



STAR OF DAVID

What Is a Star of David?

The Star of David, or Magen Daveed (shield of David) is the six pointed star made of interlocking triangles that has become universally recognized as a Jewish symbol.

This symbol adorns the flag of the modern state of Israel. According to legend, the Star of David can be traced back some three thousand years, to the time of King David, whose soldiers used shields that were also adorned with this symbol. According to other views, the shields themselves were shaped with six points and resembled the Star of David.

Does the Star of David Have Any Religious Significance?

No! The Star of David does not have any religious significance, per se, as it is not part of any rite, ritual or custom. Nonetheless, Kabbalists (Rabbis who taught Jewish mysticism, called “Kabbalah”) have noted that the six points in the star point in every direction, north, east, south, west, up and down, symbolizing God’s presence in every direction. The importance of the Star of David is symbolic, as a source of Jewish unity and pride, and as a reminder of where we can find God, if we would only look.

Being a Real Star of David!

Buying a beautiful silver star of David is the easy part. Wearing it publically and proudly is a wonderful demonstration of Jewish pride. But the real goal is not just to wear it, it’s to live it, to learn more about our heritage, and to try to make a positive impact on society, being “a light unto the nations”, (Isaiah 42:6).



photo by David Shankbone

TEFILIN

(pronounced Tuh-fill-in)

What are they?

Tefilin, (phylacteries), are two small black boxes. Inside Tefilin are four parchments upon which are written four paragraphs from the Torah, (including the well known, vitally important “Shema Yisrael”). The Tefilin are kept in place with leather straps.



Wearing Tefilin is a biblical mitzvah, (Exodus 13:16). Today, Tefilin are worn during weekday morning prayers. Earlier generations actually wore Tefilin the entire day! (Usage is now limited to the time of morning prayers because we are not capable of maintaining the proper decorum during the entire day). Tefilin are meant to be a symbol of our relationship with God. They are not worn on Shabbat because the entire day of Shabbat is just such a symbol, and no further symbol is required. It is also worth noting that the Talmud records the statement of the great sage Raish Lakeesh, “Whoever puts on tefilin will live long!”, (Menachot 44(b). The Talmudic sage Rabbah went even further, “whoever wears tefilin with a talit and says Shema...is promised a place in the World to Come”.

How are they worn?

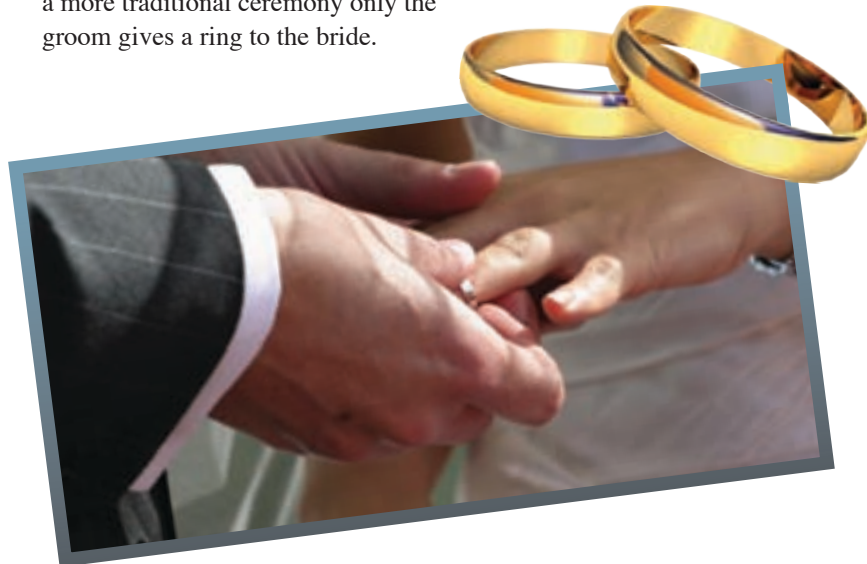
One box of the Tefilin is worn on the head, above the forehead. The other is worn on the upper arm, opposite the heart. It would be fair to note that the placement on the head, the source of intellect, and the arm,

The Bride Circles the Groom

Under the Chuppah, the bride circles the groom seven times. There are many mystical reasons given for this. One reason is that, just as Joshua circled Jericho seven times and the walls fell down, so too, after seven circles the barriers between the new couple should fall. Another reason for the bride to circle the groom is so that wherever he looks, he should only see his wife; and so that he should understand from this point onward he must “only have eyes” for her.

The Ring

The heart of the ceremony is when the groom gives his bride the ring and says (or repeats after the Rabbi) the Hebrew version of “You are consecrated to me according to the laws of Moses and Israel.” During a more traditional ceremony only the groom gives a ring to the bride.



The Blessings

Seven blessings are recited under the Chuppah at this stage of the wedding, see Appendix B for the full text of the seven blessings or “sheva brachot”. Different family members or distinguished rabbis are often called up to recite the blessings. Included are blessings that the young couple be happy, have a great family, and build a meaningful life together. After the last of the blessings the bride and groom both drink from the same goblet, symbolizing their now shared lives.

How to Light Shabbat Candles

Candle lighting is ideally done 18 minutes before sunset. It may be done earlier. That would “bring in Shabbat earlier”, which is certainly permissible. Candle lighting may not be done after sunset.

Typically, two candles are lit, although there is a custom to add one candle for each child. Almost any type of candles may be used, provided they don’t flicker, don’t have a bad odor and last for at least two hours. Today, wax candles are used almost exclusively.

Although we typically recite blessings prior to fulfilling mitzvot, we light the Shabbat candle before reciting the blessing. Why? Once we recite the blessing, we have welcomed in the Sabbath and at that point lighting would not generally be permissible. This is also the reason the eyes are covered, we don’t want to see the light until after we make the blessing.

- Step One: Light the Candles.
- Step Two: Extend your hands towards the candles and with your



only recite each stanza one time).

Please note that all the Shabbat blessings are reproduced in English, Hebrew and are transliterated in Appendix (D).

Ayshet Chayil (Women of Valor)

A common, but not universal custom is to follow 'Shalom Alaychem' with another song, 'Ayshet Chayil'. Ayshet Chayil, or 'Women of Valor' is a twenty two verse poem attributed to King Solomon. Tithes

SINGING AYSHET
CHAYIL TO THE
'WOMAN OF
THE HOUSE'
AS A (SMALL!)
TOKEN OF
APPRECIATION...

final chapter of Proverbs, it is an "ode to Jewish womanhood". Although most commentators interpret the poem allegorically, it has become the custom to sing Ayshet Chayil to the 'woman of the house' as a (small!) token of appreciation for all she has done for the family. Ayshet Chayil is reproduced in English, Hebrew and transliterated in Appendix D.

Blessing the Children

Next comes the blessing of the children. Each child is blessed individually. The father rests his hand on the child's head and bestows the blessing. The blessing given here, is merely the minimum. Adding specific, customized blessings for your child is appropriate. In many households, the children proceed to their mother to receive her blessing as well.

The first part of the blessing is different for daughter or a son. The rest of the blessing is the same for both daughters and sons.

The blessing for a daughter:

May God make you like Sara, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

The blessing for a son:

May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

Conclude for both daughters and sons:

May God bless you and protect you.

May God shine his face towards you and show you favor.

May God be favorably disposed towards you and grant you peace.

The full text for the Blessings is reproduced in English, Hebrew and transliterated in Appendix (D).

HOLIDAYS

The Jewish calendar features both major and minor Holidays. Very similar to the life-cycle events, our calendar commemorates days that are joyous and days that are sorrowful. This chapter focuses on the major Holidays, the next chapter focuses on lesser Holidays, fast days, and days of remembrance.

PASSOVER

Passover is the Holiday that commemorates the ‘Exodus’ of the Jewish People from slavery in Egypt. The “Seder”, the recounting of the story of Passover is by far the most observed ritual of the Jewish calendar.

The Passover Story

In response to one of the worst famines in the history of the world, the Jewish people, Jacob and his seventy descendants accepted an invitation to sojourn in Egypt. As time passed the Jewish people became more numerous and more prosperous, causing envy among the local populace, (sound familiar?). The Jews were too powerful, yet too

valuable to simply expel. Instead, the Jews were enslaved.

What does slavery mean? It is a difficult concept for our generation to grasp. If you hear the term at all, it is likely pertaining to things like too much homework, or one extra workplace or household chore. (Indeed, it is in reference to Passover cleaning that I have heard it most.) Slavery really means that you are under the complete control and domination of another human being 24/7. To start to get a more accurate picture I recommend reading the Slave Narrations from The Federal Writer's Project. These descriptions of slavery were recounted by actual pre-Civil War slaves. Or, closer in time and closer to our relatives, descriptions by Holocaust survivors also convey what it really meant to be a slave. (Elie Weisel's *Night*, is a good example).

The Jews were slaves in Egypt for 210 years. Egypt was the reigning superpower. No person had ever escaped its borders. The slavery was especially brutal, designed to break the body and spirit.

It wasn't enough to build buildings (pyramids?) in the hot sun under a taskmaster's whip. The buildings were intentionally built in quick sand, to prolong the project, and to assure there would never be the satisfaction of accomplishment. If the daily quota of mortar was not achieved, the amount was supplemented by adding Jewish babies. When Pharaoh heard that a Jewish savior would be born, he ordered that all baby boys be put to death.

Amidst this gloom God did save His people. First God selected Moses as their leader. Ironically, Moses was raised as a prince in Pharaoh's own palace. God liberated the Jewish people with a 'mighty arm', devastating the Egyptians with the 'Ten Plagues' that were quite literally of Biblical proportions.

The plagues initially struck the Egyptian gods (for example since the Egyptians worshipped the Nile, its water turned to blood) but soon devastated their possessions and ultimately their bodies. After the last

