

winter • 2007



KADIMA

SEATTLE'S PROGRESSIVE RECONSTRUCTIONIST

JEWISH COMMUNITY

# wtp UpDate

## A look inside the Women's Torah Project

### More Hearts, More Hands!

by Wendy Graff  
Women's Torah Project Chair

*"You Must Be the Change You Wish to See in the World."*  
— Mahatma Gandhi

Something extraordinary happened on the way to creating the first women-scribed Torah. The Women's Torah Project has become an example of Mahatma Gandhi's most inspirational exhortation. It has become the change we wish to see in the world.

The Women's Torah Project embodies community, gender equity, dialogue, creative expression — even respectful disagreement. It has become international and intercultural and interdisciplinary, connecting communities with diverse religious practice, politics and culture. The scroll itself is being written by scribes in three countries and counting. Project supporters range from Orthodox to Jew-Buh, from atheist to pan-denominational. A broad spectrum of rabbis and scholars are keen to offer their insight and support. The Women's Torah Project has raised compelling and intellectually rich questions. Exploring answers to those questions has become as much a part of the Women's Torah Project as scribing the scrolls themselves.

As attendees of a recent workshop on the Women's Torah Project said, "There is no Torah I would rather read from." It will be the change we wish to see.

**“ Project supporters range from Orthodox to Jew-Buh, from atheist to pan-denominational ”**

### Who Can Scribe the Women's Torah?

When Kadima affiliated with the Reconstructionist Federation in the fall of 2005, we were introduced to Values-Based Decision-Making (VBDM). The VBDM process outlines several steps that individuals and communities can use to tackle complex and multifaceted issues. The question of who can scribe the Women's Torah, with regard to both personal and professional qualifications, definitely qualifies.

Our first two *sofrot* are observant in their practice and have received written documentation from their *sofer*-mentors attesting to their readiness and ability to scribe a sefer Torah. The observance practice and training

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# Hi! My Name is Rachel Reichhardt

Just before Rosh Hashanah, we received an email with the bright greeting above. Before the end of her first paragraph, Rachel had outlined her credentials as a certified *soferet* (from the *Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano Marshall T. Meyer*, [www.seminariorabinico.org.ar](http://www.seminariorabinico.org.ar), in Buenos Aires), Senior Jewish Educator (from the Melton Center at Hebrew University of Jerusalem), and a founder of Brazil's first egalitarian congregation.

"Is it possible?...I'm asking because when I read about the project again...at this Elul time, I came to believe that maybe now it is time to [make] true an old dream." Our dream of expanding the number of qualified *sofrot* working on the Women's Torah has come true, too, with the addition of Rachel to the team.

Rachel's journey to sofrut started with her lifelong love of Hebrew letters, first learned in her Orthodox school. She was fortunate to meet with R. Zalman Schachter during one of his visits the egalitarian congregation Rachel helped to establish in Brazil. "From meditation after those meetings, I decided that I wanted to work in scribal arts, which was impossible to do in Brazil." Rachel studied at Pardes in Israel where she wrote her first Megillah Esther. "My teacher was very sweet, but he told me that he wouldn't teach me any more, that he wouldn't

teach me to scribe a mezuzah and wouldn't teach me to scribe the names of God." Soon after, a rabbi at Camp Ramah in Canada asked her to scribe a mezuzah. "I said I couldn't. He said, 'I'm a rabbi and I'm asking you,' although he also said that he could not give me official certification. When I came back to Brazil, a rabbi here said that if the mezuzah is kosher for [that rabbi], then it is kosher for us."

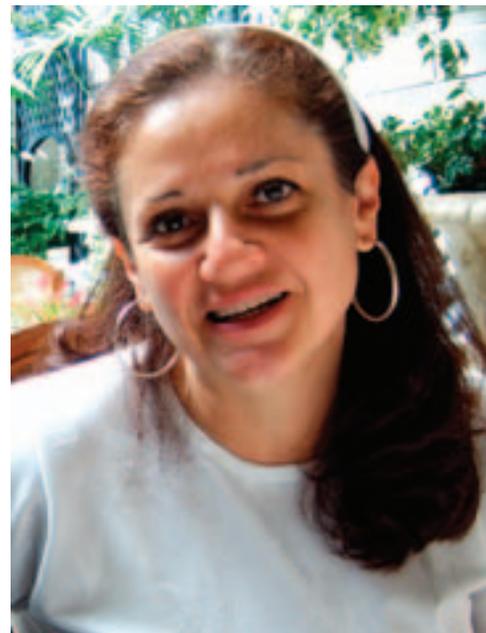
Two years ago, at the World Union of Progressive Judaism Congress in Sao Paulo, the dean of the *Seminario Rabinico*, invited Rachel to study there, which she did under the supervision of the *sofer*. In 2004 she was officially accredited the title

**"My teacher was very sweet, but he told me that he wouldn't teach me any more, that he wouldn't teach me to scribe a mezuzah and wouldn't teach me to scribe the names of God."**

of *soferet* from the Institute Bet Ezra Ha'Sofer of the *Seminario Rabinico*.

Rachel works at

*Comunidade Shalom*, a Conservative congregation with the first Brazilian woman rabbi working in Brazil, as the education coordinator for the b'nei mitzvah program, developing curriculum and assisting the teachers in applying it. She also prepares the b'nei mitzvah students for their Torah readings and teaches adult classes on Kabbalah and other Jewish subjects. According to those who know her, besides being extremely learned in Jewish studies,



Rachel has always been quite active in opening space for woman in the Jewish tradition.

When friends ask Rachel what she did on her summer vacation, which is just about to begin in Brazil, she'll tell them that she started scribing on the Women's Torah. We could not be more thrilled.

If you know someone who would like to receive this newsletter, please pass it along!

# You Can Make it Happen!

**W**e can't all be Torah scribes, but we *can* all be part of creating this first women-scribed Torah by donating generously to the Women's Torah Project. The budget is simple: we pay our scribes first, and we have committed to paying them a wage that honors scribal art, gender pay equity, and Torah. Your contribution goes directly towards this expense.

Donors can also literally be a part of this historic Torah. Any donor is welcome to send in a bit of fabric, as small as an inch by an inch, to be incorporated into the pomegranate seed motif of the Torah mantle being designed and created by Sooze Bloom deLeon Grossman. (Read all about the pomegranate Torah mantle at

[www.womenstorah.com/sooze.html](http://www.womenstorah.com/sooze.html))

We ask that the fabric — a scrap from the hem of a mother's favorite dress, a piece off a baby blanket, a grandmother's doily — be accompanied by the name of the woman or girl being honored. You are welcome to include a bit of information about her, too, if you wish. We will include those names and stories in the documentation of the Women's Torah. (Please, do not send us entire garments, though. We understand that those keepsake items may be hard for you to cut, but they're hard for us to take a scissors to, too!)

It is Kadima's practice not to list donors by amount contributed and it was our conscious decision not to limit fabric donations to those

gifting the project at the most generous levels. This flies in the face of traditional fundraising advice and, we have been told, may cost us a large donor or two. We are, of course, deeply and profoundly grateful to those of you who have given large amounts and to those who have donated again and again. There is absolutely no denying that we whoop with joy when a large check comes in. (Please, feel free to send more of those!) And we feel like old friends with those of you who contribute regularly. We believe that what our supporters, whether large or small donors, one-time givers or regular contributors, want most of all is to see the Women's Torah finished by reflecting, in every way, our most sacred traditions and intention.

## Yes, Count on Me to Make History!

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
( )

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my contribution to underwrite a

- Letter \$36     Word \$54     Verse \$72  
 Aliyah \$144     Premium \$540+     Chapter \$1,080  
 Parsha \$1,620     Book \$10,800     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to sponsor a particular segment (such as the letter that starts your child's name, the aliyah from your Bat Mitzvah, or a passage that is particularly meaningful for you):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- My employer has a matching gift program. Enclosed is a gift form.  
 I want my gift to be anonymous. Do not include my name in donor lists.  
 I've enclosed a check payable to Kadima, with "Women's Torah Project" on the memo.  
 I prefer to pay monthly (pledges of \$120 and above). Please bill me.  
 I prefer to charge my     Visa     MasterCard

Acct # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- Please charge the entire amount now.     Please charge me monthly.  
 I'd like to know more about the Kadima community. Please add me to your mailing list.

Please mail to:  
**Kadima: Women's Torah Project**  
2366 Eastlake Avenue E, #424  
Seattle, WA 98102

If you would rather make your donation on-line, please go to [www.womenstorah.com/donations.html](http://www.womenstorah.com/donations.html).

# Thank-you Donors

Donors by State • August 2005 - November 2006

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\* Thank you to Marsha Plafkin-Hurwitz and Dan Hurwitz and these donors, who contributed in honor of Marsha and Dan's wedding.

• Thank you to the donors noted above, who contributed in memory of:

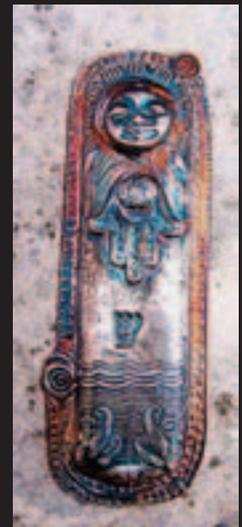
Rae Kudish  
Norma Jean Leff  
Frances Sholin

• Thank you to the donors noted above, who contributed in honor of:

Nathan Benjamin  
Beth Haverim July 8, 2006 B'not  
Mitzvah  
Danica Bornstein  
Michelle Brody & Bill Robinson  
Yanni Epstein  
Aimee Golant  
Rose Golant

Wendy Graff  
Allison Green  
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Kadima 2005-06 B'nei Mitzvah class  
Lee and Molly  
Mona Lefkowitz  
Natalya Shifra McConnell  
Many inspiring Kadima women  
Karen & Richard Meeks  
Marla M. Meislin-Dietrich  
Bea Nahon  
Rabbi Sally J. Priesand  
Jonathan Rosenblum  
Rachel Sacks  
Andrea Sher-Leff  
Dr. Helen Strauss  
Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman  
Rita Zeitman

We've done our best to assure that this list is accurate as of November 30, 2006. If we have inadvertently left off, or misspelled, your name, please accept our sincere apologies and contact us at [office@Kadima.org](mailto:office@Kadima.org) so that we can correct the mistake in our next Update.



Andrea Sher-Leff is the artist who is making the wimple clasp for the Women's Torah Project. This Mezuzah above is an example of her beautiful artistry. See more of her Judaica at [www.theredheadedgoddess.com/judaica.html](http://www.theredheadedgoddess.com/judaica.html).

## Scribe Continued from page 1

of other potential *sofrot*, however, varies. After consulting with a number of rabbis, scribes, and other experts in the field, as well as conducting our own research and reviewing our experience, we held a community dialogue, using the VBDM model, to reach consensus on these topics.

The first step in the VBDM process was to identify the questions:

- a) What kind of Torah do we want to produce?
- b) What sphere of practice and observance do we want in our *sofrot*?
- c) What kind of training in *sofrot* do we require of our *sofrot*?

We considered four alternatives and their consequences for both practice and training, ranging from Orthodox and traditional to independent and iconoclastic. We identified relevant bottom-line values of Judaism, inventoried our own values, attitudes and beliefs; and weighed the alternatives against those values.

The process was, and still is, intellectually powerful and inspiring. It brought our community together to consider questions of continuity and community, of historical precedent and *halachah*, of sacred intention and observable piety, of being in the tradition while simultaneously changing it.

We understand that we are part of the chain of Jewish tradition and that this first women-scribed Torah will live beyond this time and our community and thus must be created, as are all *sefiri* Torah, with the highest levels of *kavanah* on the part of everyone associated with its formation. It is incumbent upon us, however, to look forward rather than backwards, yet not to make change simply for change's sake alone. We recognize differing spheres of practice and understand that people of good will and integrity may choose not to read from this Women's Torah. We also know that many others cannot imagine a Torah that they would rather read from. Our intention is to create and embellish a beautifully crafted, holy Torah that carries with it the requisite *kavanah* so that anyone who reads from it will feel that they are studying a Torah made with intention, love, devotion, artistry, and holiness.

With all of this in mind, we came to consensus on the following guidelines:

### Training

Require documentation by a *sofer* or *soferet* ST”M or S”M, stating something to the effect that the individual has studied the laws and practical craft of writing *sefiri* Torah and is well-qualified to write all of the letters according to the *halachic* demands regarding the proper shapes of the letters, as well as being well-versed in the *halachot*, history and practicalities that govern writing in a more general manner.

### Observance

- The process of joining the Women's Torah Project as a *soferet* includes a conversation with the Kadima community regarding practice and observance.
- The WTP *sofrot* make practice and observance choices that consistently demonstrate acts of loving-kindness, *tzedakah*, community involvement,

and Torah study; and have a spiritual practice, whether religious, meditative or secular.

- Where possible within their consciousness and *kavanah*, live, in relationship to tradi-

tion, a maximally Jewish life during the time they are writing the Women's Torah, with the understanding that practice and observance choices must also be based on the circumstances of one's life.

It is significant that, within the Reconstructionist presentation of Values-Based Decision-Making, the “final” decision is made with the understanding that it may change in the future. We look forward to continued dialogue within our own community, the community of the Women's Torah Project, and the wider community.

**“It is incumbent upon us, however, to look forward rather than backwards, yet not to make change simply for change's sake alone.”**

# Photo Premium

**T**hinking about making a larger donation to the Women's Torah Project? Here's a beautiful incentive. Those making new donations of \$540 or more will receive a color copy of the striking, 7" x 10" photograph at right, matted to 11" x 14" and suitable for framing. Just check the Premium box on the donation form on page 3 and mail it back with your check. Tom Collicott, [www.tomcollicott.com](http://www.tomcollicott.com), took this artistic photograph and generously donates the printing to the project.

**WTP Update** graphic design  
courtesy of Susan Rosenbaum  
[www.3crowncreative.com](http://www.3crowncreative.com)



**Thank you for catching up with the  
Women's Torah Project.**

**If you want to send comments, ask questions,  
or just say hi, you can reach us at  
[office@kadima.org](mailto:office@kadima.org)**

**or**

**Kadima Reconstuctionist Community  
2366 Eastlake Ave. E. #424  
Seattle, WA 98102.**

**Don't forget to check our website,  
[www.womenstorah.com](http://www.womenstorah.com),  
for the latest WTP news.**