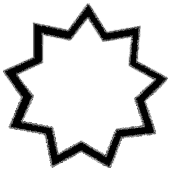


SPIRITUAL & RELIGIOUS CARE AWARENESS WEEK FAITH SYMBOLS & THEIR MEANINGS



Bahá'í: The Nine Pointed Star

A simple nine-pointed star is generally used by Bahá'ís as a symbol of their Faith. The number nine has significance in the Revelation. Nine years after the announcement of the Báb in Shiraz, Bahá'u'lláh received the intimation of His mission in the dungeon in Teheran. Nine, as the highest single-digit number, symbolizes completeness. Since the Bahá'í Faith claims to be the fulfillment of the expectations of all prior religions, this symbol, as used for example in nine-sided Bahá'í temples, reflects that sense of fulfillment and completeness." ¹



Buddhism: The Dharma Wheel

The Dharma Wheel is the symbol of Buddhist life, the endless circle of birth and rebirth, and also represents the Buddhist teaching or Dharma. The Buddha's first sermon is called "Turning the Wheel of the Dharma." The wheel often has eight spokes, which stand for the noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. ²



Christianity: The Cross

The Cross (sometimes known as 'the crucifix') is the main symbol of Christianity. It serves as a reminder of the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. It emphasizes not only his obedient suffering, undertaken for the salvation of humanity, but the power of his risen life. ³



Hinduism: The OM

The OM represents the letters A U M in Hindi, which is the sound of the sun. A – to create, U – to preserve, M – to destroy. The three letters represent the trinity of God in Hindu Dharma (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). They also represent the states of waking, dream and deep sleep and the three planes of existence: heaven, earth and the netherworld. ⁴

FAITH SYMBOLS & THEIR MEANINGS



Islam: The Crescent Moon and Star

The crescent moon and star Although Islam has no symbol doctrinally associated with it, the symbol of the crescent moon and star (*hila* in Arabic) is now widely used to symbolize Islam. This symbol has no religious significance in Islam and Muslims do not hold the crescent and star to be in any way holy or sacred.⁵ The crescent represents progress and the five pointed star, light and knowledge. The moon is also the appointed sign of times, seasons, fast and feast, and governs the Islamic calendar. The five points of the star can be taken to represent the five pillars of Islam, the essential elements of the Muslim faith.⁶



Jainism

The comprehensive Jain symbol consists of a digit of the Moon, three dots, the Swastika or Om, the palm of a hand with the wheel (Chakra) inset, and outline figure which encompasses all symbols. Also each individual symbol is separately used in Jainism.⁷ The Palm of the hand signifies this assurance; 'do not be afraid' indicating that human beings, which are suffering due to karmic bondage, do not need to be disheartened. The Wheel of Dharma (Chakra) with 24 spokes represents the religion preached by the 24 Tirthankaras consists of nonviolence (Ahimsa) and other virtues. The three Dots represent the Jain path of liberation (Jain trinity): right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct, together lead to liberation. Also these Dots represent the three worlds: earth (place for humans, animals, birds, vegetables etc.), heaven and hell, where all non-liberated souls born, live, die, and suffer. The digit of the Moon represents the region beyond the three worlds wherein reside the liberated souls. The Swastika signifies the cycles of births and deaths due to karma, in any of the four forms; heaven, human, tiryanch (animals, birds, and plants), and hell of the non-liberated souls. It reminds that one should follow the true religion and be liberated to get out of this suffering. The Om represents the salutation of five revered personalities of Jain religion. The outline figure represents the Jain description of the shape of the universe, resembling a person standing with feet apart and arms rested on both hips. The wording underneath translates as the Living beings (souls) render services to one another.⁸



Judaism: Star of David

Through the Jewish people's long and often difficult history, we have come to the realization that our only hope is to place our trust in God. The six points of the Star of David symbolize God's rule over the universe in all six directions: north, south, east, west, up and down. Originally, the Hebrew name *Magen David* -- literally "Shield of David" -- poetically referred to God. It acknowledges that our military hero, King David, did not win by his own might, but by the support of the Almighty. This is also alluded to in the third blessing after the Haftorah reading on Shabbat: "Blessed are you God, Shield of David."⁹

FAITH SYMBOLS & THEIR MEANINGS



Sikhism: The Khanda and the Chakkar

The Khanda is the insignia of the Sikh faith. The central doubled-edged sword, used by Guru Gobind Singh to prepare Amrit, is referred to as Khanda. It signifies divine strength, truth, freedom, justice, and the Sikh belief in One God. The inner circle, Chakkar, represents the Oneness of God who is without beginning or end, Oneness of humanity. This Chakkar was used by Sikhs as a war weapon against injustice and oppression. Guru Gobind Singh himself and all his Sikh warriors wore the Chakkar on their turbans as part of the battle dress. The Chakkar is surrounded by two swords call Kirpans which symbolise the twin concept of Miri (temporal sovereignty) and Piri (spiritual sovereignty) introduced by Guru Hargobind, to represent the equal emphasis that a Sikh must place on spiritual aspirations as well as on obligation to society. ¹⁰



Unitarian Universalism: The Flaming Chalice

Flaming Chalice is the official symbol of the UU Service Committee and the Unitarian Universalist Association. The flaming chalice combines two archetypes—a drinking vessel and a flame—and as a religious symbol has different meanings to different beholders. Officially or unofficially, it functions as a logo for hundreds of congregations. Perhaps most importantly, it has become a focal point for worship. No one meaning or interpretation is official. The flaming chalice, like our faith, stands open to receive new truths that pass the tests of reason, justice, and compassion. ¹¹



Wicca: The Pentacle or Pentagram

The pentacle or pentagram is a five-point star surrounded by a circle. It is the symbol of the Wiccan faith, and represents the five elements: Air, Earth, Fire, Water and Spirit. The pentagram has long been associated with mystery and magic. It is the simplest form of star shape that can be drawn unicursally - with a single line - hence it is sometimes called the Endless Knot. It has long been believed to be a potent protection against evil and demons, hence a symbol of safety, and was sometimes worn as an amulet for happy homecoming. The old folk-song : "Green Grow the Rushes,O!" refers to the use of the pentagram above doors and windows in the line: "Five is the symbol at your door." The potency and associations of the pentagram have evolved throughout history. Today it is an ubiquitous symbol of neopagans with much depth of magickal and symbolic meaning. ¹²

FAITH SYMBOLS & THEIR MEANINGS



Zoroastrianism: The Faravahar, or Farohar

The Faravahar, or Farohar, is to remind one of the purpose of life on this earth, which is to live in such a way that the soul progresses spiritually and attains union with Ahura-Mazda (the Wise Lord); this state is called Frasho-kereti in Avesta.

In the center of the figure is a circle which represents the soul of the individual. For the soul to evolve and progress, it has two wings. In each wing there are five layers of feathers. These remind one of the five jzhirums with which the soul is linked. To achieve the ultimate goal of reaching Ahura-Mazda, the soul has to pass through all the jzhirums. The five layers can also represent the five Divine Songs (Gathas) of Zarathustra, the five divisions of the day (Gehs), and the five senses of the human body.

The head of the figure reminds us that Ahura-Mazda has given every soul a free will to choose either to obey divine universal natural laws or to disobey them.

The figure also has a pair of hands which hold a circular ring. The ring symbolizes the cycles of rebirths on this earth and other planes which the soul has to undergo to make progress on the path of Asha. If these divine laws are obeyed through Manashni, Gavashni, and Kunashni, our soul will be able to attain union with Ahura-Mazda. This far-off event, towards which the whole of creation moves, is called Frasho-kereti.¹³

SOURCES:^x

- ¹ <http://www.bahai.com/Bahauallah/symbol.htm>
- ² <http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith1.htm>
- ³ <http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith1.htm>
- ⁴ <http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith1.htm>
- ⁵ <http://www.faithresource.com/showcase/Islam/islamoverview.htm>
- ⁶ <http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith2.htm>
- ⁷ <http://www.jsgc.org/jainism.htm>
- ⁸ <http://www.jsgc.org/jainism.htm>
- ⁹ http://www.aish.com/literacy/concepts/Star_of_David.asp
- ¹⁰ <http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith2.htm>
- ¹¹ <http://uufnorthiowa.org/flamingchalice.htm>
- ¹² <http://www.ecauldron.com/pentagram.php>
- ¹³ <http://pchome.grm.hia.no/~fsaljoug/farhavar.htm>

For more information, please visit:

<http://altreligion.about.com/library/glossary/blsymbols.htm> http://www.religioustolerance.org/var_rel.htm
<http://www.anglicannifcon.org/SymbolsFaith1.htm>
[http://www.guidesontario.org/training/LDP2 PR 01WREL.htm](http://www.guidesontario.org/training/LDP2_PR_01WREL.htm)
<http://www.multifaithnet.org/index.htm>

^x Please note that while every attempt has been made to present accurate information, these sites and their contents may not be authorized by the Faith Groups.