

THE SYMBOLS IN OUR CONGREGATION

On the exterior wall of our synagogue, facing Main Street:

The Hebrew Aleph, first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the first letter in the name Abraham, namesake of our congregation.

The circle in the middle of the Aleph stands for the unity which Judaism ascribes to God and the unity of Judaism which forms a timeless circle from Abraham's days to our time.

The mosaic on the side of the Aleph is shaped like a branch of the olive tree - a symbol of peace from the time of Noah and the flood.

The mosaic itself depicts events from the life of Abraham as recounted in the Bible and in Jewish folklore.

The Holocaust Window (etched glass)

On bottom: Twisted, tormented-looking candelabra with six branches, symbolizing the 6 million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. Above the candles are the Hebrew words "Kidush Hashem" - the Sanctification of God's name- a term used to explain the sacrifice of life by Jews who were killed for no other reason than the fact that they were Jews.

Above: This word at the top of the window is the word "Zion", the symbolism for the promised land, the age old land of dreams, the return to which is being fulfilled in our time with the creation of the State of Israel - as it were, out of the very ashes of the Holocaust has Israel been created.

The Stained Glass Windows

The hexagonal shape of these beautiful windows is a variation on the Star of David, retaining the six points. The motif is carried to the windows above the bima, and the parallel windows in back of the sanctuary.

The stained glass windows may be divided into two groups by the subjects that they depict: the first four on the left of the bima can be titled "Jewish history and character", while the rest take their theme from Jewish holidays.

From the back of the sanctuary, beginning on the front left window closest to the entrance from the hallway, then proceeding to the left:

1) The Hebrew word "Shalom" - peace - the password of the Jew and his never-ending quest.

2) Torah scrolls and flames, depicting the many periods in history when Jews were forbidden to practice their religion, and when their books and religious objects were put to the torch.

3) Books and a candle or a torch, a symbol of the Jewish people, for whom the book is the light of the world, a light by which they live, through which they have come to be known as "the people of the book".

4) A tree, branches of fig tree and grape, and a pomegranate - the tree symbolizes the Torah, which is "a tree of life to those who hold steadfast to it", by whose laws the Jews live; the fig and grape branches are a reminder of the prophecy of the days of Messiah, days of Shalom (peace) when each man shall live "under his grape and under his fig tree"; and the pomegranate, which is an exotic fruit, red in color and full of juice, also full of seeds, symbolic of the promise God made to Abraham, the patriarch, "Thy seed shall be very numerous!"

5) A scroll of Torah covered in gay colors, the Hebrew letters "aleph" and "hay", Magen David, a small Menorah, and little flags. All these represent the holiday of Simchat Torah - the Rejoicing of the Torah - a time when we complete the cycle of reading the Torah and begin anew. The Torah is divided into portions, which we call sedras, which we read weekly, in such a manner that within a year we read the whole five books of the Torah "from cover to cover" - or in the scroll "from pillar to post".

6) (On the other side, at the back of the sanctuary to the right) - A small scroll, masks, and a noise maker called greggor (like the ones we often use at New Year's Eve parties to make merry!), all representing the holiday of Purim, or Lots, celebrating the events recounted in the Book of Esther, when the Jews living in Persia were saved from extinction at the hands of their enemy Haman.

7) Four cups of wine, an altar, and fire, are all symbols of the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Time of our Freedom. The altar reminds us of the Pascal Lamb; the four cups represent the fourfold promise of redemption which the Lord gave Israel; the fire represents the "column of flame by night" by which means Israel was led out of Egyptian bondage.

8) A ram's horn, representing the holiest of Jewish holidays: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - New Year and the Day of Atonement - the only times when the ram's horn is used in our service, giving a special note to this solemn time in Jewish religious life - a time when our tradition teaches us that God sits in judgment over all of his creation.

9) A lemon-like fruit, call "Etrog" in Hebrew, and branches of palm, myrtle and willow; these represent the Feast of Booths (Sukkot), a thanksgiving time for the produce of the field, and a remembrance of the forty years Israel spent in the desert being supported by the Lord. The branches and the Etrog are used on this holiday in a special ceremony during services.

10) The Tablets of the Covenant on top of a mountain; representing Shavu'ot, the Feast of Weeks, when according to Jewish tradition Israel arrived at Sinai and there received the Tablets from God through Moses.

11) A candalabra of nine branches, a "top" with the Hebrew letter "shin"; these are symbols of Hanukkah, the Festival of Rededication, commemorating the time when the Maccabees won a victory over the forces of King Antiochus and regained control of the Temple in Jerusalem to rededicate it to the service of God.

12) The Hebrew letter "shin" and two candles; these represent the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the first holiday in Judaism; tradition teaches us that the Lord created the world in six days because at the very beginning of His creation He already had Sabbath in mind. The Sabbath is welcomed with the lighting of candles in the home.

Symbols on the Bima

While no two synagogues are alike, there are many objects that you will find in most, if not in all, of the synagogues you visit. The stage at the front is the "Bima", which is Hebrew for stage, or pulpit - it is definitely not the Altar! In the center of the Bima is the "Aron Kodesh" (Holy Ark), where the scrolls of the Torah (Five Books of Moses) are found. Above the "Aron Kodesh" is the "Ner Tamid" (Eternal Light), symbolic of the qualities of God: without beginning or end, a source of enlightenment and a beacon to those who follow its path. At the side of the "Aron Kodesh" is the Menorah - a seven branch candalabra symbolic of the seven days of the week, with the Sabbath light raised above all the others. All these symbols are traditional, dating back to the story of the building of the Tabernacle which is recounted in the book of Exodus.

The "Ner Tamid" in our synagogue is adorned with the wooden "Aleph" - the first letter in the Hebrew Alphabet. The Aleph symbolizes a number of things: it is the initial of "Abraham" after whom our congregation is named; it stands for one - our concept of God. The Aleph motif is carried into all of the decoration of our sanctuary, particularly the doors of the Aron Kodesh (the ark). Here we see the Aleph on both sides of the door, as a regular letter on the right, and a mirror image on the left. The doors also have

the Hebrew word "Anochi" at the very top of the display, the word meaning I am - which is the first word of the "Statements of Sinai" (Known to most as the Ten Commandments). Below the "Anochi" you will surely recognize the Tablets of the Law as they are most often depicted, with the first ten letters of the Hebrew Alphabet acting as numerators for the statements of God that were inscribed on the Tablets. On both sides of the tablets are "leaves" of mosaic inlays, created for us by an artist on the basis of mosaics found by archeologists on digs in the Middle East - the mosaic depicts the "badges" of the twelve sons of Israel - the forefathers of the tribes of the nation of Israel. At the bottom center of the door we see the artist's concept of the "Burning Bush" which Moses saw in the Sinai Desert when the Lord first charged him with the mission of redeeming Israel out of Egyptian slavery.

The two lecterns on the Bima are covered in blue, a traditional color in Judaism as in the "thread of blue" mentioned in Numbers for the prayer shawl. The six point star adorning the blue covers is called the "Star of David" because by Jewish tradition we believe that King David, who was the greatest of Jewish kings, had this geometric design on his shield when he went into battle. We have thus adopted this symbol for our own, and now many people call it "the Jewish Star". The Star of David and the blue of the table coverings appear also in the flag on the left side of the Bima - a blue and white flag with the six pointed star, which is known as "the Jewish flag".