Jewish Value Considerations When Working with Judaica

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Fixing Problems

consulted

End-of-Life



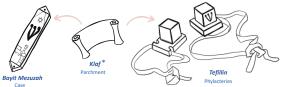
The purpose of this poster is to introduce traditional classifications for Jewish holy objects and suggest ways that their cultural significance may be recognized and respected in tandem with modern preservation practices. By looking at these traditions and techniques, we can examine the values they are trying to communicate and apply those larger values to collection care work. This poster is designed for anyone who may steward Judaica in an institution, community or home.

Traditional Classifications

According to the traditional classification of sacred Jewish objects, there are four categories, each with different rules about the creation, use, and end of the object. Some categories have strict rules, others are more relaxed. These traditional classifications only consider traditional ritual objects and are based in halakha - Jewish rabbinic law - which are laid out in the Talmud, a compendium of Jewish law and rabbinic interpretation.

In this system, there is a hierarchy of sacred objects and rules that dictate how they are to be made, handled, repaired, and disposed of through burial. Klei kodesh are holy objects (literally translate to "vessels of holiness") because they have the name of G-d written on them one or more times. They are considered sacred whether they are in use or not. Examples of klei kodesh are a sefer Torah (Torah scroll), tefillin or mezuzah parchment scroll, all of which are carefully crafted by a sofer, or scribe, who must handwrite every letter flawlessly. The very creation of these items involves spiritual kavana - intent - to infuse them with kedusha - holiness. Objects that are traditionally "more holy" have special handling guidelines, aimed at preserving the structural integrity of the ink on the parchment and legibility of the text, which, if damaged, deems the objects no longer kosher, or fit for ritual use.

Other objects fall into one of three categories, each different in nuanced ways, but for the sake of collection care practices can all be considered "not sacred."



Case		
Traditional Classifications		
English	Transliteration	Hebrew
Holy objects (literally "vessels of holiness")	Klei Kodesh	כלי קודש []
Accoutrements of holy objects (literally "holy utensil")	Tashmishei Kedushah	תשמישיי קדושה
Ritual implements (literally "commanded utensil")	Tashmishei Mitzvah	תשמישיי מצווה
Optional ritual object (has several definitions, but we'll use "optional")	Reshut	רשות

"A person must have great respect for a Sefer Torah. It is their duty to assign a special place ". for it and to treat this place with honor, and to hold it in utmost reverence." ומצוה ליחד לו מקום, ולכבד את המקום ההוא ולהדרו ביותר."

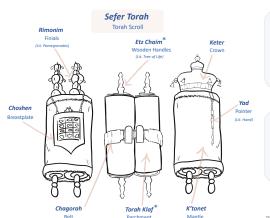
Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 28:3

Know when to ask for help.

Be curious and ask questions

Sometimes you must say goodbye.

Outlined below are some practical collection care notes for the most spiritually sensitive, the Sefer Torah, or Torah scroll, which is klei kodesh, the most holy object in the Jewish tradition. The following recommendations are based on a Sefer Torah still in ritual use, which must stay free from imperfections to remain kosher and be used in ritual. These are the strictest limitations, and do not apply to all Judaica. However, by examining these traditions and techniques, we can examine the values they are trying to communicate and apply those to collection care work.



Storage

A sefer Torah is usually stored upright, at an angle - its atzei chaim, or wooden rollers (lit. "trees of life"), resting on a backboard, its front feet up against a footrest. The scroll is stored inside its protective and decorative wrappings and adornments. One or several Torah scrolls can he stored together. An aron kodesh is a special pook, how, or cabinet that is designated to store the scrolls, and should not be used to store other objects. The aron kodesh is kept closed, and it is customary for folks to stand to show respect when it is opened. In addition to respect, this arrangement also has practical benefits of thoughtful storage practice protection from light, water, pests, and fluctuations in relative humidity.

→ Safe spaces have tangible and intangible value.

Behavior and Conduct

The holiness of a sefer Torah extends around it, making the space it inhabits holy. How we behave around a sefer Torah is representative of our attitude towards holiness. There are some halakic specifications, but essentially it is forbidden to do anything disrespectful in the presence of a Torah scroll. The sefer Torah should not the kent in or near a hathroom or gravehouse. It is also considered impolite to sit on the same surface on which a Torah is resting. As a rough guide, if you wouldn't do it at the dinner table, don't do it around the Torah. In many traditions, it is customary to kiss the Torah as it passes by.

-> Encourage dignity and respect.

Handling

When handling or using, users are careful to not touch the written surface of the Torah parchment. Partly, this is to make sure the sefer is respected (not touching something is a powerful way to signify importance); partly, it is because touching can cause damage to the text, which may ritually invalidate the entire object. If you need to touch the parchment for some reason, do it in private It is both customary and practical to place a lining or covering on the

surface before placing the Torah down. All people, including non-Jews and women, may hold a sefer Torah and that prohibit this, there is no halakha (law) against it.

Traditionally, a scroll is carried by resting it against one's body and supporting it from the bottom. Dropping a sefer Torah is considered a tragedy, a communal traumatic event, and should be avoided with careful handling. If it happens, a Rabbi

should be consulted immediately for next steps, which will likely include some sort of communal fasting to symbolize grief.

Emergency Preparedness

The Torah is considered is the soul of the community their "nortable eland" and embodies the holiness of its message. Afte prioritizing human life and safety, Torah scrolls should be a salvage priority before, during, and after disasters

→ Value life, center people.

If there is a structural or aesthetic issue in any part of the Torah scroll

It is recommended to inspect Torah scrolls regularly (every five years) to

make sure the Torah is in stable condition. This way, any minor issues can

be resolved before they expand into the text, rendering the scroll "not

Religious manuscripts, including sifrei Torah, that time or human error have rendered unfit for use cannot be "thrown out." but rather "require

genizah" - removal, for example, to a jar, closet, or burial plot that they

may "decay of their own accord." While this may not be applicable to

collection, stewards should consider the tradition and implied values

objects that have shifted in meaning upon entering a museum

It is encouraged that Jewish people actively engage with ritual by

challenging tradition, asking questions, and engaging with texts.

(parchment, ink, seams, wooden rollers), a sofer (scribe) should be

This diagram illustrates the components and accoutrements of a traditional Ashkenazi (Eastern European) sefer Torah The scroll itself is considered klei kodesh. All other objects are Tashmishei Kedushah, and are not, themselves, sacred. (The exception is an etz chaim that has already been attached to a klaf-it, too, requires geniza.)