

Congregation Magen David of Manhattan Unveils Platform for First Ever Letter-by-Letter Crowdfunded Torah

The idea of “crowdfunding” has taken the Internet by storm over the past few years - defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the practice of funding a project or venture by raising many small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet.” Startups, charities, and other organizations now turn to the power of the masses to raise money through the Internet - with enough small contributions from so many people, a company or charity can meet its fundraising goal. One popular example is Kickstarter, where many cool startups raise money from regular customers, by offering in return access to their new product.

Congregation Magen David of Manhattan (known as “CMDM”), a Syrian community synagogue in Downtown Manhattan, has taken “crowdfunding” to the world of the Torah scroll. CMDM has developed a new software platform to crowdfund a Sefer Torah letter by letter, something that is entirely new in the Jewish world. What does this mean? CMDM’s software platform has the text of the entire Torah uploaded into it - a person can log on and highlight the exact letter, passuk, or perek to buy, at the simple price of \$1 per letter. For example, if you were interested in buying your bar mitzvah portion, you can search for that section in the platform, highlight it, and buy it. And you can dedicate a purchase in someone's honor or memory. With each letter, passuk, or perek, the Torah gets filled, until the entire Torah has been purchased. The platform is live at CMDM.ReserveATorah.com.

CMDM developed this platform not only to fundraise for its own synagogue, but also to help others. The fundraising platform is open to synagogues and other Jewish organizations to license at a very affordable rate, customized for the organization. “We launched this platform only a week before the pandemic shut our doors, and from the beginning saw this as an opportunity to help others,” said CMDM’s President, Ariel Tavivian. “We had no idea how valuable the platform would be during the pandemic, since every synagogue is struggling and needs a creative digital solution to survive.”

CMDM's Program Director Erica Rolo sees the project as one of unity: "This project is extra special because it unites every person as a piece in our Sefer Torah, even from one letter. It also unites CMDM with any other organizations who use our platform to succeed, creating a web of organizations across the Jewish people."

CMDM is a very important community institution, providing families, college students and young professionals a Sephardic community in Downtown NYC. CMDM is also famous for its thriving NYC singles events (like its Shabbat Dinners and Purim Party), giving community members a place to socialize -- over 15 marriages have been made from couples that met at CMDM events!

Now, when so many synagogues are closing given the effects of Covid-19 in Manhattan, CMDM is using technology to raise funds, stay connected, and help others who struggle to do the same.

Arthur: Albert S. Tawil