



Rabbi David Castiglione of Temple Adat Shalom assists as Sofer Rabbi Alberto I. Attia writes some of the first letters in Adat Shalom's in-progress Sefer Torah.

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A Torah for Life

Temple Adat Shalom celebrates its double *chai* anniversary by commissioning the writing of its own Sefer Torah

The year 2011 is a double celebration at Temple Adat Shalom in Poway. That's because this year (Feb. 14, to be exact) marks the 36th anniversary of the incorporation of the Reform synagogue (first called Bernardo Jewish Community) back in 1974. In Hebrew, the number 18 means *chai*, or life. Double that to equal 36, and naturally, a 36th anniversary is a double *chai* and something to be celebrated with twice the joy.

The year-long celebration kicked off the weekend of Feb. 25 with a special Shabbat service that drew 500 people, a gala the next night that drew 160 and honored the shul's founding members, and a barbecue lunch that Sunday for the entire congregation, says Howard Levin, gala co-chair with Steven Wizmar. The celebration continues with anniversary-specific projects and classes for K-10 religious school students throughout this past school year and into the upcoming one. The ultimate activity observing the congregation's special anniversary, though, comes in the form of the commissioning of Sofer Rabbi Alberto I. Attia to write a Sefer Torah for the congregation.

According to the Book of Deuteronomy, the final obligation of the Jewish people's covenant with God is to write a Torah scroll, and in Jewish tradition, any person who writes a letter in a Sefer Torah, or supports another doing so, fulfills a once-in-a-lifetime obligation. What better way to honor a double *chai* anniversary, then, than by commissioning the writing of the Adat Shalom Sefer Torah?

Even the shul's religious school students are contributing to the process, says Susan Cohn, Adat Shalom's religious school director: they're meeting in class with Sofer Attia to learn about the significance of writing the Sefer Torah and working on age-appropriate projects related to Torah writing; working with their families in a program this fall to complete a program called Climbing the Tree of Life Through Doing Good Deeds; and even working with a weaver to make the wimpel for the new Torah.

"To every Torah scroll there is a history," wrote Rabbi David Castiglione to his congregants at the project's outset. "Unique to every Torah scroll's history are the legacies and the stories

of all who have touched and been touched by its teaching and sacred role...As we mark our double *chai* anniversary, we have reached a time when we as a temple can add the story of our own community's history to theirs with a Sefer Torah born of our own experience and dreams. From the very first letter to the last, writing our scroll will deepen our connection to God; to our people [and] Israel; to the communal legacies we steward; and to our children and to our children's children through the generations."

It was those very first letters of Genesis that Rabbi Castiglione and Cantor Lori Frank wrote with the help of Sofer Attia during the February anniversary weekend, says Rayna Colton, co-chair with Jason Glovinsky of the Torah project. Congregants will have the chance to write their own letters Oct. 23 of this year and Feb. 12 of next year, in addition to a future day of learning and to help sew the Israeli parchment together. Finally, on May 6, 2012, more than a year since the first ink touched the parchment, the congregation will have a final celebration to mark the completion of the Sefer Torah.

In the midst of celebration over its new Torah, though, Rabbi Castiglione reminds congregants that the shul couldn't have made it to 36 without the people who have called it home:

"Our congregation was built, is sustained and grows stronger with each new day because of the hundreds of hidden *tzadikim* (righteous) who walk through our doors every week — Jews who do what they do because it is the right thing to do." ✪

WHERE TO FIND THEM

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