



The Israeli Flag

Blue and white, and a symbol of the Jewish state.

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During their wanderings in the wilderness after the Exodus from bondage in Egypt, the Jewish people raised banners and flags (*degel*) in their camps to signify their tribal identities (Num 2:2). According to the Midrash, each tribal prince had a flag (*mappah*) of a unique color, corresponding to one of the 12 precious stones of the breastplate of Aaron, the *Kohen Gadol* (Num. R. 2:7).

Theodor Herzl's first design for a Zionist flag, as written in his diary in 1895 and proposed in The Jewish State one year later, was seven gold stars (representing the “seven working hours” of the day) on a white background (standing for “our new and pure life”). Although other Zionist leaders convinced him to accept the Star of David, Herzl insisted that six stars appear opposite the six points of the Magen David (star of David, or Jewish star), with a seventh star above it. This design, with the inscription “*Aryeh Yehudah*” (Lion of Judah) embroidered in the center, became the first Zionist flag.

The combination of blue and white as the colors of the Jewish flag was derived from an 1860 poem, “Judah’s Colors,” by Austrian Ludwig August Frankl, which explained that the blue symbolized “the splendors of the firmament,” and the white represented “the radiance of the priesthood.” The blue stripes on the Zionist flag were also inspired by the stripes on the tallit (prayer shawl). They provided “religious and ritual symbolism of Jewish life guided by precepts of the Torah, while the Star of David reflected the unity of the Jewish people.”

The dark blue stripes in the original flag were later lightened to enhance visibility at sea. Soon after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Zionist flag became the official national flag — “a white rectangle with two blue stripes along its entire length and a Star of David in the center made up of six dark blue stripes forming two equilateral triangles.”

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