

Iyar

## Yom HaAtzmaut: Symbols of the State of Israel

In honor of Yom HaAtzmaut (Israel's Independence Day), this lesson will focus on symbols of the State of Israel: The Israeli flag and the emblem of the State of Israel. We will learn how these symbols reflect Jewish tradition and the significance of their components.

### Goals

- > The students will learn about Yom HaAtzmaut.
- > The students will learn about the different components of the Israeli flag and the emblem of the State of Israel and how they reflect Jewish tradition.

### Sources

- > From the Torah: The story of Noah
- > From the Torah: The golden menorah
- > The diary of David Wolfson

### Ages



Grades 4–6

## Background for the Teacher

### Yom HaAtzmaut: Israel's Independence Day

On Yom HaAtzmaut, which falls on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, we celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel. In ancient times, the Land of Israel was the home of the Jewish people for hundreds of years. During Roman and Byzantine rule in the first centuries CE, the Jewish population of the land was greatly reduced over time.

Over the next 2000 years, most of the Jewish people lived in the Diaspora. However, more than 100 years ago, many Jews began to move back to Israel. In 1947, the UN decided to end the British Mandate (which had given Britain control of Palestine for over twenty years) and authorized the establishment of the State of Israel. Yom HaAtzmaut expresses the joy of the entire Jewish people over the establishment of the State.

The night before Yom HaAtzmaut, local parties begin on the streets of Israel. Israeli flags fly along streets, on houses, and on cars. Yom HaAtzmaut is a day off from school and work. An official government ceremony to mark this special day involves the lighting of twelve torches (representing the Biblical twelve tribes of Israel) by specially chosen citizens.

### The Israeli Flag

The Israeli flag is based on the flag of the Zionist Movement, with a few minor changes. It includes two blue stripes that are reminiscent of the stripes on a *tallit*, as well as a *Magen David*.

A *tallit* is a large cloth with special strings (*tzitzit*) attached to its four corners. Traditionally, it is white with two light blue stripes. The *tallit* is used during prayer and as part of Jewish life-cycle events. In the Torah, we find the commandment to tie *tzitzit* to the four corners of the garment, with one light blue string at each corner. According to the Sages, the light blue color was chosen because it reminds us of the sky, which is thought of as G-d's residence. (In Hebrew, the same word is used for "sky" and "heaven".) Over the years, people stopped using blue threads in their *tzitzit* and added blue stripes on the *tallit* cloth itself. Today, many *tallitot* have stripes of different colors.

The **Magen David** is a widespread symbol that is thousands of years old. Over the generations, it was adopted as a Jewish symbol and was engraved or painted on gravestones, synagogue walls, family crests, etc. Its Hebrew name testifies to its ancient role as a symbol of protection and defense. (In Hebrew, *magen* means shield.)

## Official Emblem of the State of Israel

The official emblem of the State of Israel has three main components: a seven-branched menorah, olive branches, and the word "Israel."

**A golden menorah** was one of the vessels in the Temple. It had seven branches (unlike a *chanukiyah*, which has eight branches and a *shamash*). It is a Jewish symbol that has been found in ancient mosaics, graves, and synagogues. The Menorah in the state emblem is based on the Menorah that appears on the Arch of Titus, which is thought to closely resemble the Menorah used in the Temple.

**The olive** is one of the Seven Species of the Land of Israel. In ancient times, olive oil was an important component of people's diets and was also used to light the Menorah. An olive leaf is mentioned in the story of the Flood in the Book of Genesis. The olive leaf that the dove carried in its mouth was a sign and a symbol of the end of the flood and the return of calm and quiet. Based on this story, the olive branch became an international symbol of peace.

## Activities

### Opening Hook

Before the lesson, place the drawings of the Israeli flag and the emblem of the State of Israel (Supplement 1) inside a gift-wrapped box.

Watch or just listen to the song "[My Israel](#)." Dance with the students to the music, preferably in circles. After a few minutes, have the students sit down and bring out the gift-wrapped box. Tell them that on Yom HaAtzmaut, the State of Israel celebrates its establishment and independence, which was declared on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar (May 14<sup>th</sup>) 1948. Tell the students that after many years during which almost all Jews lived in the Diaspora, many of them returned to the Land of Israel and, despite all the difficulties involved, established a state. Tell about the great joy this brought to the Jewish people. Ask: What does a new country need?

Take an Israeli flag and a picture of the official emblem of the State of Israel (Supplement 1) out of the box. Explain to the students that each country has a flag and an official emblem and that the State of Israel chose to include in its emblem symbols related to the Jewish tradition. Explain that today we will learn about the different components of these symbols and why they were chosen.



## Main Activity

Divide the students into four groups. Each group will do an activity focusing on one component of these symbols. During the activities, the students will learn about the significance of the components of the different symbols and how they reflect Jewish tradition and the values of the State of Israel. To conclude, each student will design a flag based on what they have learned and will write a prayer or wish for the State of Israel.

The groups:

1. **Tallit**
2. **Magen David**
3. **Menorah**
4. **Olive Branch**

Distribute the appropriate activity cards to each group (Supplements 2–5), one for each student in the group, along with sheets of white paper, a blank flag (Supplement 6) for each student, pens or pencils, and colored markers or crayons.

You can also give them colored paper and scissors and suggest that they cut out pieces of colored paper to decorate their flags, instead of using markers or crayons.



## Conclusion

Bring the class back together and ask a representative from each group to tell the class about what they learned. Make sure that the different values represented by the different components are mentioned: connection to tradition, light (the Menorah), peace (olive branches), prayer (the *tallit*), and defense (the *Magen David*). Present the flags that the different groups made, attach them all to a piece of string, and hang them up in the classroom. Ask the students to share the prayers and wishes that they composed.



## Digital Game

### Connect Four – State of Israel



Divide the class into two groups: Team Flag and Team Emblem. Have the groups take turns choosing a number from the board and answering questions based on knowledge from the lesson or general knowledge about Israel. If they answer correctly, they can place one of their colored discs on the spot where the question was. If they answer incorrectly, the other team gets a chance to try and answer the question. The goal is to get four of your team's discs in a row (horizontal, perpendicular, or diagonal). If a team chooses a number for which there is no question, they can put their disc on that spot without having to answer a question.

Supplement 1/1



Supplement 1/2



Supplement 2

# Tallit

What was the design for the Israeli flag based on?

David Wolfson, the president of the Zionist Organization, suggested that:

**“We have a flag, white and blue. The *tallit* that we cover ourselves with when we pray – this *tallit* is our symbol.”**

(From the *Diaries of David Wolfson*)

A tallit is a large cloth with strings (*tzitzit*) tied on its corners which Jews wear as a shawl during prayer. The *tallit* is often decorated with blue stripes. The color light blue decorated the cloak worn by the High Priest and the Torah commands us to dye *tzitzit* this color.



- Why did David Wolfson think that the Israeli flag should be based on a *tallit*?
- How do you think the color light blue is related to *tzitzit*, *tallit*, and the flag? (Think about where we find this color in nature.)

The illustrations below depict Jewish life-cycle events that involve a *tallit*. Examine the pictures and write what ceremony is shown in each picture.



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Using the *tallit* as a source of inspiration, decorate your flag using the art supplies that you have in front of you. On the back of the flag, write a personal prayer or wish for the State of Israel.

Supplement 3

# Magen David

The *Magen David* is a symbol that is thousands of years old and is found in many cultures around the world. Over the years, Jews adopted this symbol, first as a protective charm and later as a general Jewish symbol.



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  - > Today, the *Magen David* is a very common Jewish symbol. What are some examples of other symbols that incorporate a *Magen David* or places or objects that are decorated with a *Magen David*?
  - > Why do you think this symbol was named for King David?
  - > What message did the designers of the flag wish to convey when they decided to put a *Magen David* in the middle of the Israeli flag?

✎ Here are some pictures that each include a *Magen David* and some sentences. Read each sentence and decide which picture it matches.

Anyone who wears me shows that they are proud to be Jewish.

People study Torah in this building, and it is shaped like me.

I'm part of the logo of a first-aid organization in Israel.

I was drawn using tiny letters, as part of a decoration of an ancient Bible.

I decorate a special object that we use on Chanukah.



Efi Elian



Michael Yaakovson

✎ Using the *Magen David* as a source of inspiration, decorate your flag using the art supplies that you have in front of you. On the back of the flag, write a personal prayer or wish for the State of Israel.

Supplement 4

# Menorah

**“Make a menorah of pure gold. Its base and shaft, cups, knobs, and flowers shall be hammered from a single piece. Six branches shall extend from its sides, three on one side and three on the other.”**



(Exodus 25:31–32; translation adapted from *The Koren Tanakh*, 2021)

The Menorah described in the Torah stood in the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) and in the Temple. Since ancient times, it has been a very important and well-known Jewish symbol.



- > How do you think the Menorah was used in the Temple?
- > Why do you think the Menorah became an important Jewish symbol?
- > In your opinion, what message did the designers of the emblem wish to convey when they decided to put a menorah in its center?



Study the pictures.

- > Find the menorah that most resembles the Menorah in the emblem of the State of Israel and mark it in yellow.
- > Find the menorah that includes trees and mark it in green. If you know the name of the type of tree shown in the picture, write it down.
- > Find the menorah that is made up of geometric shapes and mark it in black.
- > Find the menorah that includes the word “shalom” and mark it in red.
- > Which menorah is your favorite? Mark your favorite menorah in blue and explain why it is your favorite.



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Gila Yudkin



Using the Menorah as a source of inspiration, decorate your flag using the art supplies that you have in front of you. On the back of the flag, write a personal prayer or wish for the State of Israel.

Supplement 5

# Olive Branches



The olive tree is first mentioned in the Torah in the story of Noah and the Flood. After the flood had ended, Noah checked whether the land was dry:

**“... he [Noah] sent the dove forth from the ark. The dove came back to him in the evening - and in its beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. Noah knew then that the water had subsided from the earth.”**

(Genesis 8:10–11; translation from *The Koren Tanakh*, 2021)

The olive leaf brought by the dove showed Noah that the flood was over.

Olive trees are one of the most common trees in the Israeli landscape and are used in a variety of ways – for food, crafts, and industry.



- > Inspired by the story of Noah, olive branches became a symbol of peace. What is the connection between these two things?
- > The emblem of the State of Israel also includes a menorah. What is the connection between a menorah and olive trees? (Hint: Think about how people used to light menorahs.)
- > In your opinion, what message did the designers of the emblem wish to convey when they decided to put a menorah in its center?



My cousin who lives in Israel sent me some photographs she took. She asked me to try to guess the connection between each picture and olive trees.

Next to each picture, write what’s shown in the picture and how it relates to olive trees.



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Using olive branches as a source of inspiration, decorate your flag using the art supplies that you have in front of you. On the back of the flag, write a personal prayer or wish for the State of Israel.

Supplement 6

