



Ask The Rabbi...

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This edition contains: 1. A Six-Pointed Question: The Origins of The Magen David
2. Answer to Last Week's Riddle

Vered Zur <zur@Papin.HRZ.Uni-Marburg.DE> wrote:

Schalom, my name is Vered and I live in Germany. Some days ago I was sitting with friends, talking. We talked about the Magen-David and the question why the Magen-David is looking like he is looking with two triangle, one on his head. We came to the conclusion that David decided how his "Magen" should look like. But why did he decide for this sign? Perhaps you can answer me or us this question.

BlondeJANE@aol.com wrote:

Dear Rabbi: I am very interested in the history of the Jewish 6 pointed star. Who originally began to use this symbol and why? Your response is greatly appreciated.

Dear Vered, BlondeJANE & Roy,

The six-pointed star has long been associated with the Jewish people. In Southern Italy, a tombstone dating back to 300 C.E. was found with a six-pointed star on it. In the year 1354, King Carl IV insisted that the Jews of Prague make a flag for themselves that would feature the six-pointed star as well as the five-pointed star of King Solomon.

The words "Magen David" literally mean "Shield of [King] David." Some say that the soldiers of King David's army wielded **shields** in the shape of a six-pointed star. King David's personal **seal** was not a star, but rather a shepherd's staff and bag. His son, King Solomon, used a five-pointed star for his personal seal.

In Kabbalistic teachings, one finds that the number six represents the Heavens and the Earth and the four directions (North, South, East, West). There are those who suggest that the Magen David with its six points correspond to this Kabbalistic idea, which in turn can represent G-d's Omnipresence. Interestingly, the words "Magen David," in Hebrew, are made up of six letters.

Some people have the tradition to hanging a Magen David in their Sukka. Perhaps the six sides allude to the six "Ushpizen" guests who visit during the first six days of Sukkot: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe, Aharon, and Yosef. The star as a unified whole symbolizes the seventh "Ushpizen" -- David -- the "king" who unifies the whole. Furthermore, the Magen David has 12 sides: David as king unified the 12 tribes.

While we're on the subject of kings, I'm reminded of the time when the King of England honored Hershel Greenbaum with a promotion to royalty. Hershel had memorized a Latin

Roy Bernstein of Simon's Town, South Africa <RDB@msi.imt.za> wrote:

What is the origin of the Magen David? Does it have any mystical connections? The reason I ask is that geometrically, it is very interesting: a magen david can be circumscribed by a hexagon. The inside of a magen david is also a hexagon and therefore one can draw another similar magen david inside it. This process may be carried on ad infinitum. The bottom line is that the magen david actually contains an infinity of hexagons! Moreover, it is the smallest polygon (i.e. the one with the fewest sides) which has this property.

phrase to be recited during the inauguration ceremony, but in his nervousness he forgot what it was he was supposed to say. Assuming that no one there knew Latin anyway, he decided to ad-lib a Hebrew phrase instead: "*Mah Nishtanah Halailah Hazeh Mikol Halaylot.*" Hearing this, the king turned to his minister and said "Why is this knight different from all other knights?"

Answer to Last Week's Riddle

Q Which *mitzvah* comes about only as a result of lack of intent on the part of the doer or his worker?

A The *mitzvot* of "*Shichecha*"-- the forgotten bundle left for the poor, and "*Leket*" -- the stalks dropped by accident and left for the poor.

These *mitzvot* occur only when someone or his worker forgets one or two bundles of produce in the field; or when he or his worker drops a stalk or two of grain while harvesting his field. In such a case it is a *mitzvah* for him to leave them for poor people. If he intentionally "forgets" a bundle and leaves it for the poor, he fulfills a different *mitzvah* -- the *mitzvah* of Charity. But the *mitzvah* of "*Shichecha*" can only be fulfilled by unintentionally forgetting a bundle.

Source: Rambam, *Hilchot Matnot Aniyim* 4:1, 5:1.

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Issue #60 - March 18, 1995

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