Sightings of a chuppah, or marriage canopy, generally conjure up romantic images of tuxedos, white dresses, flower bouquets and wedding cakes, but at 10 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 12, Manhattan Jewish Experience (MJE) will see a different kind of marriage beneath a chuppah: the marriage of a Torah scroll to a synagogue and its congregants.

The Torah scroll, which is MJE's first, will be danced beneath a chuppah from its original home at West 86th Street and Central Park West to MJE headquarters at West 86th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, accompanied by musicians, a trumpet and a saxophone. The rest of the band will meet the procession on the ground floor of MJE for some serious celebratory dancing, which will be followed by a meal held in honor of the new Torah scroll, called a Seudat Mitzvah.

A typical Torah scroll takes about a year to complete and must be written by hand—a painstaking costly process performed by trained scribes. Marc Arkovitz, a pediatric surgeon at Colombia Presbyterian and a participant at MJE for two years, is donating this historic Torah scroll in memory of his parents Liba and Moshe Arkovitz.

“Six months ago, after services, I noticed the rabbis taking the Torah out of the MJE ark and returning it downstairs to the Jewish Center,” says Arkovitz. “I realized then that our Torah was borrowed; MJE couldn't afford its own Torah. Kind of spur of the moment, I said I'd donate one,” he explains. “I thought it would be the best way to honor my parents' memory.”

Arkovitz, who grew up Conservative but, in his words “never did much” after his bar mitzvah, became more interested in Jewish observance after his mother passed away and he made the decision to recite Kaddish for her each day. After trying out other synagogues that did not spark any real feelings of connection for him, Arkovitz became involved with MJE.

“This Torah, to me, is one of the most exciting things we've ever done at MJE, because our mission is to bring young Jews close to Torah in a very hands-off, open kind of way,” says Rabbi Mark Wildes, founder and director of MJE. “We just provide the tools: the education and the inspiration.”

Arkovitz views himself as an atypical donor. “I don't think of myself as a big donor. I'm not looking to make a name for myself or to have something inscribed for me. I did it for my parents and for MJE. The concept of giving a Torah is a nice one, but giving it to MJE is even better because MJE is dedicated to bringing Jews back to Judaism,” says Arkovitz.

For MJE participants, the new Torah symbolizes something even larger than the holy scroll that it literally is. “The acquisition of our own Torah solidifies MJE as a community,” says Amy Gitlitz, an MJE participant. “It is a recognition of MJE's growth over the past eight years into a complete congregation and spiritual home for so many people.”

The Torah dedication will be preceded on Saturday, November 11th, by an afternoon of learning regarding the importance of the Torah to a Jewish community. The entire community is invited to participate at both events, and there are many opportunities to sponsor a letter, word or verse of the Torah.

For more information about MJE, visit www.jewishexperience.org.