldman](https://twitter.com/aefeldman).

The Torah That Ended Up at the Goodwill Doesn't Belong to a Jew.

By Ari Feldman

November 21, 2019

https://forward.com/news/national/435014/mystery-torah-goodwill-thrift-store-saga/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Saturday%20Newsletter%20RSS&utm_maildate=11/23/2019

For Jill Hyman, a Torah is an *etz chaim*, the tree of life and the “source of Jewish existence.” She refers to a scroll as “she,” as though she knows it personally.

So when Hyman, the administrator of Temple Beth El in Williamsburg, Va., got a call a little over two weeks ago about a Torah that was up for auction on ShopGoodwill.com, she felt appalled — and profoundly drawn to the scroll. Its mantle bore the name of a small town in Ukraine, the country at the center of the current impeachment inquiry. One of Hyman’s daughters had just celebrated her bat mitzvah; she imagined the last bar mitzvah boy to read from the scroll before the Nazis liquidated the Jews of the town, Berdichev.

“Clearly it means something,” she said then. “She belongs to the Jewish people.”

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Now Hyman is grappling with a new, unexpected reality: that the Torah rightfully belongs to a retired real estate agent who lives about a 90-minute drive away in Spotsylvania, Va., who once came close to playing professional football and spent years collecting religious objects. And who is not Jewish.

[The Forward first reported on the Goodwill Torah on Nov. 6](#), chronicling how it had been dropped off at a Williamsburg thrift store and then, after weeks on a shelf with a \$500 price tag, bought by someone hoping to flip it for a profit. The unknown buyer, however, soon returned it to a Goodwill in Richmond, from where it was posted to the online shop. But the article raised more questions: Where was the Torah from? How did it end up in Williamsburg? Who did it really belong to?

Two weeks of further investigation has allowed us to reconstruct the last two decades of the Torah's life, tracing a surprising odyssey through a world little known to Jews in which the sacred scrolls are not reserved for ritual reading, but are collectibles of fluctuating value bought and sold by bible enthusiasts.

We still don't know the Torah's true age or origins, and will likely never know. But we discovered that it was sold in the 1990s by a Judaica store on Manhattan's Lower East Side to the owner of a traveling bible museum in



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Texas, who soon sold it through a middle man to the Virginia real estate agent, a Christian collector who, earlier this year, consigned it to an auction house outside of Washington, D.C.

The auction house couldn't sell it — and can't fully explain why it went to Goodwill.

“I'm not holding anything against anybody,” said the real estate agent, Mel Meadows, who is 69 and occasionally quotes from the Talmud. “I just want my property back.”

A Torah from pieces'

Meadows did not see the Forward's original article about the Torah. In fact, he only learned that it had ended up in a Goodwill after I contacted him. But a rabbi who worked at the auction house last winter saw it, recognized the Torah, and reached out. After talking to him, I was able to reverse-engineer the story back a few more chapters.

Every new bit of information surprised me: I grew up under the impression that Torahs were created by scribes, lived in synagogues, day schools and summer camps, and then, when they became too worn for use, were buried in *genizahs*, the special repository for retired Jewish texts.

It turns out that Torahs, one of the holiest objects in Judaism, sometimes have lives completely outside the faith. This story helps illuminate that world, revealing that, like it or not, there are many non-Jews in the United

States who find value and use in an old, worn, handwritten Hebrew scroll.

What we know of the Goodwill Torah's life starts in the heart of what once was the Jewish mecca of the Lower East Side, in a former tenement building on



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Essex Street that will soon be replaced by [a sleek tower of “micro-units.”](#) Today, the gentrifying block is home to cafes and a Pilates studio, but 20 years ago it was still a row of hole-in-the-wall Judaica shops.

At 11 Essex, three rabbis operated A & Y Sofrei Stam, a storefront [where a scribe examined and repaired](#) the parchment scrolls in tefillin, the leather boxes worn for weekday morning prayers, and in mezuzahs, which are mounted on the doorposts of a Jewish home.

In the 1990s, A & Y was crammed floor to ceiling with ornaments, scroll-repair supplies and as many as 40 Torah scrolls at a time, recalled Rabbi Michael Schiffman, who at the time operated his own small business, Havdalah Judaica, from a desk inside the store. Schiffman, now 64 and living in Florida, back then bought Torahs from shuttered synagogues and via brokers, who collected unused scrolls around Europe and sold them to shops in the United States and Israel.

Schiffman told me that the Goodwill Torah was one of those scrolls, and that it was considered a “Torah from pieces” because it had panels from several different eras and places, perhaps dating as far back as the 1600s. Schiffman didn’t recall the shop repairing the scroll, meaning it was likely unfit for ritual use, unlike the majority of the scrolls they sold.

“Some of them you look at, and it can take your breath away,” he said. “That one, it was an older scroll. It wasn’t particularly wonderful.”

Neither Schiffman nor Franklin “Rusty” Maisel, a dealer in rare bibles, recall the exact year that Maisel came to Havdalah and bought the Torah, saying it was bound for a museum.

Maisel was born Jewish but converted as a young man to Christianity, and for more than two decades has operated a traveling bible museum. He says the museum — which includes multiple Torah scrolls and a working, scale model



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Gutenberg press on which he demonstrates early printing methods — is his way of spreading enthusiasm for the bible.

“I try to teach respect for the Torah, which a lot of Christians don’t understand,” said Maisel, who is 75 and lives outside Fort Worth, Tex. “We are basically Christian believers. But what is a Christian is an interesting thing. Like what is a Jew? People have different definitions.”

Maisel was part of a spike in trade in the late 1990s in rare bibles and Judaica fueled largely by eBay, which allowed collectors to obtain a scroll fragment here, a Gutenberg bible leaf there. He estimates that he sold about 12 full Torahs over the years. Neither he nor Schiffman remembers what he paid for the Goodwill Torah.

Schiffman no longer trades in Torahs, but the deep admiration for the scrolls and their scribes that he felt while working on Essex Street remains. He told me he was “embarrassed” at what became of the Torah after it left the Lower East Side, even though he knows it wasn’t his fault.

“It’s not a piece of furniture,” he said. “It’s something holy and special. It’s the history of our people.”

‘Scripture is the experiences of those who have gone before us.’

Around 2000, Maisel said, he sold the Torah to Paul Barkocy, a pastor who handled rare-bible sales for, he contends, businessmen including the former presidential candidate Ross Perot. Again, neither Maisel nor Barkocy could tell me the sale price.



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Barkocy said he had planned to resell the Torah quickly, and at his request Maisel created a letter attesting to the Torah's provenance, whose claims are somewhat dubious.

[The letter](#) says that a Rabbi Yitzchak Goldstein had determined the scroll was written in the 1400s, adding: "Because of its age, quality, and source Rabbi Goldstein thinks the scroll should be recognized as an extraordinary and historically significant Torah." It also identified Berdichev, the name on the Torah's mantle, as the birthplace of a founder of Hasidic Judaism.

Goldstein could not be reached to verify this. Schiffman, the rabbi who once worked on Essex Street, said "Goldstein" was in fact a pseudonym the scribe used to hide his earnings from an ex-wife, and declined to share his real name. The founder mentioned in Maisel's letter, meanwhile — Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev — was not a founder of Hasidic Judaism, and he produced no rabbinic dynasty, though he was an influential figure in the movement, experts say.

(Schiffman, for his part, thinks the Torah likely came from Germany, where the Jewish communities were wealthy enough to afford such a large scroll.)

Armed with the certificate, Barkocy sold the Torah to Meadows, the Virginia real-estate agent, who punted for the Washington Redskins in two pre-seasons in the early 1970s, but never played a regular-season game. Meadows told me he was fascinated by its purported historical significance; it would go well with the Torah scroll fragments he already had framed in his home.

Barkocy recalled bringing the Torah to the large house Meadows was living in at the time in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Curious to see if it was complete, the two unfurled the scroll, with the help of Meadows' wife and son, along the longest corridor in the home, searching for notable passages like the Ten



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Commandments. Meadows said they made sure not to let it touch the ground, a grave mistake in Judaism.

“From Genesis to Deuteronomy, it was all laid out,” Meadows said.

Meadows is a self-taught scholar of religion and rare bibles who, in an interview, mentioned the shifting names of God and the 70 interpretations that the ancient rabbis said could be found in every verse. For more than two decades, he collected hundreds of rare bibles and religious ornaments worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, including a bible from the American Revolution and a copy of the William Tyndale bible, whose translation got its creator burned at the stake.

“To me, scripture is the experiences of those who have gone before us,” he said, “as they are dealing with the mystery of God.”

The book was never kosher’

In 2009, after two real-estate investments flopped and Meadows had to pay significant out-of-pocket costs for his wife’s heart surgery, he [consigned much of his collection — though not the Torah — to auction](#) in New York. He says the bulk of it brought about \$250,000.

This year, downsizing in order to move closer to his children, he hired Quinn’s Auction Galleries, about a half hour outside Washington, D.C., to sell the rest — including our Torah.

Rabbi Howard Gorin, who Quinn’s hired last winter to assess the value of the library of a deceased rabbi, told me that he examined the Berdichev Torah, and was unable to corroborate Maisel’s letter of authenticity.



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Still, the Torah went up for auction in May alongside the dead rabbi's books and Judaica. Meadows had set a sale minimum of \$4,000, but there were no qualifying bids.

"The book was never kosher," noted Matthew Quinn, executive vice president of the auction house. It's "an assemblage, it's not necessarily real, so to speak, and that presents a challenge."

Quinn acknowledges that when the Torah didn't sell, it should have been returned to Meadows. When I first called the Quinn's office, Quinn himself assumed it had been, since that's what they do with valuable items that fail to sell at auction. It was only later, when Meadows told me he never got it back, that it became clear someone at Quinn's had dropped the ball.

When I called Quinn back, he said the Torah seemed to have mistakenly been included in a load of unsold items marked for donation to thrift stores and charities. The employee who was supposed to give the Torah back to Meadows lived in Williamsburg, Quinn said, which may explain why it ended up in the Goodwill store there.

Now, Quinn says that he is planning to work with Temple Beth El, the Williamsburg synagogue caring for the Torah, to get it back to Meadows.

"This was obviously an unfortunate decision, and we'll work on getting to the bottom of it, and making sure that something like this doesn't happen again," he said.

'It's almost like we found a child'

When Hyman brought the Torah back to Beth El, an unaffiliated congregation with about 150 member-families, it was the toast of the synagogue. People came to examine it, despite its strong smell of mold. They set it in an ark, to



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join their collection of Torahs that includes a tall, thin scroll that survived the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia. For Beth El's leader, Rabbi David Katz, the whole episode has in part underscored how unfamiliar most people in their town — where Beth El is the only synagogue — are with Judaism.

“It's almost like we found a child,” explained Katz. “And yet, nine out of 10 people around here wouldn't understand what it is.”

The congregation had been planning to hire a scribe to examine the Torah, and estimate the cost to repair it.

But Meadows wants it back, which makes Hyman — the synagogue administrator who calls the scroll “she” — uncomfortable.

She is skeptical of the auction-house story that the Torah got lost by mistake. She is also unnerved that this Torah — and many others — live their lives in Christian hands.

“I feel like the whole story is how an *etz chaim*, this Jewish lifeline and connection to the Jewish people, is being culturally appropriated,” she said.

When Hyman first got the call about the Torah from Goodwill she was on her way to a bris, the ritual circumcision of an eight-day old boy. She immediately turned around to grab another Beth El member and go get the Torah, figuring the infant would forgive her absence.

“God willing, one day we can tell him the story,” she said. “And he'll understand.”



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The Torah, unrolled in Beth El's sanctuary, in front of its holy ark, where the synagogue's Torahs are kept.

Clarification, 11/21/19, 12:45 p.m. — This article has been updated to clarify the role of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev in the history of Hasidic Judaism.

Correction, 11/21/19, 4:30 p.m. — A previous version of this article incorrectly stated the name of Temple Beth El's rabbi. He is Rabbi David Katz, not Rabbi Adam Katz.

Clarification, 11/26/19, 11:15 a.m. — A sentence about the congregation of Temple Beth El has received the Torah has been clarified. The location of the Torah in Beth El has also been clarified.

Ari Feldman is a staff writer at the Forward. Contact him at feldman@forward.com or follow him on Twitter @aefeldman



A Hanukkah Story...

A Holocaust Chanukah Miracle

By [Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal](#)

Every year, Chanukah arrives just when we seem to need it most. When the days are at their shortest and the nights have grown unbearably long, the menorah casts its glow upon a people hungry for light. In 1938, the entire world found itself sinking into a darkness unlike any it had known in modern history. If ever there were a need for light to guide our way, it was on this cold December evening in Germany, as the eighth and final day of Chanukah was about to begin.

The Geier family was sitting in their second-class compartment on a train headed from Berlin to Holland as they watched the winter sun slip beyond the horizon. It had been a long and terrifying trail that led from *Kristallnacht* (“The Night of Broken Glass”) to this moment. They could still hardly believe they had managed to obtain an American visa and were now finally on what they prayed would be an uneventful journey to freedom.

Judah and Regina Geier and their two children, Arnold and Ruth, spent the duration of the train ride staring out the window, nibbling on sandwiches, reading, dozing, and



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trying to behave as if the world were still a normal place. But unlike most of the other passengers, the Geier family remained acutely aware of the dangers that awaited them as the train approached the German-Dutch border. There, Nazis, German police, and officers of the Gestapo would all be present for a final check of passports and travel papers.

For Judah Geier, however, there was an additional heaviness that weighed on his heart. As an Orthodox Jew and a cantor, his whole life had been devoted to following the ways of the Torah. Yet, here it was, almost nightfall, when the flames of the Chanukah menorah should have been rising to spread their light, and he was forced to sit quietly in his seat with only the harsh glare of a naked bulb to illuminate the graying sky. Surrounded by strangers, he was afraid to strike a match or recite a blessing for fear of calling undue attention to himself and his family. Regina Geier, sensing her husband's inner struggle, tried to reassure him that G-d, who sees and knows all, would surely understand his situation and, no doubt, grant him many more Chanukahs to celebrate properly.

Judah nodded gratefully, but did not seem comforted. In a place and time of such spiritual darkness, the light of the menorah seemed more important than ever – especially on this eighth night of Chanukah, which represents the culmination of the holiday, when all the candles are lit simultaneously to proclaim the miracle of Jewish survival. Under these dangerous circumstances, how could he possibly light the menorah? But, then again, how could he possibly *not*?

Judah turned the issue over and over again in his head as the train continued onward. Suddenly, the train screeched to a halt at the German-Dutch crossing, where it sat in the station for the longest ten minutes of Judah's life as the border police and the Gestapo prepared to check everyone's documents. He felt his wife's body go still next to his, and even his children sat frozen in fear. One wrong answer, one nervous twitch, could mean the difference between escape and imprisonment, between a new life and certain death.

Then, it happened. A Chanukah miracle arrived at the German border just in the nick of time. With no warning, the entire station and every corner of the train was thrust into total darkness. All the lights were extinguished at the very same instant, leaving the passengers and the approaching officers groping in the darkness.



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Without a second's hesitation, Judah seized the moment and reached for his overcoat on the luggage rack above. He put his hand into one of the pockets and pulled out a small package. Before anyone realized what was happening, he struck a match, lit a candle, and quickly warmed the bottom of eight other candles. He then planted them firmly in a neat row upon the windowsill and, in a breathless whisper, recited the Chanukah blessings. As his family looked on in amazement, Judah carefully lit each candle and placed the ninth one – the *shamash* – off to the side. In the bright warmth of the menorah, his face radiated joy and peace for the first time in months.

Seeing the unexpected light in the window, the Gestapo and the border police came running. The sound of their boots striking the pavement with intensified blows echoed throughout the stillness.

Nevertheless, Judah continued to focus his thoughts on the Chanukah lights while his heart pounded as loudly and rapidly as the quickening footsteps.

When the officers burst through the door, Judah was braced for the worst, perhaps even the end. However, instead of Judah was braced for the worst, perhaps even the end responding with rage to this brazen display of Jewish ritual, the officers only noticed the opportunity that it provided. By the light of the flickering candles, they would now be able to see clearly enough to begin checking passports and papers, and so, with characteristic Nazi efficiency, they set to work. As soon as the process was completed and they were about to leave, the chief officer of the border police turned to Judah and thanked him personally for having had the foresight to carry “travel candles” on his trip.

Meanwhile, the Geier family sat in stunned silence for close to half an hour, unable to take their eyes off the windowsill. Just as the candles were beginning to grow dim, every light in the station suddenly flashed back on. Judah, still in awe at what he had just witnessed, put his arm around his twelve-year-old son. With tears in his eyes, he drew him close. “Remember this moment,” he declared softly. “As in the days of the Maccabees, a great miracle happened here.”



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As told by Arnold Geier (Judah's son) to Pesi Dinnerstein

[By Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal](#)

Excerpted from "Small Miracles of the Holocaust" by Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal. The newest book in the Small Miracles series is *Small Miracles from Beyond: Dreams, Visions and Signs that Link us to the Other Side*.



Art by Alena Friedman



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**DON'T WORRY
BE JEWISH**

On the Lighter Side...





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Dates for BSVT services – December 2019 – June 2020

Sat. Dec. 7, 2019 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. Dec. 21, 2019 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. Jan. 11, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. Jan. 25, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. Feb. 1, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. Feb. 22, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. March 7, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. March 21, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. April 4, 2020 -10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. April 18, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. May 2, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat
Sat. May 23, 2020 -10:00 a.m.	Bat Mitzvah of Rebecca Efraim – no Torah Study
Sat. June 6, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.	Shabbat

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If you would like to sponsor a Kiddush/Oleg, perhaps to mark a birthday, anniversary or other special event, please contact Beryl Oelbaum at beryla@sympatico.ca.

Notes:

Torah Study commences at 9:00 a.m., and Shabbat morning services commence at 10:00 a.m. Evening services commence at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. Watch for ad hoc messages. All are welcome to attend Torah Study, but please notify Deborah Leek at healthydirections@yahoo.ca, if you plan to attend.



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*Happy Hanukkah
To All!*

