

The *shabbos goy* and the Torah

By [David Williams](#)

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The other day was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the day that ends the High Holy Days in Judaism. It's a day of fasting and reflection, and this year, it was also on a Sabbath.

My wife is Jewish, and on most Yom Kippurs, I tend to serve as the [shabbos goy](#), the non-fasting, adequately caffeinated gentile who helps get things done while the Chosen People wrestle with both God and their low blood sugar. That certainly happened Saturday, as I trundled into town seeking bagels and whitefish salad for the break-the-fast that comes at sundown. And did dishes. And cleaned.

But this year, my wife is on the board of the synagogue, and that meant that she was to sit up on the *bima* at the front of the synagogue. It was her responsibility to carry the Torah scrolls into the congregation, as the Torah is honored before the reading.

And as her spouse, I was expected to be up there with her. And so I was. A *shabbos goy*? On the *bima*? Huh.

At the appointed time, another board member opened up the Ark. And then it was my job, as the partner of the board member, to take the Torah from the Ark. So I did, but not without awareness of my actions. Here I am, on Yom Kippur, in front of the whole congregation. A Gentile. But not just any Gentile.

I'm a Presbyterian Teaching Elder, a pastor of a congregation, and a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. On the *bima*. In a synagogue. On Yom Kippur. Taking the Torah from the Ark.

For a moment, that scene at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* fluttered into my head. But I am comfortable and at ease with the faith, with my Jewish wife, and both boys mitzvahed, my older adding his fine baritone to the synagogue choir, my younger helping lead the later family service. I'm reasonably sure that the Creator of the Universe is copacetic with this.

So into my arms I took the scrolls, the tall ones, the ones that were hidden away in Poland and survived the Holocaust. I the Gentile handed them to my Jewish wife. Then it's back into the Ark I went, where the crowns...silver and covered in tiny bells...awaited. I put them on the Torah, gently, and then watched Rache as she walked it through the synagogue.

When she returns, I take the bells off, and then she places that old Torah into my arms. It is surprisingly light, and I hold it like a sleeping child, and return it to the Ark. If objects had memory, what a strange thing that would seem. A relief of sorts, perhaps.

As we sat afterwards, the congregation coming forward for the first reading, Rache slipped her hand in mine. "That was special," she whispered in my ear.

It was. How many *shabbos goyim* can claim such an honor?

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