

## THE MESSIEST TORAH A HIGH HOLIDAYS CHILDREN'S STORY

By Rabbi Robert B. Barr

The High Holidays were drawing near and the Rabbi needed to prepare. One of the things the Rabbi needed to do to get ready for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was to check the Torah and practice chanting the Torah Portion.

About a week or two before the holidays arrived, the Rabbi decided it was time to go in the sanctuary and practice. When she got there she walked onto the bimah,<sup>1</sup> walked over to the ark, and carefully opened the ark doors. This was a big congregation with a very large ark. The ark held many many Torahs— not one, not two, not three... but fifteen Torahs.

Each year the Rabbi would select a different Torah to read from. Since this was the Rabbi's 15th year, there was only one Torah left. It was a Torah the Rabbi had never really seen up close - because this Torah was rather small and sat at the very back of the ark.

Actually, the Rabbi had to struggle to even reach the Torah; she had to stretch and extend her arm back as far as she could to grab hold of it and bring it out. When the Rabbi finally grabbed it, she noticed that the handles of the Torah were rather sticky— like there was syrup on them or something. Not too concerned, the rabbi pulled the Torah out and as she did, she noticed that the cover of the Torah was all bunched up and was dirty.

The rabbi couldn't figure this out at all. The ark and the Torahs were supposed to be cleaned regularly and all the other Torahs looked okay. It was just this Torah that was a mess. For the next hour or so, the rabbi washed the handles of the Torah, cleaned the cover, got out all of the wrinkles, and then she was finally ready to open the Torah to practice chanting. But the rabbi was in for a surprise.

When she opened the Torah, she couldn't believe what she saw! All of the letters were in the wrong order; she couldn't even read it at all.

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<sup>1</sup> The bimah (pronounced bee-mah) is the raised platform in the sanctuary where the rabbi usually stands.

It was just gobble-dee-gook. So the Rabbi had to stand there for hours, carefully putting all the letters back in the right order.

It took the Rabbi so long to get the letters back that she really didn't have enough time left to practice. So, the Rabbi put the Torah carefully back in place knowing that the Torah was in better shape now. The handles weren't sticky. The cover was clean and wrinkle-free. And now the letters were all in the right places. The Rabbi figured, "I'll come back tomorrow and be able to practice."

So the next morning, when the Rabbi arrived at the Congregation, she went to the sanctuary, walked onto the bimah, opened the ark, and reached to pull out the Torah that she had cleaned. Oy! The rabbi was shocked! The handles of the Torah were stickier than they were the day before, the cover was more messed up, and the letters were scattered everywhere. There were even letters that had fallen off the parchment and into the ark!

"What's going on here?" wondered the Rabbi, now growing a bit angry. Not having time to really investigate, the Rabbi cleaned the Torah again, brushed off the cover, and put the letters back where they belonged. Of course by this time it was late and the Rabbi had to leave again... still not having time to practice the Torah portion.

You'll never guess what happened the next day when the Rabbi arrived at the Congregation ready to practice chanting from the Torah... The Torah was in even worse shape! Now the Torah didn't even have a cover on it, and all the letters had fallen from the parchment. The Rabbi was steamed but she didn't have time to waste, because the High Holidays were only a few days away!

Once again the Rabbi straightened everything up. She got the Torah all put together like it should be, and she put it back in the ark. But this time, the Rabbi decided she had to know what was going on. So instead of leaving, she hid in the back of the sanctuary to see for herself what would happen.

As the Rabbi waited, she began to get tired and started to doze off. But soon she was awakened by the sounds of laughter and play. She could not figure out what was going on. Carefully the rabbi peaked over the chairs, and she saw the strangest sight. The ark doors were

open and the Torahs were dancing and playing together— they seemed to be having a wonderful time.

Now the Rabbi stood up and asked, “what’s going on here?”

And of course all the Torahs froze. “Come on,” said the Rabbi, “I saw you! You must tell me what’s going on here!”

“We were just having a good time,” said one of the larger Torahs.

“The holidays are here and we are happy and excited. We like to see adults and children come to services— we enjoy being part of celebrating Jewish history”

“That’s great,” said the rabbi. “But what about the little Torah I’m going to chant from? Why is he so sticky and his cover so dirty and his letters all over the place?!? The rest of you look fine!”

The little Torah peeked out from behind the larger ones, answering “it’s just that I’m sorta a messy kind of Torah.”

“What do you mean?” asked the Rabbi.

“Well Rabbi,” said the Torah, “have you ever walked into another Rabbi’s office whose desk is very neat? Like all the papers are filed, all the books are put away, there are no coffee cups anywhere, and the office is really neat and clean?”

“Sure,” said the Rabbi. “I’ve been in offices like that.”

“And now think about your office,” said the little Torah. “With books and papers everywhere, and so much stuff on the floors that it is hard to get to your desk! And then there are all those coffee cups and pop cans everywhere. You barely have any room to work at your desk because of the mess you have there.”

“You are right,” said the Rabbi, “my office could be a little neater.”

“A *little* neater?!” laughed the little Torah, “your office could be a *lot*

neater. And you see Rabbi, I'm like you— I don't put my things away when I'm done playing. I forget where I left my letters. I don't wipe up after I spill something..."

"Hmmm," said the Rabbi, "it seems that you and I have a lot more in common than I thought. So what are we going to do about it?" asked the Rabbi.

"Nothing!" answered the little Torah. "I've always been messy and so have you. There's nothing we can do— it's just the way it is."

"Nope," said the Rabbi. "It doesn't work that way. This is the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah). That means it's a time for us to be honest and look at ourselves and see if there are ways that we can make the New Year better." The Rabbi continued, "I think that both of us have things we can do, and I think that together we can help each other do things like being neater, cleaning up our rooms, and remembering to put our things away"

"That doesn't sound like any fun!" whined the little Torah.

"Maybe it's not as fun as making a mess," said the Rabbi, "but, it is the right thing to do. Just like we need to treat ourselves and those around us with respect, we have to treat the world in which we live with respect as well. Part of that means taking responsibility for ourselves, our toys, our books, our rooms, and the places we live. This is a good time for us to think about this," continued the Rabbi, "because this is the New Year— a time for change and new beginnings. Maybe we can help each other."

"That's a great idea!" said the little Torah. "If we help each other and work together, maybe together we can do a better job in the year to come."

The Rabbi looked at her watch and realized how late it was. "Wow!" said the Rabbi, "I've got to go home and I still haven't had a chance to practice. Services are tomorrow. If I don't practice my chanting there is no way that I'm going to be able to do it!"

"Don't worry," said the little Torah, "I'll help you!"

The next morning, when the Rabbi removed the Torah from the ark during services, the Torah smiled at the Rabbi and the Rabbi smiled at the Torah. As the Rabbi opened the Torah to begin chanting, the Torah (in a very quiet voice so that only the Rabbi could hear) began to chant. The Rabbi could follow along without anyone knowing the Torah was helping. And that Rosh Hashanah people thought the Rabbi chanted better than she had ever chanted before. And the Rabbi thought she had as well— for this year she had the help of a very special friend and she knew that it was the beginning of a very special year.

As the Rabbi returned the Torah to the Ark, she winked at the little Torah and said, “I think this is the beginning of a very special friendship. L’shanah Tovah! Happy New Year!

THE END

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