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## Rockland synagogue touts new Torah

*Hannan Adely  
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ORANGEBURG — Tovah Adesnik is overjoyed to be able to witness and participate in the writing of a new Torah at her synagogue.



For Jews, the writing and dedication of the Torah is not only a spiritual and joyous event, but it also fulfills the 613th commandment to write a Torah in one's life.

"To me, it's extremely uplifting and a privilege to be part of this," Adesnik said. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be associated with this type of project."

Adesnik and other members of the Orangetown Jewish Center gathered Sunday with the scribe who is writing the Torah to complete the final letters. The Torah will be dedicated during a celebration June 8 that will feature music, singing and dancing as the community escorts the scroll to its home in the sanctuary.

Rabbi Craig Scheff said plans for the new Torah took shape after the death of Seymour Cohen, a respected pediatrician and past president of the synagogue who died Sept. 24. Leaders of the synagogue approached the Cohen family about doing this as a community project and dedicating it in his memory.

"It just made sense because he was a man who represented teaching, learning and community," Scheff said.

Since beginning the project a year ago, the Orangetown Jewish Center has held a series of workshops, lectures and other activities to teach people about the writing and the importance of the Torah. The event has helped unite and inspire the 500-family congregation toward a common goal, Scheff said.

"Any time you bring people together in an emotional, spiritual and intellectual way, you're creating new communities," Scheff said. "There's a sentimental value to what we're doing and a spiritual value as well."

Janet Miller, a member of the congregation, said the writing of the new Torah has been a community effort involving every age group and a fitting tribute to Cohen, who was a close friend and who was involved in youth activities.

"This is a very, very special honor for a very special man and his family," she said. "This is a labor of love for me."

The Orangetown Jewish Center commissioned the



scribe, Rabbi Zerach Greenfield, to write the Torah, which is a scroll that contains the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.

Inscribing Torah scrolls requires meticulous skill and must be done by hand by a specially trained scribe, who is also known as a sofer.

The 304,805 letters are written in Hebrew calligraphy on animal skin parchment using a special quill dipped in kosher ink. The writing is a full-time job that takes about 40 weeks to complete, Scheff said.

Though only a professional scribe can write the scroll, Jews may fulfill the 613th commandment by supporting the creation of the new Torah, either by commissioning it, fundraising for it or by helping to write the letters.

The Orangetown Jewish Center invited congregants to contribute to the project and in return dedicate a book, column, phrase, letter or other part of the Torah in memory of a loved one. Dedications will be recorded in a dedication scroll that will be displayed in the synagogue.

"By being there and participating and dedicating a word or a letter or a phrase, it's as if you are personally involved in the writing of the Torah," congregant Mel Rosenstock said.

During the event Sunday, members of the Orangetown Jewish Center sat with Greenfield and took the feather quill in hand to fill out the last 80 letters of the Torah. The final letter was filled by Cohen's wife, Reva.

By having a hand in the writing of the Torah, the congregants can become part of the narrative of their people that will be passed down for generations, Scheff said.

"Ultimately, the greatest reward is to be able to dance with that Torah when it is brought into our synagogue for the first time," he said.

#### **TORAH FACTS**

- It contains the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible and outline the moral and physical laws of Judaism.
- It is a narrative starting with the creation of the world in Genesis and continuing to the death of Moses in Deuteronomy.
- A Torah scroll is written in special ink on parchment made from the hide of a kosher animal. It is housed in the ark of every synagogue.

