

Faravahar or Farohar Zoroastrian Symbol.



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.

The word "faravahar" actually is Pahlavi, or Middle Persian. It derives from ancient Iranian (Avestan) word fravarane which means "I choose." The choice is that of the Good, or the Good Religion of Zarathushtra.

Another related word is fravarti or fravashi, which may derive from an alternative meaning of "protect," implying the divine protection of the guardian spirit, the fravashi. From these words come the later Middle Persian words fravahr, foruhar, or faravahar.

What exactly is a fravashi? The origin of the word, as has been said here, relates either to divine protection or to one's moral choice of Good or Evil, and one's choice of the Good Religion. But there is much more to it than that. The concept of the fravashi as guardian spirit does not occur in the Gathas of Zarathushtra. But in later Zoroastrianism, it becomes a most important idea. The Fravashi is the part of the human soul that is divine, unpoluted, and uncorrupt. It is not only our divine guardian but our guide; its perfection is always within us, as an ideal towards which we can reach. Every human being has a fravashi; even the divine spirits have them. Once a human being has finished life on earth, the fravashi, the higher individuality of that person, returns to Heaven.

In the later books of the Avesta (the Zoroastrian scriptures), the fravashis of the righteous are invoked as fierce and mighty warriors for the Good. In a long prayer called the Farvardin Yasht, there are litanies praising and reverencing the fravashis of the early "saints" and heroes of Zoroastrian tradition. The fravashis of the good departed are supposed to return to earth on special days, and towards the very end of the Persian year, in March, just before the Persian New Year, there are ceremonies to honor the fravashis of the righteous.

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.

In nature, there exist two opposing forces: Spenta-Mainyu - the good mind or assar-I roshni - and Angre-Mainyu - the wicked mind or assar-I tariki. A continuous conflict goes on in nature between these two. A person's soul is caught between the two and is pulled by each from side to side. The two long curved legs on either side of the circle represent these two forces.

To help the soul balance itself between these two forces, the soul is given a rudder in the form of a tail. This tail has three layers of feathers, which reminds one of the path of Asha - Humata (Good Thoughts), Hukhta (Good Words), and Hvarasta (Good Deeds), or Manashni, Gavashni, and Kunashni - by which the soul is able to make its own spiritual progress.

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.

In zoroastrianism, the Faravahar or human spirit, embodies two opposing indicators of good and bad. This will clearly show the Zarathustra's philosophy that everybody should try to promote his/her Sepanta Minu (positive force) and suppress his/her Ankareh Minu (negative force).

As a result of such a spiritual struggle toward goodness and avoiding evil, everybody will be able to thrive in all the walks of his/her life. Since, the ring of covenant which located in the center of the Faravahar's trunk is the symbol of the immortality of the spirit, it can be inferred that more human beings try to promote their own Faravahar, more their spirit will be elevated in the other world after they pass away.

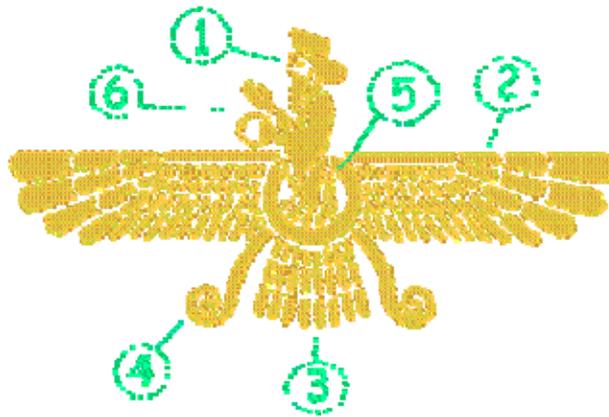
For that reason, ancient Iranians would never mourn at the death of their beloved ones, because they would believe that their spirit will be elevated to a higher level in the other world. Naturally, when we believe that at the time of death, the spirit of the dead bodies would be elevated to a higher level, we have to joy at their departure to another world, rather than being heartbroken, though their loss may be intolerable for us. In this way, in zoroastrianism, on the basis of one's Faravahar, everybody is responsible for his/her own deed.

For this reason, Cyrus the Great and most of the other Iranian ancient kings, according to historical documents, not only never forced anybody to be converted into zoroastrianism, they even respected

the belief system of others. In this regard, the Human right's Charter of Cyrus the Great at the conquest of Babel reads:

" I ordered that no one is permitted to abuse anybody or to damage the cities. I ordered that no house should be damaged and no one's property should be violated and ransacked. I ordered that everybody should keep to his/her belief system and be free to worship his/her own God. I ordered that all the people should be free in their thoughts, choosing the place of their residence and no one should violate the rights of others."

Explanation of the Faravahar Symbol



1. The Faravahar's face resembles the face of human being and therefore, indicates its connection to mankind.
2. There are two wings in two sides of the picture, which have three main feathers. These main feathers indicate three symbols of good reflection, good words, and good deed, which are at the same time the motive of flight and advancement.
3. The lower part of the Faravahar consists of three parts, representing bad reflection, bad words, and bad deed which causes misery and misfortune for human beings.
4. There are two loops at the two sides of the Faravahar, which represent Sepanta Minu, and Ankareh Minu. The former is directed toward the face and the latter is located at the back. This also indicates that we have to proceed toward the good and turn away from bad.
5. There is a circle in the middle of the Faravahar's trunk. This symbol indicates that our spirit is immortal, having neither a beginning, nor an end.
6. One hand of the Faravahar, points upwards, showing that we have to struggle to thrive.
7. The other hand holds a ring. Some interpreters consider that as the ring of covenant, representing loyalty and faithfulness which is the basis of Zarathustra's philosophy.

Compiled by: Phil (Phiroze) Masters. Canada.