

March 1, 2018

Guardians of the Torah



Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

I am sure you are familiar with the *Memorial Scroll* we have at Hillcrest Jewish Center. The Memorial Scroll is the Torah scroll we take out from the Ark four times a year, during Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, and the last days of Pesach and Shavuot, when we recite Yizkor. You may recognize the Memorial Scroll because it has a tallit as its Torah mantle. It is very fitting that the Memorial Scroll is displayed when we remember our loved ones and those who perished during the Shoah, since the Memorial Scroll itself was rescued from the Shoah.

Memorial Scroll # 327 from the Kolin-Nymburk community, in the Czech Republic, is the scroll Hillcrest Jewish Center received from the *Memorial Scrolls Trust* in 1990, over 25 years ago.

It is one of 1,564 sacred Scrolls which arrived at Kent House, the home of Westminster Synagogue in London in February 1964, after being rescued from the hands of the Nazis who "collected" Torah Scrolls and other ritual objects with the intention of creating a museum of the "extinguished Jewish race."

The *Memorial Scrolls Trust*, decided to find new homes for the 1,564 scrolls as a way to make a statement that Torah scrolls belong in houses of worship and not in a museum.

"To those who were entrusted with the Scrolls, they were a symbol of hope after a time of sorrow, and an intimate link with those synagogues and their congregations destroyed by the Nazis. Over the decades since the Scrolls arrived, the shelves on which they were so gently laid have grown emptier, as one after another they have

been sent out to be restored to their proper place in Jewish life. After fifty years, when most of the Scrolls have found new homes, the Trust is charged with the next phase of its work. It must ensure that those synagogues who have received scrolls are aware of what they have, that they investigate the scrolls' original homes or what is left of them, and hand on to the next generation the precious legacy they have acquired."

You may wish to learn more about the trust and its meaningful mission at www.memorialscrollstrust.org.

"The long journey of the Scrolls is not finished. They have a role to play in enabling those who care for them today to remember their past and to look ahead to their future, to play a part in ensuring that the terrible events which brought them to London and then onward to new homes, can never be repeated." I hope that this article will help create this awareness and that next time you come to shul, you will go to the wall on the right of the bimah, if you haven't already done so, and read the plaque that tells the story of Memorial Scroll # 327 entrusted to us.

However, this article would not be complete if I did not invite you to reflect on what it means to be "entrusted with the Torah," or paraphrasing a well-known children's movie, on what it means to be "*Custodians of the Scroll*."

The Nazis, may their name be obliterated, not only sought to destroy the physical Torah scrolls or to confine them to a museum, but they wanted to extinguish the flame of Judaism as well. 6,000,000 of our brothers and sisters perished in the Shoah. However, Judaism is alive and thriving, partly because of the State of Israel and partly because of all of us, the true "*Custodians of the Scroll*," the true "*Guardians of the Torah*."

To remember the Holocaust and to display Memorial Scroll # 327 is only part of our mission, both as individual Jews and as Hillcrest Jewish Center. In order to do true justice to the mission assigned to us by the *Memorial Scrolls Trust*, we need to become true "Guardians of the Torah," by making our homes and our shul, a place of Torah study, of prayer, and of lovingkindness. After all, Judaism will survive not in a museum or in a Holy Ark, but in the hearts, minds and actions of those who practice and live it every day.

So next time you see Memorial Scroll # 327 or read the plaque, think of those who used the scroll before, try to connect to their Jewish lives, and make a commitment to live your own Jewish life in a way that will honor their memory.

With many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan