

SLICE OF LIFE

First Sefer Torah Inscribed in Northern Nevada



The Cunin triplets (r. - l.) Chana, Moshe and Rochel by Frank X. Mullen Jr.

On Monday, a scribe in Reno began writing Hebrew letters on a parchment scroll in a manner handed down from the time of Moses.

"In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the Earth," the scribe wrote.

They were the first words of the first *Sefer Torah* to be inscribed in northern Nevada. A *Sefer Torah* is a hand-written scroll of the first five books of Moses, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, and takes as long as a year to complete.

"It's painstaking work; it must be exact and every letter must be kosher," said Rabbi Moshe Liberow, a *sofer*, or scribe, from Colorado Springs, Colo. "There are 304,805 letters in 245 columns and all must be perfect. There are about 5,000 laws on how to write a Torah."

The scroll will be sent to Israel for completion and will be returned to Reno in about a year. It will be dedicated as the Torah for the local Chabad, a community of Orthodox Jews. The inscribing of the Torah came at a celebration of the third birthday of three children: Moshe, Chana and Rochel Cunin.

The triplets were born to Rabbi Mendel and

Sarah Cunin, the leaders of the Chabad of Northern Nevada. At the celebration at Bartley Ranch Park's events center, Moshe had his hair cut for the first time. The ritual signifies that when a boy turns 3 years old, he begins a new stage of development as a Jew, his father said.

Moshe then ceremonially licked drops of honey placed on Hebrew letters, an act that signified "learning how sweet are the words of the Torah," his father said.

For their third birthday, Moshe's sisters celebrated their first Sabbath candle-lighting on Friday. Cunin said he hopes his children will become educators and bring light to the world.

The guests exclaimed, "*Mazel tov!*" which means "Congratulations, happiness to all," and community members came to the scribe to participate in the writing of the Torah.

Harvey Lerner, the triplets' maternal grandfather, said the community rejoices at the beginning of the project.

"It's wonderful to participate in the writing of the Torah," he said. "Ultimately, it is the community's Torah."

Liberow said the writing of the scroll is not just important to Jews, but to everyone.

"Torah means instruction," he said. "It is a blessing, a showing of a blessing. It unites all humanity."

He said another Chabad scribe will finish the document, writing with a turkey quill on more than 60 sheets of parchment made from cowhide. When complete, the finished scroll will be as long as half a football field.

The Torah then will be checked and double-checked to make sure every word, every letter, every stroke is perfect.

"But if there is a mistake found, it can be corrected," Liberow said. "One tiny mistake

won't invalidate all of the work. It can be fixed. God is strict, but He is not cruel."

Although the holy book is written for the local Chabad, it is not exclusive to orthodox Jews, Rabbi Cunin said.

"We consider every Jew in northern Nevada as part of our community," he said. "Everyone is welcome, all of the time." ■

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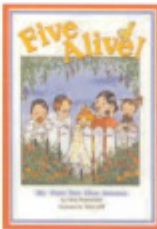
Ed's note: In 1981, the Lubavitcher Rebbe established the "*Sefer Torah Campaign*," urging all Jews to acquire a "letter" in a Torah scroll. "The obligation to write a *Sefer Torah* is the culmination of all the 613 *mitzvot* [commandments]. It is thus clear that acquiring a letter in one of the universal Torah scrolls now being written hastens the culmination of the exile," the Rebbe said.

Since the campaign began, Chabad-Lubavitch Centers have initiated the writing of Torah scrolls to be used in their local communities. The Rebbe's emissaries encourage Jews from all walks of life to purchase letters for themselves, family members and even departed loved ones in these Torah scrolls of Jewish unity. In addition, special Torah scrolls for children (four to date) are written in the old city of Jerusalem. Children under the age of Bar and Bat Mitzva can "purchase" a letter in one of these children's Torah scrolls by sending the equivalent of \$1 U.S. (in local currency) to: Children's Sefer Torah, P.O.Box Kfar Chabad, Israel, 72915 or via internet at kidstora.org. Children receive a beautiful certificate inscribed with their name and the location of their letter. See an upcoming issue of *L'Chaim* for stories connected to these special Children's Sefer Torahs.

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