

One of the most beautiful lines we have written in the Torah is the Shema. The Shema is with us all the time. We say it three times a day; it is written inside every mezuzah scroll, and it happens to be one of the first prayers a young child learns.

shema in hebrew

Become a scribe and copy your own Shema.



The Whole-School Holiday Curriculum

Shavuot VI: The Art of the Sofer

by Carrie Hearshen



The Art of the Sofer

During this time of year we remember the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. When we received the Torah on Sinai, it was told to us by Moses, but now we read about the Jewish people's history from a scroll.

Many of us know the Torah by touching it, reading from it, or seeing it put into or taken out of the ark. We notice its beauty. However, when you stopped and taken time to notice its craftsmanship, the process taken in order to write the scroll, what materials and used and who wrote it?



A *sofer* ("scribe" in English), is a specially trained writer. The *sofer* pictured here is Eric Ray z"l. Being a *sofer* has been a job primarily held by men; however, some women have begun to take on this mitzvah. A *sofer* must (1) know how to write all the Hebrew letters, (2) know the laws of how the letters should be written, (3) know the Torah and understand what he or she is writing, and (4) a *sofer* must have a connection to God. Each time a *sofer* begins writing a Torah, he or she must say a blessing.

Why do you think it is mandatory to say a blessing before beginning to write?

A *sofer* will usually take about one year to write all 305,805 letters of the Torah. Scribes work diligently and patiently, careful not to make any mistakes. *Sofrim* are not allowed to write anything by memory. They must copy each letter from an existing source. In order for tradition to be preserved, all Torah scrolls must be identical. No errors can occur. Because of this, many *sofrim* will say each letter aloud as they write the Torah. In addition, many *sofrim* will leave blanks for the name of God and then fill them in later, as one must go to the *mikvah* (ritual bath) before writing the name of God.



For Review Only

The Materials and the Creation:

The Torah is written on a *klaf*, parchment made from the skin of a kosher animal such as cow or deer. When the *sofer* has finished writing the Torah, the pieces of *klaf* are sewn together using twisted tendons (sinew) from the thigh of a kosher animal. The text is written with a quill from a kosher bird; the ink is made from all-natural products.

In Judaism we make sure to respect the animal that we use. How do we show this when we kill an animal and when we use parts of an animal for a specific purpose?
