



Czech Memorial Torah Scroll No. 1518

Held in joint trust by
The University of Houston
The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation
—Houston Hillel—

Rescued from the HOLOCAUST
by the Memorial Scrolls Committee,
Westminster Synagogue, London

THE TORAH, the holiest book in Judaism, comprises the five books of Moses—*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. The torah is not a printed document but a scroll of 80 panels of parchment (sheepskin or cowhide) sewn together with animal sinew. No artificial materials may be used in the creation of a torah. It is fastened to wooden dowels that enable readers to advance the panels. The torah is written in Hebrew letter-by-letter by a scribe (a *sofer*) in a centuries-old tradition, utilizing a sharpened feather, *i.e.*, a quill pen. The torah is comprised exactly of 304,805 letters with 42 lines per panel. Ink for writing the torah on the parchment must be made of natural materials—a blend of powdered gall nuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum arabic, and water providing for a deep, black color.

The Holocaust torah (No. 1518) is protected in memory of the 600-year-old Jewish Community of Prague and the Pinkas Synagogue. The Pinkas Synagogue was founded in 1352 with continuous worship until 1939 when the Nazis forbade Divine Service and closed synagogues during the devastating occupation of Czechoslovakia.

During World War II, torahs of synagogues no longer in use were entrusted to the Prague Jewish Museum and stored in over forty warehouses, some of them deserted Prague synagogues. Prague Jews assigned to the tasks of acquiring and documenting Czech torahs were deported and transported to their death in the Terezin concentration camp.

Torah 1518 is said to be from the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague and is on permanent loan to the University of Houston and Houston Hillel, obtained by the faculty of the University in 1976 on behalf of the student body, with the generous support of patrons of the greater Houston Jewish community.

Torahs gathered under German occupation suffered rips and mutilation. The Prague Holocaust torah reveals multiple leaves with small and large patches, as well as new lettering inscribed, according to tradition by a scribe (*sofer*), enabling its use in religious services on campus. The torah was repaired at the Westminster Synagogue in London.

The torah is kept secure in the Special Collections Reading Room of the M. D. Anderson Library on the University of Houston campus, both in a specially designed cabinet in library archives and, when on exhibit, enclosed in the torah display case.

Donors also funded a red torah mantle, two silver rimonim, a silver breastplate, and a silver pointer. The silver is currently on loan to Houston Hillel for the decoration of torahs used during Sabbath and holiday services.

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