

הקשר היהודי שלך

Your Jewish Connection

Brought to you by the Lifelong Learning Committee

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Symbols, Symbols Everywhere

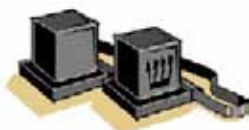
Judaism abounds in symbols. We find them in Torah, in our sanctuary, and in the larger community. Where did these symbols come from? What do they mean? What is their relevance?

The *Shema* prayer is the source for several symbols. (See [Signs and Symbols](#) for more details.)

- We place a *mezuzah* on the doorposts of our homes. This is a *mitzvah* from the *Shema*. It is a constant reminder of G-d's presence and *mitzvot*.



- A *tallit* is the prayer shawl worn over clothes during morning and afternoon prayers, as well as all prayers on *Yom Kippur*. It represents fidelity and observance. Wearing a *tallit* fulfills the *mitzvah* of wearing *tzitzit* as described in the *Shema*.



- *Tefillin* are meant to remind us of G-d's *mitzvot*. We bind them to our head and our arm, committing both our intellect and our physical strength to the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*. The *Shema* commands us to bind the words to our hands and between our eyes.

• The *Magen David*, or Star of David, also means Shield of David. It doesn't have any religious significance but is most commonly associated with the Jewish people. Historians place its origins with King David (possibly due to the design of the shield he used in battle) and Kabbalists give meaning to the two triangles and six points. (See [Does the Star of David have Religious Significance in Judaism](#).)



- The *menorah* is a very familiar symbol seen in synagogues and is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith. It has seven branches and was originally the candelabrum placed by the Israelites in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. Today, we see the menorah on the emblem of the State of Israel.

• The [lamp over the ark](#) in today's synagogues, called the *ner tamid* (literally, the continual lamp; usually translated as the eternal flame), symbolizes the *menorah*.



- The nine-branched *menorah* or *chanukkiyah* used on Chanukkah is commonly patterned after this *menorah*, because Chanukkah commemorates the miracle that a day's worth of oil for this *menorah* lasted eight days.



- There are many symbols in Judaism that you can investigate on the Internet. Just type the word into Google or another search engine. Here are a few to get you started:

✧ For [short descriptions at Buzzle](#):

- Hamsa – Chai – Shofar – Kippah – Four Species – Torah Scroll – Dreidel

✧ For items with [longer descriptions](#):

- Pomegranate – Shabbat Candlesticks – Kiddush Cup – Lion of Judah – Twelve Tribes of Israel - Miriam's Cup

If you'd like to see how well you know your Jewish symbols, try the [game found here](#). (This is a suggestion from the New South Wales, Australia, Board of Jewish Education.) Have fun!