





## BACKGROUND ON THE TORAH

The word Torah is derived from a root that means teaching or instruction. The term Torah refers to the book(s) of the Torah or the Torah scroll. A Torah scroll consists of 304,805 letters. While several vowel systems were introduced before 250 AD, the Torah has always been written as a consonantal text without vowels.

The Torah scroll is read from beginning to end by *parsha* weekly on Saturdays (the *Shabbat*) in synagogues. The readings are chanted by a cantor and/or the rabbi and members of the congregation participate by offering blessings.

## QUICK FACTS

### Preparation of the skins

- The skins are also called parchment, sheets, membrane, yurial and k'laf
- The skins are made into a thin layer called parchment. The thinner skins are called vellum.
- The skins come from a kosher animal
- During Talmudic times, salt water and barley were sprinkled on the skins which were then soaked in gallnut juice (*afatsa*). They even used dog's dung.
- In modern times, the skins are dipped in clear water for two days then soaked in limewater for nine days to remove the hair. Then it is stretched on a wooden drying frame and scraped dry and pressed. Then it is sanded it until it becomes a flat and smooth.
- Skins prepared for use in a Torah scroll may not be used for anything else
- A scroll may necessitate 80 or more animal skins
- After the sheets are used they are sewn together with string made from the leg sinews of kosher animals (called *giddin*)

### Copying the text

- The ink was a blend of powdered gall nuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum arabic, and water – not carbon-based) so they don't erode the writing surface

- The ink must be black and is typically prepared in small quantities as fresh ink tends to be darker and lasts longer without fading.
- Each letter of the Torah scroll is written with great care following specific patterns
- No letter is allowed to touch another. If a mistake is made while writing the name of God the sofer must ritually discard the skin and start with a new one
- It takes up to a year to produce a Torah scroll
- ...a series of tiny pinholes can be seen on either side of the text. Using the pinholes a grid was created with a very dull knife.
- The letters appear right underneath the lines – as though they were hanging down from the line. It looks upside down to us, but this is how the lines were written when the scrolls were created. Today, we write on top of the lines.
- Where the letters are made large, it is indicated by a dot that there may be some question about the specific word, or that a correction is needed. A large letter may also introduce a new or very important section.
- You can see wax dripping that come from reading by candlelight.

## **THE LODZ TORAH**

This is an extraordinary Torah scroll from Germany, or perhaps Poland, composed between the late 15c and the early 16c but retaining a number of late-medieval and unrecorded scribal practices. A powerful witness to the living preservation of God's word through the darkest times in history and shows the loving and careful attention to correcting the text over time and conserving it for future generations. It was the greatest spiritual legacy that one generation left for the next.

Few scrolls have preserved the unique traditions found in this Lodz Torah scroll. It is one of the rarest scrolls in existence.

### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

- Skin-Type: Calf skin parchment as traditionally prepared by Ashkenazi soferim (scribes) finely finished in a natural cream color.
- Height: 22 3/8"

- Text height: 18” or 45.72cm
- Scroll length: 72’ ¼” or 22.098 m
- Sheets: 36
- Columns: 115
- Sewing Style: Tightly sewn with an unusual method of leather strips fitted through the skins, perpendicular to the seams for extra security.
- Condition: Re-inking throughout, where cracked, chipped or faded letters were copied over with a dark ink.

### **PALEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION**

- Kabbalistic or Late-Medieval Scribal Aspects: There are numerous spiral and wrapped letters—some that were erased and corrected.
- Provenance and Date: Germany, or perhaps Poland, late 15c or early 16c.

### **HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION**

This Lodz Torah scroll was composed between the late 15c and the early 16c in Germany, or perhaps Poland, its skins are extremely refined likely created in a poor community and it was meticulously cared for (as opposed to replacing it), which resulted in preserving scribal traditions that may otherwise have been lost over time. The variations speak to medieval traditions that are preserved in this text and relate to how it was composed but not to its content. This is an important distinction.

The Lodz scroll was very carefully fashioned and composed and was meticulously corrected over time. Alterations to the text demonstrate the great lengths scribes went to ensure the integrity of the hand-copying process.

The scroll was composed in a region where Jews suffered severe persecution in late medieval times.

1. Those who cherished and preserved this scroll looked to its text for hope and inspiration during the Black Death and almost certainly witnessed the horrific backlash of persecution that resulted in the death of thousands of Jews who were blamed for the plague.
2. Those who read from this scroll certainly heard of Luther and the Reformation

Witnessed the persecution against Jews that resulted from misguided eschatological exegesis by some Christians that the Jews killed Jesus. Yet this scroll survived.

3. The Lodz scroll could tell the story of the decline in faith in the so-called Enlightenment, an emergent disregard for the Hebrew Bible which resulted, starting in Germany, with a rejection of the authenticity and historical reliability of the very writings preserved in this scroll.
4. This scroll survived the darkest chapter in history – the Nazi atrocities against the Jews – the Holocaust.
5. As is often the case, we do not know how the Lodz scroll survived all the above persecution against the Jews, their faith and scriptures, apart from God's intercession.
6. The Lodz scroll was carried by post-WWII immigrants to Israel and was sold to an unnamed scroll dealer who, in turn, provided desperately needed capital to the sojourners for a new start in life.

### **TORAH SCROLL PUNCTUATION**

“Codex Leningrad was able to have vowel points because it was a codex, and not governed by the strict laws of a ritual scroll.”

“...the scrolls were not used for Torah study, but only for reading in religious ceremonies.”

Since the Torah forbids us to add anything to it, we may not use a voweled scroll. We should, however, understand that the division of verses and that the cantillation have been transmitted from Sinai to this day as an oral tradition.” (Jewish Encyc., vol. 10, ‘Punctuation’)

“Aaron ben Asher and his academy of Masorites who lived in Tiberias in the 9th century. Once the punctuation, vowels and trope became standardized, a guild known as the nakdanim or punctuators developed. It was their job to accurately apply the signs to humashim.” (Drew Mazanec, “Torah Scrolls and Punctuation”, Email, October 12, 2013, amazanec@gmail.com)