

Suggestions and Directions for Designing and Making a Torah Binder

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INTRODUCTION

There are no hard and fast rules for the length or width of a Torah binder; however, you must keep in mind the regulations regarding *sha'atnez*, which forbids the mixing of wool and linen. Woolen floss may not be used on linen. The design elements and the media are yours to choose. Let your creative juices flow and be courageous in your expression of beauty.

SUGGESTED DESIGN STEPS

1. Measure the girth of the Torah for which the binder will be made.
2. Decide whether the binder will circle the Torah more than once, and determine the length of the binder.
3. Decide on the width of the Torah binder. A width of four to six inches will give a very nice area in which to lay out your design.
4. Make a paper pattern using freezer paper that is strong enough to withstand handling as you use it to cut the fabric for your binder. Make multiple copies of the paper pattern since you will find it helpful to lay out your design on the paper pattern as you work through the design phase of the project.
5. Think about the design elements you want to use and begin to research appropriate designs. Make copies of your design elements and place them on one or more of your freezer paper patterns to see how they will look when the design is completed. Think of the Torah binder as a long, narrow painting.
6. Determine what medium you will use. The medium will suggest the fabric for the body of the Torah binder. See the suggestions and considerations for materials at the end of this section.
7. Decide on the closure for the binder. Velcro closures work very well and can be blended into the design.

You may use a special buckle-type closure available in stores that sell trimmings. If you choose to make your Torah binder longer than the girth of the Torah, you will need to devise a tying method.

8. If you are inscribing a Hebrew phrase, be sure that you have the Hebrew letters and words checked by a person who is knowledgeable in Hebrew. There are Hebrew alphabet books that can help with the design of the letters. For possible phrases, look to the *Tanakh*, *siddur*, *mahzor*, and *Psalms*.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR MATERIALS

Needlepoint You will need even weave canvas that either has the design painted on it or will be stitched following a charted design. I suggest Perle cotton yarn rather than Persian wool yarn since it is easier to use and has a better life expectancy. Metallic threads can be added as accents.

Surface embroidery You will need a tightly woven fabric of linen or comparable cotton fabric. The design will need to be transferred to the fabric using special marking inks that can then be removed easily after the stitching is completed.

Surface embroidery can also be done on silk. The same conditions regarding transfer of a design prevail. A variety of stitches lend themselves to this medium.

Counted Cross Stitch or Even Count Stitchery You need even-weave linen or Aida cloth or similar even weave fabrics such as Lugana. The design would need to be charted and the stitching completed from the charted design.

Applique You will need a base fabric such as muslin and the appliquéd designs would need to be attached either by hand stitching or machine stitching. The band would need a backing to finish the binder.

Pieced/Mosaic Sections You would need a fine quality muslin on which individual segments such as a tile motif would be constructed and then pieced to create the whole band. The band would require a backing that unifies all the pieced elements.

Using the tile motif also lends itself well to the use of stamped images or wood block print images on tile sections of fabric and then connecting the pieces.

Silk Ribbon Embroidery This medium lends itself well if the design will be floral designs. You need a tightly woven fabric for ribbon embroidery and you must use silk ribbon to get the desired effect. The design is transferred to the fabric and then the ribbon embroidery is treated as surface embroidery.

Painted Fabric You need a tightly woven fabric and fabric markers to place your design on your band.

Weaving You will need a table top loom and various fibers. The band is woven and the beauty of a woven binder comes from the woven patterns. There are distinctive ethnic patterns that lend themselves to this medium.

FOR ASSISTANCE

The Creative Judaic Arts Committee is just a phone call or e-mail away if you need assistance at any time. For questions, contact Education Director Lisa Kogen, at lkogen@wlcj.org or 212.870.1260.

To paraphrase the blessing in the liturgy of the Italian Jews of Rome, “*May the Holy One bless every daughter of Israel who makes an artifact in honor of the Torah.*”