All of us are familiar with this symbol but what does it really mean. We see the Star of Life at hospitals, on ambulances and on uniforms of Emergency Medical personal. So what does it mean and represent you ask? Please read on to find out!

Definition of the Star of Life from Wikipedia is as follows:
It is a blue, six- point star, outlined with a white border which features the rod of Asclepius in the center. Traditionally used in the U.S. as a stamp of authentication or certification for ambulances, Paramedics and other Medical personal. Internationally it represents all Emergency Medical Service units and personnel worldwide.

Credit goes to Leo Schwartz, chief of EMS branch, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for creating and designing this symbol which became trade-marked and widely used February 1st, 1977. This new logo/symbol was designed to set itself apart from the old one that was an orange cross on a white background which closely resembled the already used American Red Cross logo with a Red Cross and white background.

The new symbol is described as a six barred cross that is trade-marked as blue with a white border using a staff with snakes wrapped around it making reference to the Greek mythology god, Asclepius, known to practice the art of healing to all.

With the trade-mark in place this symbol would be restricted to certain types of use only. It would be used on emergency vehicles that provide EMS services. Qualified medical staff would also be allowed to use this symbol on uniforms and personal use items for themselves. You would also see the Star of Life on maps, highway and hospital signs to denote locations where emergency care is available just to list a few here.

What does this symbol actually represent?

The Star of Life was designed with six barred arms to represent the six tasks that all EMS personnel carry out when performing their duties

Task one starts at the top center arm of the cross following a clockwise pattern for the other arms to represent the 5 remaining tasks. The six tasks include early detection, early reporting, early response, on scene care, care in transit and last the transfer of patient to a higher level of care.

1. Early detection is when untrained or involved people realize, observe the scene and identify safety hazards, which then takes the initiative if they can, to ensure safety of the scene when possible.
2. Early reporting is when the actual call for help is made to 9-1-1 and medical staff is dispatched to render care to the injured parties.
3. Early response is when the first rescuers begin to provide basic care to the injured to the extent of their ability.
4. On scene care is when professional EMS staff arrives; begin to treat the injured on the scene and determination the need to transport patients.
5. Care in transit is when the EMS staff has determined the patient will need further medical care and continue to treat injured as needed in transit.
6. Transfer to higher care takes place between the EMS staff and hospital staff when the transport EMS team reaches the hospital and delivers the patient for further medical care.

In review the Star of Life is not just a logo, it is a symbol that carries meaning to all EMS providers.