

MJC Sanctuary Objects and Symbols



Ark/Torah

The Ark (*Aron Hakodesh*) symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant which was stored in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Ark houses the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), our most revered possession, traditionally believed to have been Divinely revealed to Moses. A *Sefer Torah* is a formal written scroll crafted by a Torah scribe (*sofer*) under exceptionally strict requirements. When praying, Jews face the Ark — symbolically towards the direction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

Eternal Light

The light hanging over the Ark is known as *Ner Tamid* or Eternal Light and is found in almost every synagogue. The *Ner Tamid* is perpetually lit and has much symbolic meaning. The light represents God's eternal presence. It also recalls the ancient Temple

Menorah and the constant flame of the sacrificial altar in Jerusalem. Many Jews interpret the *Ner Tamid* as a metaphor for the light God's word brings to the world.

Hebrew Verses

The Hebrew words inscribed above the rear entry doors to the Hazzan Neil Ben-Isvy Sanctuary are from the *Mah Tov* prayer expressing reverence and awe for synagogues and other places of worship. On the left side of the *bimah* (the elevated platform from which the clergy lead services), is the Biblical verse reminding us that "This is the gateway to the Lord, the righteous shall surely enter." This hopeful message is a reminder that prayer *and* righteousness are necessary to gain God's favor.

Memorial Plaques

Along the two side walls of the sanctuary are plaques consecrating the memory of departed loved ones. Plaques are lit weekly to honor those who died during that particular week in the Jewish calendar. They are a reminder of the religious obligation of *Yahrzeit* (the exact anniversary) of the passing are a reminder of those we have lost.

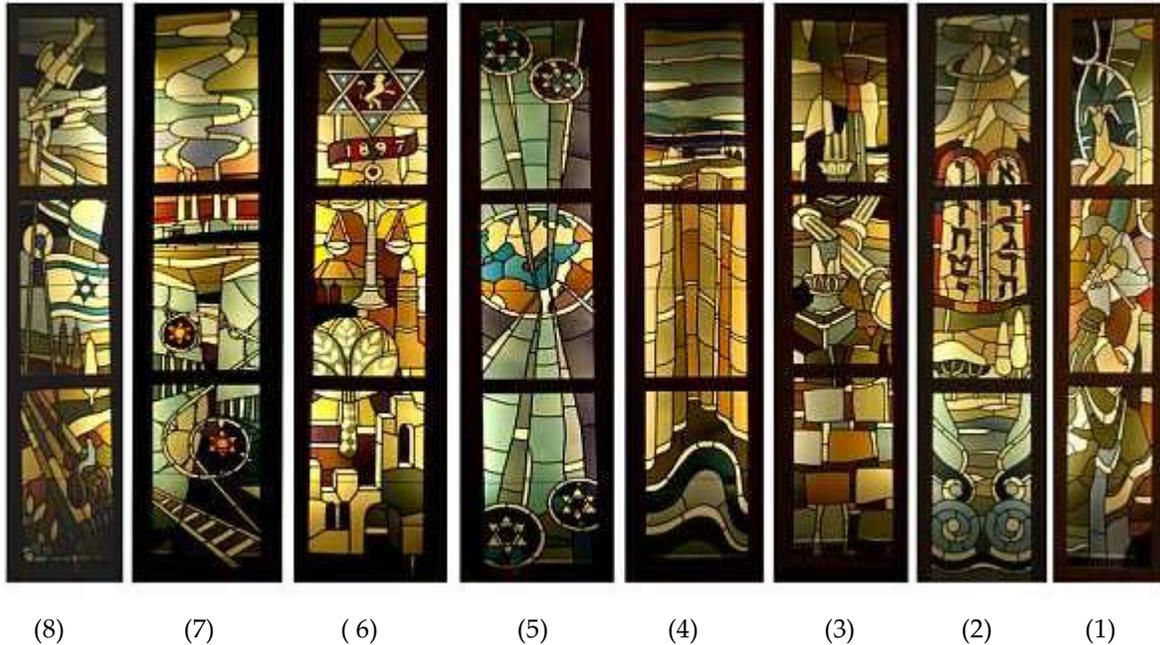
American/Israeli flags

There are American and Israeli flags on the *bimah* demonstrating our love for both countries. Jews are taught to respect the land in which they live and have made a significant contribution to every aspect of American life, including serving in the military since the Revolutionary War. The reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of a 2,000 year old dream to return to this land and create a Jewish homeland. At our synagogue and at synagogues throughout America, prayers are offered for the United States, and the land of Israel, for leaders of both nations, for the Jewish people everywhere, and for worldwide peace.

Menorah

The candelabra on the *bimah* is a Chanukah menorah commemorating the Maccabees victorious rededication of the Temple. When a meager supply of oil was used to rekindle the Temple's menorah, the oil miraculously burned for eight days. The Chanukah menorah, therefore, has places for eight candles and a raised *shamash* which is used to light the other candles. A beautiful teaching is that the *shamash* is elevated because it selflessly serves others, sharing its fire and light. Our menorah also is designed in a way to evoke a name of God, *Shaddai*.

Stained Glass Windows (Jewish History in Stained Glass)



Look carefully around the sanctuary and you will see eight panels of stained glass. You will certainly recognize some Biblical symbols as well as some modern ones, but the fact is that the panels tell the story of Jewish history from its beginning to modern day. The key is to read them from right to left just as Hebrew is read that way.

Judaism found its roots with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel & Leah. (1) Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac and God's intervention, known as "The Akedah," is the subject of the first pane. A nomadic people, we wandered the Near East ultimately to settle in Egypt where we were enslaved. The parting of the Red Sea (2) during our deliverance from slavery to freedom and the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai is memorialized in the second pane. After 40 years of wandering in the desert, the people of Israel settled in the Land of Israel later to build a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant carried through the desert and to become the central focus of our worship. (3) The destruction of Solomon's Temple in the year 586 BCE and the exile of Israel to Babylonia was later followed by a return to the Land and a rebuilding of the Temple. The second Temple was also destroyed, this time by the Romans in the year 70 CE. It was the destruction of the mountaintop fortress of Masada (4), the last refuge of the zealots who fought and died so valiantly during a siege by the Roman Legion that began the second exile of the people of Israel from its beloved land. The exile that began

in the year 70 CE lasted for close to 2000 years as Jews were scattered (5) to lands around the world where often we flourished but other times were persecuted for our religious beliefs and cohesive identity.

But in all those centuries, we never gave up the dream to be “a free people in our Land, the Land of Israel” (Hatikvah – the National Anthem of the State of Israel). No-one embodied that dream more than Theodore Herzl (6) who in 1897 convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland which gave modern voice to this ancient dream. But this was not to be. Not yet. Not before a holocaust (7) was visited upon the Jewish people during which we became a target for complete extermination and annihilation by Nazi Germany during the 20th century. Six million of our people were destined to be slaughtered like cattle along with millions of others who shared our fate during a period of the most unspeakable brutality that the world has ever witnessed. But we survived and in 1948 (8) realized the dream of all the generations that preceded us. We gathered the battered remnants of European Jewry, opened the doors to the exiled Jews of the many countries of our dispersion and created the modern State of Israel. The promise given to Abraham has been fulfilled in our generation and once again we are witness to the people of Israel living in the Land of Israel.

It was once said that the “eyes are the windows to the soul.” In this case it is the windows of our sanctuary that teach our history through our eyes.