

Groundbreaking Women's Torah coming to San Francisco Bay Area



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The Reconstructionist Community of the Bay Area welcomes the Women's Torah, the first Torah in history to be created and embellished by an international community of women and the first to be sewn together in community. The Torah is the handwritten parchment scroll of the first five books of the bible. All over the world, Jews read and study from the Torah during religious services and other times. The Hebrew letters must be hand-written by a trained scribe on special parchment using special ink and quills. Learning to become a Torah scribe requires painstaking training. Until the [Women's Torah Project](#) (WTP), only men scribed Torahs.

In 2003, the [Kadima Reconstructionist Jewish Community of Seattle](#), WA wanted to commission the first Torah to be scribed by a woman. To do that, Kadima underwrote the training for two of the world's first women Torah scribes. Eventually, six scribes on three continents contributed to the Women's Torah, including Julie Seltzer, who completed a Torah scroll while in residence at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco.

In Jewish tradition, the Torah is treated like a person of great honor and adorned with the finest embellishments. All of the items that are used with the Women's Torah—rollers, belt and clasp, cover, crowns, pointer, bima (altar) cloth, and wine goblet—were also made by women from all over the world, including [San Francisco metal artist Aimee Golant](#), who created the [Torah's crowns](#). Scribes, artists and others associated with the creation of the Women's Torah will offer a variety of programs at several different venues during this groundbreaking Torah's week-long residence in the Bay Area. Most programs will also feature a benefit art sale by WTP artists.

On Wednesday, Feb 22, 2012 from 6:30-8:30 at the [Bureau of Jewish Education Jewish Community Library](#) in San Francisco, co-sponsored by the [Reconstructionist Or Shalom Jewish Community](#), Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman will speak about the 90th anniversary of the first bat mitzvah, when Judith Kaplan, the daughter of the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism became the first woman to publically read from the Torah; Wendy Graff, Director of the WTP, will give her talk, "From Parchment to Parsha," and Aimee Golant will speak about creating the Torah's crowns.

Saturday morning Shabbat services on Feb 25 will be held at [Reconstructionist Congregation Ner Shalom](#) in Cotati. Saturday Mincha (afternoon) and Havdalah (end of Sabbath) services will be held at the [Reconstructionist Keddem Congregation](#) in Palo Alto, followed by a reception. Graff and Golant will speak and will show the Women's Torah Project video.

Renown poet and liturgist [Marcia Falk](#) will read her work on Tuesday evening, Feb 28 at the [Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley](#), co-sponsored by [Or Zarua Reconstructionist Havurah](#). On Wednesday, Feb 29 [Stanford Hillel](#) will host scribe Julie Seltzer, Graff and Golant, from 6:30-9:00 for the final WTP event.

Called, "among the most ambitious recent American synagogue commissions," perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the Women's Torah is that it was sewn together in community. The Torah's scribe usually stitches the 62 parchment panels into one continuous scroll and attaches each end to decorative rollers. For the Women's Torah, however, those tasks were completed by the women, men and children who gathered in Seattle for the celebration of the Women's Torah's completion in October, 2010. The WTP broke ground for women, yes, but it also created a template for community involvement. For those who value community, the Women's Torah Project is the change we wish to see in the world.