

**INDEPENDENT SOFER REPORT**  
**PREPARED FOR SAVE A TORAH, INC.**

**SUMMARY**

The undersigned Soferim were commissioned by Save A Torah, Inc., to examine 11 Torahs provided to different organizations/purchasers by Rabbi Menachem Youlus of Baltimore, Maryland. We examined the Torahs at different locations in the Washington, D.C., area on February 17, 2010. The following is a summary of our conclusions:

1. All the Torahs we examined were written more than 70 years ago, and one is approximately 250 years old.
2. All the Torahs we examined were written in Poland or other parts of Eastern Europe.
3. Eight of the Torahs we examined are ritually acceptable for use in a synagogue service ("kosher").
4. Two Torahs we examined were not currently acceptable for use in a synagogue service ("kosher"), and we were told, after our examination, that they were sold as "not kosher."
5. One Torah we examined is not currently acceptable for use in a synagogue service, but we concluded from our examination that it was probably "kosher" when initially repaired and appears to have been inadequately maintained after that repair.
6. The quality of the repairs of the Torahs we examined were very good to excellent.
7. The Torahs we examined will last and should be ritually acceptable ("kosher") for many years if cared for and stored with proper temperature, humidity; and proper rolling.

**DETAILED SYNOPSIS**

In January, we had both received phone calls from Mr. Zitelman who was searching for a Sofer to examine some Torahs. He decided to use Yitzchok Reisman, who asked Yitzhik Winer to drive him down and help with the examination.

We were originally scheduled to perform our examination on February 10, 2010, but due to the snow it was pushed back a week.

On February 17, 2010, Rick Zitelman, president of Save A Torah, Inc., brought us to various synagogues, to a school in the Washington, D.C. area, and to his office to examine 11 Torahs

Neither of us has had any prior contact with Rabbi Menachem Youlus about these Torahs or the examination. We did not know Mr. Zitelman or Save A Torah, Inc. prior to his contacting us about these examinations. Mr. Zitelman briefed us on February 16, 2010, about our assignment, which was to examine, evaluate and analyze the origins, age, condition, and ritual acceptability of the Torahs we would review the next day. We were given no information regarding any of the Torahs prior to our examination, and mantle covers were removed for each Torah before the examination.

At each location we unrolled the Torah and reviewed the entire Torah, rolling it from beginning to end and then from the end to the beginning. We examined both the front and back of each Torah. The age of a Torah and the location where it was written can be determined from the style of writing, the type of parchment, and the condition of the Torah. The conclusions provided in this Report reflect our oral observations that were transcribed as we were reviewing each Torah. We have reviewed the transcribed notes, and they are accurately reflected in this Report.

Only after we examined each Torah were we told the account given to the purchaser of the location where the Torah was found and its origin. Our observations were noted and they are reflected in this Report.

In several instances, as indicated below, a representative of the synagogue was present to observe our examination.

After visiting the synagogues and the school, we examined five additional Torahs at the office of The Zitelman Group, Inc. The examination procedures described above were again followed.

## **TORAH EXAMINATION SUMMARIES**

### **1. Kemp Mill Synagogue**

We received the Torah from Mr. Jeremy Brown around 7:35 a.m. Our examination was held in the Beit Midrash of Kemp Mill Synagogue. Mr. Brown left for work and did not remain during our examination.

This Torah is approximately 110 years old. It was probably written in Russo, Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). It is a very good Torah with nice looking script. Both the original writing of the Sofer and repairs were very good. The Torah had been professionally cleaned. There was still some dirt on the back of the parchment, and this indicates some destruction at some point in time from improper care or storage. Since the parchment is torn at its ends, we concluded that the Torah had been torn from its original wooden posts (“Atzei Chaim”).

We could neither confirm nor refute the account given in a letter to Erica Brown describing how the Torah was obtained. The fact that the Torah was likely written in Russo, Poland neither supports nor refutes the account that it was found in a cemetery in Majdanek-Lublin.

## **2. Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy**

We received the Torah from Rabbi Tzvi Klugerman around 8:40 a.m. and examined it in a small conference room. Rabbi Klugerman left the room for morning services at the school.

The Torah is approximately 100 years old. It appears to have been written in Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). The end of the Torah shows evidence of minimal water damage because letters appear on the back of a rolled-up portion. It is a beautiful Torah in excellent condition. The restoration is excellent. The writing is a distinctive script (unique “alephs” and “heys”) which would allow an expert to identify a Torah written by the same Sofer. The only significant repair is at the end. Written on the back of the parchment on the top at the beginning of the Torah is the name “Motel Leydman.” This could be the name of the original owner.

## **3. Kol Ami Synagogue**

We received the Torah from Rabbi Leila Gal Berner around 10:15 a.m. Rabbi Gal Berner stayed with us throughout the entire examination. We examined the Torah in her dining room.

The Torah is between 80 and 90 years old, probably written between 1920 and 1930. It was probably written in Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). It is a small Torah, made in small size for practical reasons such as portability. There is strong black writing and good quality ink and was written entirely by one Sofer, and all of the panels are original. Some columns are narrower than others, and there has been repair. Most of the columns start with the letter “Vav,” which is a desirable feature. It is a very unusual and unique Torah.

There may have been writing in Russian script at the beginning of the reverse side of the first section of the Torah. The parchment appears to be homemade, and it is probably calfskin.

Rabbi Gal Berner asked several questions:

Question #1 - Was the Sofer who wrote this Torah from the Sofer School in Tarnow?

Answer – We cannot tell whether the Sofer was from the Sofer School in Tarnow. It could have been written by a Sofer who went there. The Sofer who wrote it was not a beginner Sofer.

Question #2 - Is there any evidence of Nazi abuse such as stains, damage, or signs of misuse?

Answer – The Torah appears to have been cleaned, indicating there could have been stains, but we can not tell if it was due to Nazi abuse.

Question#3 – The story is that this Torah was found in Bergen Belsen in a box wrapped in many woolen blankets from the middle of the war until 2002. Could it have survived in a box from the 1940s to 2002?

Answer – We just can't tell. If water did not get to the Torah, it is possible that the Torah could last.

#### **4, 5. B'nai Tzedek Synagogue**

We met with Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt around 11:25 a.m. and then received two Torahs from Cantor Marshall Kapell, who remained throughout the examination. We examined both Torahs in the Sanctuary. At the request of Cantor Kapell, we also examined a Megillat Esther and another Torah.

We determined that the Torah in the Ark that is used for services was written about 1900 and was originally from Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). It was made from natural parchment – a thin light strong parchment. There is evidence of water damage on top. The Torah has one early panel replacement. It is a very good Torah. There is evidence of fire/smoke damage at the section that is read on Yom Kippur. We cannot determine whether or not the Torah was written in Zebmie, Poland, or if it came from Zebmie, Poland.

We determined that the Torah displayed in the lobby in a glass case is between 150 and 200 years old. It is probably a Polish Torah. The columns do not begin with “Vav.”

This Torah is not suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“not kosher”). It has been well used and is deteriorating. It is dusty throughout and is in poor condition. We could not determine if the Torah was written in Zebmie, Poland. It is too damaged to be repaired.

#### **6. Ohr Kodesh Synagogue**

We met with Rabbi Marc Israel around 12:50. He remained throughout the entire examination.

The Torah was written between 1910 and 1920 and is from Poland.

This Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). It is in good condition. It is a beautiful Torah and has dark writing. It has been nicely restored. There are some signs of water/smoke damage at the end of parshat *Naso* and at parshat *Pinchas*. It appears that someone tried to clean this because some letters came off on the back and there have been some repairs. There is one new panel at parshat *Ki Savo*.

We were unable to tell whether or not the Torah was rescued from Bialystok, Poland.

#### **7, 8. Sixth and I Synagogue**

Mr. Zitelman said that Esther Foer, Director of Sixth and I Synagogue, brought the two Torahs home to her house where Mr. Zitelman picked them up from Bert Foer on February 16, 2010, and returned them to the house on the evening of February 17, 2010.

The “Rubenstein Torah” is approximately 150 years old. The long length of the parchment and long columns indicate a German style, but the writing is not indicative of a German Sofer. It appears to be from Middle Europe (Czechoslovakia, Bohemia). We cannot tell exactly where the Torah was written.

This Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). The parchment and ink are good quality. Several panels have been re-stitched and put back together. During the repair, the same holes were used, but they were stitched opposite of the original stitching. Many letters have been repaired. There is a new panel at Parshat *Shlach*. We cannot determine whether or not the Torah was found in Dachau.

The “Zuckerman-Zitelman Torah” was written on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan 5685 (April 7, 1925) and is 84 years old. It is from Wegrov (Vengrav?), Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). It is in excellent condition and can be compared to a new Torah. It was written by a Sofer Rav Yonasson Weintraub, STaM.

After we examined this Torah, Mr. Zitelman showed us a description of this Torah provided to him by from Menachem Youlus. It described the Torah precisely, and is consistent with the description given to Sixth and I Synagogue for its dedication. The information regarding authorship of the Torah appears at the beginning of the Torah and seems to have been composed when it was written and “stamped certified” and acknowledged at the end of the Torah.

### **9. Aish HaTorah – Zitelman Torah**

Mr. Zitelman said he picked up the Torah from Laura Israel at the Aish Center in Rockville on February 16, 2010, around noon (with the permission of Rabbi Palatnik) and brought it to The Zitelman Group office.

This Torah is approximately 100 years old. It is from Poland.

The Torah is suitable for ritual use in the synagogue (“kosher”). The Sofer had nice penmanship. The parchment was made in Poland. There is some water damage in *Bamidbar*. Some of the color is transferred. The Aitzei Chaim seem to be original and are a very common style. The Torah is good but may need repairs in the near future.

### **10. Jon and Joy Siegel Torah**

Jon Siegel dropped off the Torah on February 16, 2010, at the Zitelman Group office.

This Torah is approximately 250 years old, and is mostly Polish. There are a few panels that appear to be approximately 100 years old. There is one relatively new panel. The Aitzei Chaim date from approximately 1870 and may have been installed when the 100-year-old panels were added.

The Torah is not currently suitable for ritual use in the synagogue ("not kosher"), and it appears to have been stored improperly and had a crease when unrolled. We concluded that prior to its improper storage it was probably "kosher." Repairs should not be a major problem, and the Torah can be made "kosher" once again with repair.

The Torah was made from different panels written at different times. It has Kabbalistic letters and is small so that it can easily be transported. Use of different panels written by different Soferim does not affect whether a Torah is "kosher" or "not kosher." Panels of many rescued Torahs are combined with panels from other Torahs in order to make them suitable for ritual use ("kosher").

**11. Zitelman Torah** - (Kept in Rick Zitelman's office)

This Torah is approximately 150 years old and was written in Poland.

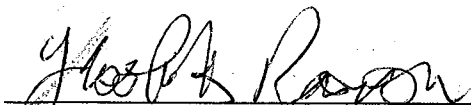
This Torah is not suitable for ritual use in the synagogue ("not kosher"). It needs a lot of work to restore and make it "kosher." Some repairs have been made to it. There are chemicals on some parts and not on others, making repairs difficult and costly.

After we finished examining this Torah and advised Mr. Zitelman that it was not "kosher," he told us that he had acquired it knowing that it was not a "kosher" Torah.

**Affirmation**

Yitzchok Reisman declares, "I had never met nor had any conversation with Rabbi Youlus prior to our examination, nor did I have any business, family, or social relationship of any kind with Rabbi Youlus."

Itzhak Winer declares, "I was chosen by Yitzchok Reisman to drive him down to Rockville, MD, and to assist him in his examination. I have had some professional contact with Menachem Youlus over the years, but I do not have any family or social relationship of any kind with Rabbi Youlus."

  
Yitzchok Reisman, Sofer STaM      Date 1-10

  
Itzhak Winer, Sofer STaM      Date 1-10

## **BIOGRAPHY OF RABBI YITZCHOK REISMAN**

Yitzchok Reisman was born in NY to Chassidic East European parents and spent most of his life in the New York area. As a young student, Yitzchok learned in the Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn under the great Rabbi Kalmenovitz. From an early age, Yitzchok was attracted to study the fine art of Jewish Writing. While at the Yeshiva, he studied the laws and practicalities of safrut (scribal writings) from Rabbi Chaim Brandshtader who came from Shanghai (The entire mir Yeshiva escaped from Mir to Shanghai from the Nazis). In his formative years as a “Sofer Stam”, Yitzchok had the opportunity to learn this special skill from the previous generation of Scribes who came from Europe before the destruction caused by the Holocaust, when almost all of the Polish Scribes were murdered.

Over his 45 years as a Sofer, Yitzchok has taught many students the art of a Sofer. He has experience in directing Torah writing projects Torah education programs. He has been involved in many restoration projects of antique Torah scrolls all over the USA. He deals with individuals and synagogues in both wholesale and retail sales of Torah scrolls, Tefillin, Mezuzot, and Megillot.

Aside from Yitzchok’s extraordinary knowledge of general scribal work relating to the writing of Torah scrolls, Tefillin, Mezuzot, and Megillot he is also a recognized expert in his knowledge of antique Jewish writing and the history scribal writings. Yitzchok can actually replicate the exact work other scribes did centuries ago. He is probably one of the only Sofrim in the world who can write many different types of script that were used in various countries over different time periods. He uses his specialty for special restoration projects he his involved in.

Yitzchok also prepares various types of ink from different antique recipes to be able to faithfully reproduce the work of the old scribes. He has a broad knowledge of the different types of parchments and has developed innovative techniques of restoring old manuscripts and Torah scrolls.

From an early age, Yitzchok has traveled the world to study everything there is to learn about Jewish manuscripts. He went to Egypt in the 1960’s when there was still a sizeable Jewish community there and traveled around the country to meet community leaders and get their permission to analyze and study the ancient Torah scrolls and other Jewish manuscripts. He has traveled, as well, to Eastern Europe, Spain, Italy, North African countries such as Morocco, and many other places worldwide. In addition, he has a broad knowledge of antique Spanish and near eastern scripts.

As a result of his great experience and incredibly broad knowledge, Yitzchok is today known to be one of or the most knowledgeable Sofrim in the field of ancient Jewish writing. Just by looking at the script he can, in most cases, both accurately date it as well as tell from where it came. Over the years, Yitzchok has discovered several very interesting and valuable findings. Approximately 15 years ago, someone brought to him a section of a Torah bought at an auction

in London. After quick look, Yitzchok realized that it had been written by a Chinese Sofer, and had once belonged to the Kaifeng synagogue in China in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The seam between the parchments had been sewn with silk thread instead of regular animal tendons, and the style of the writing was particularly indicative of the Chinese tradition. These few sections of the Torah scroll are today in the possession of the Bible Society of America. Yitzchok has, as well, dated several valuable manuscripts from the 11<sup>th</sup> century that were sold at auction for great sums. See [Ancient Torah Scroll page](#)

Yitzchok has amassed a very large collection of antique Torah scrolls, Megillot and other Jewish manuscripts. He owns antique Megillot Esther (Scrolls of Esther) from nearly every major old Jewish community in the world.

### **BIOGRAPHY OF YITZHAK WINER**

- Born and raised in Jerusalem
- Studied at Yeshivat Kol Torah
- In 1993, completed his training as a scribe, and received official certification from the Vaad Mishmeret STaM
- Spent several years writing megillot, tefillin parchments, mezuzah parchments and Torahs
- Came to the U.S. in 1998 and graduated from Touro College
- Has sold over 100 used and new Torah scrolls to wholesalers and other scribes
- Teamed up with Avrom Fox of Rosenblum's and serves as the expert scribe and supplier of Torahs
- Continues to repair Torahs and restore them
- Expert in the history of Torah scrolls, technically knowledgeable about script, ink patters and has great expertise with antique Torah scrolls