

Shabbat ends 7:04 PM

It may be human.

SLICE OF LIFE

'They Danced With This Torah Before the Nazis. We're Dancing With It After'

By Yisrael Eliashiv / Chabad.org



Lennard Hammerschlag helps the scribe complete the final letters at the dedication of the Hammerschlag Torah at Chabad of the Shore.

The dancing at Chabad-Lubavitch at the Shore in Ventnor, N.J., was already underway on Simchat Torah 2023 when the horrific news from Israel of the Oct. 7 massacre began to spread through the room. It came in fragments, each update worse than the last. Congregants turned to Rabbi Avrohom Rapoport, the center's director, and asked whether they could still dance.

"Now we have to dance for ourselves and for all those who can't dance anymore," Rapoport told them.

So they kept going. Rapoport remembers dancing and crying simultaneously, the joy of the holiday pressing against what they were hearing from the Holy Land.

"It was as if the Torahs were dancing for us," Rapoport said. "We were just holding on."

With the congregation watching him, he pointed to one of the scrolls. "You see this Torah? They danced with this Torah before the Nazis, and we're dancing with this Torah after the Nazis."

THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR

The Hammerschlag Torah's story begins in Lauenau, Germany, where the family had

deep roots. Lennard Hammerschlag, whose grandfather Adolf Hammerschlag brought it out of Germany, says the family believes the scroll is about 200 years old.

When the family fled to Bulawayo, in what was then Southern Rhodesia, they were forced to give up nearly everything they owned. Adolf made certain the Torah was not among the losses. It remained in the family for nearly 80 years.

In 2018, Lennard, his brother Marc, and a group from Stockton University brought the scroll back to Lauenau, into the room on the old Hammerschlag property that had once served as the town's Jewish prayer space. The Torah had once been spirited away under terrible circumstances. This time it came and went in peace.

"It was significant that I didn't have to bring it in through the back door," Hammerschlag said. "I brought it in through the front door."

In Ventnor, the scroll served for years as the centerpiece of the Chabad center's Holocaust exhibit. Hammerschlag wanted more for it than a display, and he and Rapoport had spoken about restoring it for years. When a sofer, a ritual scribe, finally gave them an estimate, the figure exceeded the cost of a new Torah.

"Value-wise, you could buy a Torah for less than it costs to fix this one," Rapoport said. "For us it wasn't a money thing. This Torah has a story."

The two were discussing the cost at a Shabbat dinner hosted by Rapoport when a guest, Craig Beresin, moved from the far end of the table and found himself within earshot.

"I'm meant to hear this," he recalls thinking, "and I'm not meant just to hear it and do nothing."

His parents were elderly and in poor health, and he had been looking for meaningful ways to honor them. He pledged toward the restoration and began bringing others into the project.

When the scribe, Gad Sebbag, examined the scroll, he found fine parchment and lettering. The text on the entire Torah, however, was red. Jewish law requires the letters of a Torah to be black, and over the decades the ink had faded through shades of brown to a reddish hue, a

condition known as chaludah. All 304,805 letters needed attention.

Restoring them meant tracing the hand of the original scribe, whose strokes, spacing and layout remained visible in the faded ink.

On August 30, 2026, the community gathered to complete the restoration. They screened the documentary "Saved from the Shoah: The Hammerschlag Family Torah Returns," Hammerschlag filled in the final letter, and the congregation sang, danced and raised the scroll high in the Jewish tradition of hagbah. Its first formal reading came on Rosh Hashanah, when Hammerschlag was called for the third aliyah.

TORAH RESCUED AFTER 80 YEARS

In May 2015, Dr. George Leventon and his wife, Marge, traveled to Russia to help recover and restore Torah scrolls that had been kept out of Jewish communal ownership since the early years of Soviet persecution. In their Moscow hotel, Marge unrolled the one that would eventually reach the Jewish community of Bellaire, Texas.

An initial restoration followed in 2016, with further work in 2024 to prepare it for regular synagogue use. George restored the badly dried wooden rollers himself, Marge designed its mantle, and friends contributed two crowns and a yad.

On Oct. 27, 2024, as the community marked a year since Oct. 7, the congregation formally dedicated it as the Am Yisrael Chai Torah. Rabbi Yossi Zaklikofsky, co-director of the Chabad center, recalled the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.

"This Torah, like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, seemed lifeless for decades," he said, before being restored "word by word, letter by letter."

Esty Zaklikofsky, who co-directs the center with her husband, said the name reflected what the community was living through.

"At the time, everybody was very focused on the hostages," she said. "It really felt like this Torah had itself been held hostage for approximately 80 years. It wasn't being used as a Torah is meant to be used, and here we were, decades later, with the Torah restored and everybody celebrating."

WHAT IS GEMATRIA?

Torah can generally be interpreted on four levels: literal, allegorical, homiletic and esoteric. Gematria, which involves each Hebrew letter having a numerical value, is allegorical. When Hebrew words or phrases have the same Gematria, this alludes to the inner connection between the two. For instance, one of G-d's names, "Elokim," has the same Gematria as "hateva," meaning nature. When "Elokim" is used in Scripture, it represents G-d's presence within nature.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Freely translated and adapted

Rosh Chodesh, Marcheshvan, 5743 [1982]

To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere,
G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

Coming from the month of Tishrei... and taking into consideration the familiar saying to the effect that "as one prepares himself for the journey, so one proceeds," which is associated with the well known customs of proclaiming as Simchas Torah ends, "and Jacob went his way,"

Meaning that inasmuch as a Jew, every Jew, is, of course, a member of Kehilas Yaakov (the Community of Jacob), is now about to set out on "his way," going into the "ordinary" months of the year that are not "abundant with festivals," but are largely taken up with matters of earning a livelihood and mundane affairs, this is the time to remind him that "his way" is the way of Yaakov as it has been designated by G-d, namely, the way of G-d, the way of "All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven," as behooves a descendant of Yaakov;

Considering further that although all Jews have the same task and purpose in life - complete dedication to the service of G-d, as our Sages expressed it: "I was created to serve my Creator," yet, coming down to actual conduct they are divided into three categories: men, women, and children (of pre-Bar-Mitzvah and pre-Bas Mitzvah age). Hence, this is reflected in the resolutions which have been adopted by them respectively, during Tishrei for the entire new year.

In light of all above, and also in view of the fact that a resolution made jointly by several persons, and more so by many people, in congregation, is more certain to be carried out with greater hatzlocho [suc-cess] and in the fullest measure by each one, man and woman, I take the liberty of making the following suggestion and request, hoping that it will be acted upon:

It would surely be "right and proper and good

and fitting" that "the heads of the people together with the tribes of Israel" everywhere gather together as soon as possible - men separately, as well as women and children separately (the children under their respective counselors, of course) in order to reaffirm and, especially, to decide upon the proper ways and means of carrying out in actual reality and in the fullest measure, the good resolutions which each had made during the auspicious month of Tishrei, beginning with Rosh Hashono and in the propitious subsequent days, as well as to supple-ment those resolutions, if necessary,

The resolutions relating to speech, thought (these "too" are known to G-d), and certainly actions, since action is the essential thing: the resolutions made for the entire year, may it bring good and blessing to us and all our Jewish people.

It is surely unnecessary to underscore that in regard to good resolutions and good intentions there is always the assurance that G-d helps carry them out, and, indeed, even better and sooner than one expected -

Especially if these gatherings will be associated with, and continuous to, one of the daily prayers, together with words of Torah at the opening of the gathering, and with a donation to Tzedoko [charity] during the proceedings or at the conclusion:

For then will be "brought into" the gathering the "three things on which the world stands Torah, prayer and acts of benevolence; beginning with one's self, the so-called "small world," and on to the "world" in the ordinary sense, the world in which one lives, which is in need of a very, very strong blessing from the Creator and Master of the world that it should be a world that stands firmly, and not, G-d forbid, a world that shakes and stumbles etc., particularly as of recent times.

To conclude with blessings: May G-d grant Hatzlocho that the "writing and sealing for good" and the "sealing for good" which everyone received in the month of Tishrei, should materialize in the fullest measure, in the kind of good that is revealed and obvious, throughout the coming months and days, bringing good and blessing to us and all our people, to the extent of "open wide your mouth, (state all your desires), and I shall fulfill them,"

And soon indeed bring the realization of the main and essential blessing - the true and complete Geulo (Redemption) through Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

With esteem and blessing for Hatzlocho and for good tidings, in all above -

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The birth of a Jewish child brings joy not only to his parents and extended family but to the entire Jewish people, for it signifies a step closer to the coming of Moshiach. The

Talmud states that Moshiach will not arrive until "all the souls in guf" (the storehouse in which they await their descent into the physical world) have been born. The birth of a Jewish baby therefore hastens the Redemption and brings closer the blessings of the Messianic Era.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 25 Iyar, 5743-1983)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.

From the Archives

The Chabad Rebbes taught that Shabbat Bereishit is a special day that has an influence on the entire year. In fact, a Jew's conduct on Shabbat Bereishit determines his conduct throughout the entire year to come.

Why Shabbat Bereishit? Because the foundation of a Jew's service the whole year long is the perpetual remembrance of "In the beginning G-d created."

G-d created the world from absolute nothingness, and continues to create it every second anew. The miracle of creation wasn't a one-time event, but an ongoing miracle by which each individual creation is constantly being sustained.

The world doesn't exist by virtue of its own right. The only reason it continues to exist is that G-d chooses to recreate it every minute.

A Jew may sometimes feel that keeping Torah and mitzvot is difficult. So many problems and obstacles threaten to hinder his Divine service! But when he reminds himself that "In the beginning G-d created," that G-d is perpetually creating the world and preventing it from falling back into nothingness this very minute, he will come to understand that nothing can deter him from serving the Creator. As every creature receives its vitality directly from G-d, nothing has the power to prevent him from observing G-d's commandments.

When a Jew thinks about "In the beginning G-d created," his personal concerns will soon be forgotten. He will realize that G-d is the one true Source of everything, and that only good can come from Him. And in that way he will merit to receive G-d's blessings in all of his endeavors.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה'י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



Published by
Lubavitch Youth Organization
1408 President St, Brooklyn, NY, 11213
phone 718 778 6000

Chairman
Director
Publishing Director
Program Director
Secretary
Administrator
Layout
Associate Editor
Chairman Editorial Comm.
Rebbe photo

Rabbi David Raskin
Rabbi Shmuel Butman
Rabbi Yosef Y. Butman
Rabbi Kasriel Kastel
Rabbi Moshe P. Goldman
Rabbi Shlomo Friedman
Rivky Laufer
David Y. B. Kaufmann
Rabbi Nissen Mangel
S. Roumani

L'Chaim contains words from sacred literature. Please do not deface or discard.
All contents © 2026 by L.Y.O. ISSN 1050 0480
L'Chaim Subscriptions
For a one year regular or gift subscription, send \$55, payable to LYO (\$60 elsewhere) to: L'Chaim, 1408 President St, Bklyn, NY, 11213
Please call our office before sending in any subscriptions.
Learn about Moshiach
Visit www.moshiach.com or call (718) 953 6100