

The Sefer Torahs and their respective carriers are lined up. I feel joy and a sense of discomfort being “shoved together” with a precious item, it is like that a lot today. A switch in emotions to either sides of the spectrum, it is easy to flip with just one glance around the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust Reunion. A gathering of 70-100 Torahs from the Tri-State Area, and several hundred guests at Temple Emmanuel NYC on a brilliant spring day in 2024.

There are prayers of praise, of grace, but none takes our Beth David Reform Congregation Czech Torah to a different place more than The El Malei Rachamim prayer for me. It is known as the Memorial Prayer for the Departed. The Torahs and all guests are asked to rise and the chanting begins. The prayer asks G-d for protection over the souls of the departed and is traditionally recited during the funeral, going up to the grave of the departed, Yiskor remembrance days, and other occasions on which the memory of the dead is recalled. Standing with the physical Torah weight and my emotions, I close my eyes. The Torahs in this Synagogue have survived, revived and are living on in so many ways to represent l’dor v’dor. I see the prayer in a different light as it presents a safe space for all the Czech Scrolls and serves to teach a message that is more profound than I have words.

Then the words come:

O god full of compassion who dwells on high grant perfect rest beneath the sheltering wings of your divine presence, among the holy and pure who shine as the brightness of the firmament (names of the Czech Scrolls)

Who have made an eternal home in our Ark.

Author of mercy, bring this Torah under the shelter of your wings and let its soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life. May the inheritance of this Torah in this Synagogue be its repose as it is in peace and let us say Amen.

Nevertheless, we continue to put one foot in front of the other and proceed with the procession of the reunion of Torahs, Colors, Velvet, Aytzim moving high! The Torahs have not been together since 2019 and at that point, it was a time that they came together for the first time since 1964, from Thousands of hours away, originally Czech Torahs, all from the same place. The Torah’s ages dating from the 1200s to the early 20th century in this Czech region seem impossible to comprehend. The scrolls steadfastly bore witness to the unthinkable while internally D’avening, week after week, in hiding, they survived. Restored and loaned by the Memorial Scrolls Trust, Beth David was honored in the late 1980s to receive a numbered Czech Scroll.

We walk in this magnificent Temple, once again, humbled and surrounded with the greatness of being in the room with the Torahs and the survivors for the second time. Five years later. In 2019, life has changed for all of us. Pandemic, Shiva, War, Hostages, Ukraine, I can go on and on.

In 2024 the very same Torah was heavier for me, it was crying out with its own mixed emotions. Our Scroll was joyous to see Torah covers new and old and profoundly saddened in the shrinking number of people attending and knowing what it knew.

As I slowly process with our Torah, our "JUDE" star, from the Camps, sewn with such love, on to our Torah cover beckons the depth of the soul of anyone who has lost someone during the years of the Holocaust. From the audience, hands, tallisim, kippot, reach out, touch or kiss the cover of the Torah. I stop and dignify their memory, their moment. We are the protectors of the only Torah that is powerful like that. Time stands still as I am find myself being so grateful to the Torah for giving me strength to hold it strong, to carry it proudly, and return it with humility to its home in the Beth David Reform Congregation Ark where it watches and teaches. L'dor vah dor. May we continue to find the teachers to commit to Jewish education and never forget.