

## **Torah: An Installation**

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*Shabbat Shalom!* I am thrilled to act as (NAME OF SISTERHOOD) installing officer this evening. We are here to recognize the women who have heeded the clarion call to serve and lead within Conservative Judaism.

*Torah* is the pulse beat of the Jewish people. The perpetuation of the teachings of *Torah* is the ultimate aim of each Sisterhood. An organization as large in scope as Women's League for Conservative Judaism requires many emissaries of goodwill to carry the message of its work. We look forward to the future leaders of (NAME OF SISTERHOOD), remembering that *Shavuot* is *Zeman Matan Torataynu*, the season of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

Legend tells us that when the children of Israel stood trembling with awe at the foot of the mountain and the law was offered to them, it was the MOTHERS of Israel who stoutheartedly called out in unison "*na'aseh ve-nishma*" – "we shall do and we shall obey." These women were ready without hesitation to accept the precious burden of the law. It was THEY who showed the way to the rest of our people. And for this, we revere their memory. They have set the pace for us forever. You, our leaders, remind us of these pace setters. And as all of Israel followed their example then, so shall we follow yours today.

Will the following outgoing officers and elected Board members please rise and remain standing as I call your names:

Directors:

Financial Secretary:

Treasurer:

Corresponding Secretary:

Recording Secretary:

Vice President – Ways & Means:

Vice President – *Torah* Fund:

Vice President – Membership:

Vice President – Education:

On *Shavuot*, we read the book of *Ruth*, a remarkable story of loyalty and devotion. Like our ancestor Ruth, you women have worked long and diligently, fulfilling your duties with loyalty and devotion. Just as Naomi and Ruth almost came to the parting of ways at the Judean border, so you tonight are also standing at the crossroads. You, like Ruth, must make a decision. Do you feel, like Orpah the faithless sister-in-law that you already have done enough for Sisterhood and are now entitled to return home, allowing us to go on without your further help and assistance? Or, are you going to say, as did Ruth, “*wither thou goest I will go...*”? Will you follow us into a new year – into a new future – and again, like Ruth, lend us your willing hands and hearts? Will you, out of your cherished sense of responsibility, continue to work for Sisterhood? May your decision be positive. And just as the Jewish people were blessed through Ruth, so may we be blessed through you. You are officially discharged from your duties and may be seated. *Today Rabbah!*

(NAME OF PRESIDENT), will you please join me. It is time, (NAME), to relinquish your President’s pin and make room for a new leadership, as vibrant Sisterhoods are wont to do. Your enthusiastic, creative leadership has, we hope, enriched your life as you have surely enriched this Sisterhood, your synagogue and your community as well. Your training through Women’s League and through Torah has served you well. We all look forward to your continued leadership activities in

Sisterhood, in your congregation, and in Branch. It is now my pleasure to relieve you of your President's pin and give your new Past President's pin. *Yishar kokeheikh.*  
(REMOVE PRESIDENT'S PIN AND REPLACE WITH PAST PRESIDENT'S PIN.)

Will the following incoming Directors please rise and remain standing:  
(READ NAMES). And will the following ongoing Directors please join them to reaffirm your commitment (READ NAMES). Judaism is a strongly earth-centered religion. Its practice does not stress the preparation of humankind for the next world, but rather seeks to guide us in this one. Our passion is ascertaining God's will in all things – ethics. This will is written in the *Torah*, the heart of the Jewish religion.

To protect as well as to adorn it, each precious *Torah* scroll is covered by a mantle. You will notice that the mantle is open at the bottom and closed at the top, except to allow the *atzet hayyim* through two holes. As Directors, you too must be open to new ideas and visions of Sisterhood, but only allow those most related to our goals to come through. We thank you for your commitment to Conservative Judaism. You are duly installed and may be seated.

Jews have often risked their lives to save a *Sefer Torah* that almost the only purpose for which we are permitted to sell one is to ransom a human being's life. Only life itself is more holy to us than the words of the *Torah*.

If we look closely at an unrolled *Torah* Scroll, we see that the parchment is attached to two rollers. These wooden rods are called *atzet hayyim* – trees of life, from the verse in Proverbs, "*The Torah is a tree of life to them that hold fast to her.*"

Will the incoming Financial Secretaries please rise and remain standing:  
(READ NAMES). There is little glamour in sending out statements and addressing

hundreds of envelopes. Yet, your task is very important because you are the first communicators between the membership as a whole and the administration. We want you to be aware that your responsibilities and assignments are meaningful and vital in the life of Sisterhood. Your work is always behind the scenes, but essential to Sisterhood's continuation. As the *atzei hayyim* give strength and a resolution to the *Torah* Scrolls themselves, so will you add your vigor to your Sisterhood. Thank you! You are duly installed and may be seated.

Writing a *Torah* is a holy task. The *sofer*, or scribe, has always been considered a particularly skilled person, one who has had to record his pen strokes with specificity and precision. Will (READ NAME), incoming Recording Secretary, please rise and remain standing. (NAME), you are this Sisterhood's special scribe, recording the details of discussions and decisions that will affect its future functioning. Record the minutes carefully. Set before the Sisterhood membership, your pen works with honor, as a lasting legacy. I formally install you as Recording Secretary. Thank you! You may be seated.

The *yad* is used by our *Torah* reader to point to each word as it is being chanted. Its origin can be traced to Central Europe, where the reader used his index finger to point. This often made it difficult for the person called to the *Torah* to see the script, so the *yad* evolved.

Will (READ NAME), incoming Corresponding Secretary, please rise and remain standing. As the Corresponding Secretary, it will be your role to point out activities, events, and opportunities which are available to your *yad*, for membership as well as to the community at large. Be as straightforward as the pointing the way is one of God's paths. You are duly installed. *Mazal tov!* You may be seated.

The *tas* was developed for utilitarian reasons. Festivals, special *Shabbatot* and certain other occasions, such as *Rosh Hodesh*, require reading from more than one portion of the *Torah*. The *tas* came into being as a marker plate or shield attached to the front of a *Torah* mantle, to show the particular *parashah* to which that specific scroll was rolled. Without the *tas*, the congregation would have to wait restlessly for a scroll to be rolled to the proper reading.

Will (READ NAME), incoming Treasurer, please rise and remain standing. Counting the coins, depositing the checks, and monitoring the accounts is a formidable task for the Sisterhood Treasurer. Like the *tas*, you must keep our place and always be aware of where we are in the cycle of administration. We know you will carry out your duties with the same precision you have demonstrated in the past. You are hereby installed as Treasurer. *Mazal tov*. You may be seated.

Sisterhood's primary objectives are to further the spiritual, cultural and social interests of our own membership and of the entire congregation. We must also work to strengthen Jewish education in the schools and among adults. Practically, we realize that all these efforts must be financed. While the original purpose of the *tas* was to show us our place, a wonderful phenomenon occurred over its years of usage. As the *tas* developed into the breastplate, it was placed over the *Torah* mantle, becoming a decorative as well as an indicative object.

Will (READ NAME), incoming Ways and Means Vice President, please rise and remain standing. (NAME), the breastplate represents the lungs – pumping energy and fresh air through the body of our Sisterhood. This revitalization must occur on a regular basis in order to maintain a healthy body. So it is with the raising of monies to fulfill our obligations to the synagogue, ourselves and our children. You are the breastplate, the energizing pump which enables Sisterhood to carry out its

many projects. You are hereby installed as Ways and Means Vice President. *Mazal Tov*. You may be seated.

The *mappah* – the *Torah* binder – was originally called a “wimple” in Germany, where it was believed to have originated. Since many of the traditional arts were not accessible to Jews, there developed, especially among women, the idea of *biddur mitzvah*, enhancement or embellishment of a *mitzvah*. Women found acceptable ways of using their artistic skills to beautify the *mitzvah* of wrapping the *Torah*, by means of the elaborate embroidery of the wimple, made from the material used to swaddle an infant at his *brit*. It was often also used as part of the young man’s *huppah*.

Would (READ NAME), incoming *Torah* Fund Vice President, please rise and remain standing. As the mappah binds the *Torah* Scroll, so does your position bind Sisterhood to the study of *Torah*. May you be blessed with creative inspiration to bring the message of *Torah* and *Torah* Fund to your members. You are duly installed as *Torah* Fund Vice President. *Mazal Tov!* You may be seated.

The *Torah* is the clarion to our people to heed not only the letter of God’s laws, but the true purposes of these laws as well. There are numerous steps to making a *Torah* scroll, from the preparation of the hide, to making and using the durable but not indelible ink; from using an *olar*, a pen knife, to cut the feather in order to make the quill, to drawing the line on the parchment with a sharp *sarggell*. The number of lines in each section is specified at 43 and all lines end equally. It is a rigorous undertaking, indeed.

Will (READ NAME), incoming Education Vice President, please rise and remain standing. We read in the book of *Exodus* that the children of Israel traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. The sages interpret this verse to mean that when our people went for three days without *Torah*, they became

demoralized and discouraged. Therefore, it was decided that no more than 3 days would ever be allowed to pass without a formal reading. (NAME), I install you as Education Vice President, reaffirming Sisterhood's commitment to *Torah* and learning through its educational programs. *Mazal Tov!* You may be seated.

When we speak of dressing the *Torah* and enhancement of that *mitzvah*, we automatically think of the crown. The *keiter* is the ultimate form of ornamentation and reminds us of God's majesty through the *Torah*. Will (READ NAME), incoming Membership Vice President, please rise and remain standing.

The crown holds all the adornments of the *Torah* Scroll together. So, too, the membership of Sisterhood must come together, united in purpose and in deeds, working toward a strengthening of our spiritual selves. The crown cannot stand on its own, for it must rely on all the components of the *Torah* we have previously noted. I hereby install you as Membership Vice President, to work in conjunction with your fellow officers in pulling together the various components of Sisterhood in our synagogue. *Mazal Tov!* You may be seated.

The *aron hakodesh*, the holy ark, is the waiting place for the *Torah* Scrolls in the synagogue. The *Torah* waits anxiously to be taken out and read; to be learned from; to bring us closer to God. Judaism teaches us that the heart of all reality is not only physical but spiritual as well. So, too, is the holy ark: while it is a physical space, it is also one of spirituality.

(NAME), please join me. As the ark brings the *Torah* scrolls together, you will bring this Sisterhood together. In the *Torah* we read of the importance of dreams. We know you dream, as well. May the *Torah* scrolls which fill the ark fill you with inspiration. May *Torah* provide you with the vision, the goals, and the strength to

strive to bring those dreams for Sisterhood to fruition. I hereby install you as President, and pass to you your Sisterhood President's pin. *Mazal Tov!*