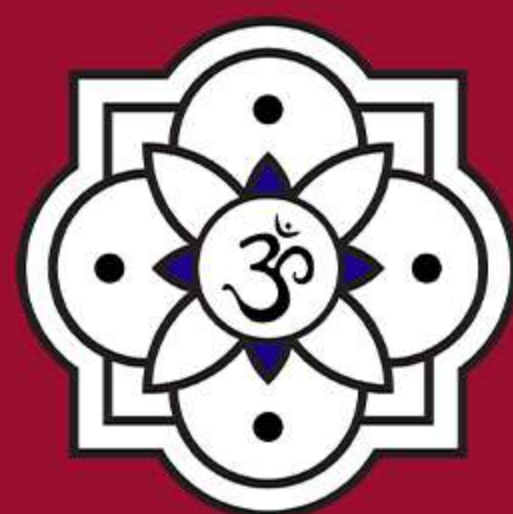




THE MEANING OF SWASTIKA



UNDERSTANDING A SACRED SYMBOL AND ITS
WRONGFUL ASSOCIATION WITH HATRED



CoHNA

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ABOUT CoHNA



CoHNA (Coalition of Hindus of North America) is a grassroots level advocacy organization dedicated to improving the understanding of Hinduism in North America. The coalition seeks to protect the collective interests of the Hindu community by working on the issues faced by them and educating the public about Hindu heritage and tradition.

Through its grassroots level work, CoHNA seeks to make an impact on how Hinduism and India are discussed in the North American mainstream – among the youth, in the media and within political circles. We believe that, through mutual respect and understanding, we can make the world a better place, enriched with values and practices from various religious and traditional paths – including Hinduism. Hinduism and India's ancient culture have enriched the world through millennia and continue to do so even today. As descendants of that heritage and as citizens of the United States and Canada, we hope to carry this forward, so that our countries can reap the benefits of these treasures and develop a better understanding of our religious and cultural practices.



CoHNA is building a movement to empower Hindus whereby they can become meaningful contributors and active participants in their local communities on a wide range of issues and work towards a vibrant society of today and tomorrow – one that can stand upon the pillars of mutual respect, pluralism and sustainability.

For more information about us, and to learn how to get involved, please visit www.cohna.org or follow [@cohnaofficial](https://twitter.com/cohnaofficial) on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.



WHY THIS BOOKLET?

Without a doubt, the Swastika and the Hakenkreuz (which bears overlapping features with the Swastika) have become the center of controversies over the last century.

We recognize and acknowledge the transgenerational trauma of the six million Jews, one and half million Roma and others killed by Nazi persecution, and the chilling, intimidating effect of Nazi inspired hatred on Jewish Americans, African Americans and others even today. Hindus and Sikhs have also been targets of neo-Nazis and those who support Nazi ideology. Yet, the important work of fighting bigotry and racism must not inadvertently stoke resentment against other religious minorities and traditions.

Hindus believe in the fundamental concept of *Dharma* and peaceful co-existence and have never tolerated hatred towards others. On the contrary, Hindus have provided shelter to persecuted communities, including Jews, Parsis, Christians, Buddhists and others due to their inherent aversion to hatred.

It is imperative that we equip our children with proper knowledge about world cultures and religions, so that they can develop the mutual respect and pluralism that must be the cornerstone of any multi-racial, multi-ethnic and inclusive society.

Through this simple booklet, along with education and awareness, we hope to foster a mutual understanding of the Swastika with other communities and to prevent misunderstanding and misuse while imparting much needed education on hatred and intolerance in today's world. Through this booklet, individuals can learn to distinguish between the two symbols and rightly condemn the Hakenkreuz for what it represents, rather than the Swastika, which (along with its equivalents), has been around for thousands of years and is used by many cultures as a symbol of peace, well being and auspiciousness.



THE MEANING OF SWASTIKA FOR HINDUS

In Sanskrit, the word *Swastika* means “that which brings good luck and well-being.” The word *Swasti* occurs frequently in the Vedas as well as in classical literature, and means health, luck, success, and prosperity. It is a symbol of divinity and auspiciousness. The limbs of the Swastika can be associated with the four goals of life: Dharma (right action), Artha (worldly prosperity), Kama (worldly enjoyment) and Moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death). They also symbolize the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva).

Swastika and its equivalents have been used for thousands of years in India and other parts of the world, always in a positive sense.

REFERENCES IN HINDU LITERATURE

In Rigveda, as a Vedic Mantra for Peace:

*Om Swasti Na Indro Vriddhashravah Swasti Nah Pusha Vishva-Vedah |
Swasti Nastarkshyoarishtha-Nemih Swasti No Brihaspatirdadhatu ||*

Translation: Om! May Indra, who possesses great speed do well to us; may Pushan, the knower of the world, do good to us; and may Tarkshya, who devastates enemies, do good to us! May Brihaspati, the Lord of Vedic knowledge or speech, give us spiritual delight gotten from the light of knowledge and wisdom.

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, as a Universal Mantra for Well-being:

*Om Sarvesham Swastir Bhavatu | Sarvesham Shantir Bhavatu
Sarveśām Pūrnam Bhavatu | Sarveśām Magalam Bhavatu
Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti ||*

Translation: May there be well-being in all; may there be peace in all; may there be fulfilment in all; may there be auspiciousness in all. Om peace, peace, peace.

In Katha Upanishad:

Namaste'stu Brahman Swasti Me'stu.

Translation: Salutations to Brahman, may good happen to me by this.

In Lakshmi Tantra:

“After sitting in a posture of either a Chakra, Padma, or Swastika as he pleases...” Here, the Swastika is referred to as a particular Asana or yogic posture for the reader to begin meditation.

In Yoga:

Swastikasana is an ancient yogic posture, where the practitioner sits cross legged, placing the left toe on the right knee fold and the right foot on the left knee fold. As described in the Lakshmi Tantra above, the Asana is used in sitting for meditation.





A Swastika used as a welcome sign at a Hindu home.

Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



A Swastika drawn on a Hindu boy's head during a traditional head shaving ceremony.

Photo Credit: BBC.



A Mandir (Temple) dedicated to Shiva has Swastikas etched near the entrance gate as a form of good luck and auspiciousness.

Photo Credit: OpIndia.



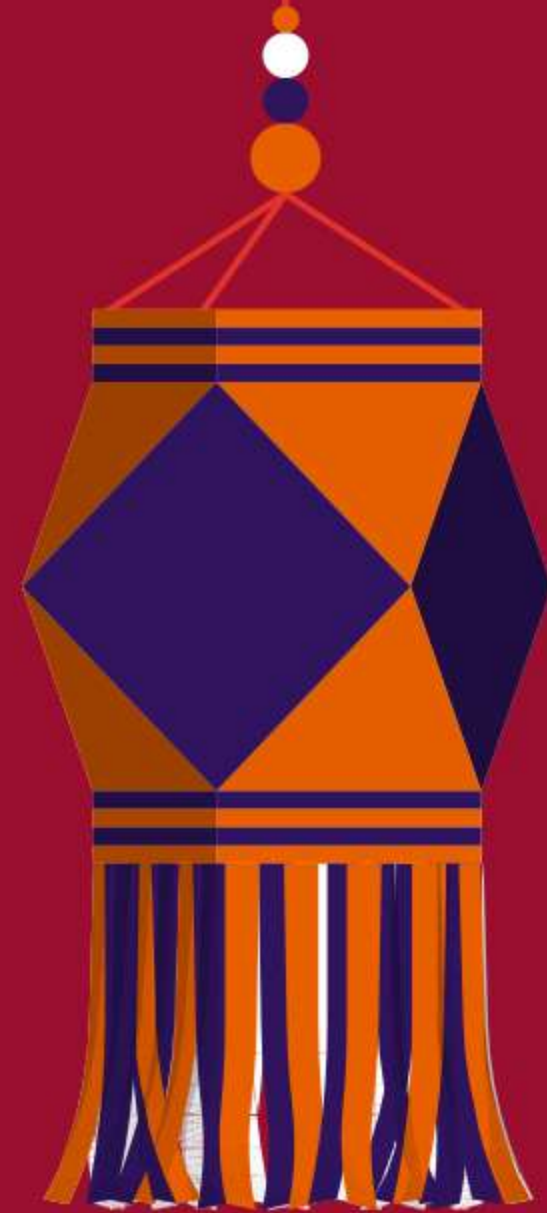
During many Hindu festivals such as Diwali, Holi and Durga Puja, Swastikas are adorned at entrances using flowers, rice, colors to mark the beginning of the festivals.

Photo Credit: Encyclopedia Britannica.



A practitioner sits in Swastikasana for meditation.

Photo Credit: Namita Piparaiya, Yogana-ma.



IMPORTANCE IN OTHER RELIGIONS



BUDDHISM

In many parts of Asia where Buddhism flourishes, the Swastika possesses a variety of meanings and interpretations. These range from symbolizing the auspicious footprints of the Buddha to the Dharma wheel in reference to the *Samsara* doctrine. Swastika represents the core doctrine to Buddhists and can be seen imprinted on temples and on Buddha's chest. Buddhists often use it as a form of meditative Mandala.



Swastika represents the core doctrine to Buddhists and can be seen imprinted here on Buddha's chest – as a reminder of the values.
Photo Credit: Davidlohr Bueso.



Swastikas can be seen on many Buddhist temples in Japan and throughout Southeast Asia.
Photo Credit: The Telegraph UK.

JAINISM

For Jains, the Swastika is the emblem of their seventh Tirthankara (spiritual teacher) known as *Surprashvanatha*. According to Jainism, it is a reminder of the four places that they could be reborn. All Derasars (Jain temples) and sacred texts must contain the Swastika.



The Government of India commemorated the 2600th Anniversary of Mahavir Swami, the founder of Jainism. Note the Swastika printed on the coin.
Photo Credit: Numista.



Jain emblem on a temple in Calcutta, India.
Photo Credit: Hern Hunter.



WHAT IS THE HAKENKREUZ (HOOKED CROSS)?

A symbol, meaning “hooked cross” in English, devised and used by Adolf Hitler and Germans of the Nazi era. It was ubiquitous from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s and represented their hateful ideology. To the Jewish people, the Hakenkreuz represents the most violent genocidal evil; one which was responsible for the extermination of over six million Jews, one and half million Roma and others.

The symbol brings fear, trauma and pain in the hearts and minds of these communities even today.



The flag of the National Socialist German Worker's Party, designed by Adolf Hitler.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



War Ensign (Balkenkreuz) of Germany, 1938-1945), with the Cross and the Hooked Cross.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



Logos of the German Christian Movement, 1932, 1935, 1937.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

WHAT INFLUENCED HITLER'S DECISION TO USE THE HOOKED CROSS – A SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE

Leading scholars such as German historians Werner Maser and J.V. Palatine, Hitler's biographer Robert Payne, along with Dr. Daniel Rancour-Laferriere and Rev. T.K. Nakagaki, have pointed out that Hitler's decision to use the Hakenkreuz as a symbol of the Nazi party may have been due to his childhood upbringing at the Benedictine Monastery in Austria, where he repeatedly saw the “hooked cross” in multiple places, and used to see the statue of Abbot Theodorich von Hagen, who had a stylized Hakenkreuz in the coat of arms.

Furthermore, the scholars highlight the mistranslation of Hakenkreuz into Swastika, even though a native German speaker can easily understand that the infamous term is translated as “hook” (Haken) “cross” (Kreuz).



Hakenkreuz in the honor of Theodore Hagen at the Lambach Abbey, Austria, dedicated in the year 1869. Photo Credit: Omaimon Paradosis.

The German language has various words associated with the cross and does not contain the word “Swastika.” Some examples include:

- *Christenkreuz* (Christian Cross)
- *Hakenkreuz* (Hooked Cross)
- *Ritterkreuz* (Knight's Cross)
- *Balkenkreuz* (Beam Cross)
- *Winkelkreuz* (Angled Cross)
- *Krummkreuz* (Crooked Cross)

THE WRONGFUL ASSOCIATION WITH SWASTIKA

In the West, the Swastika has been wrongfully associated with the Hakenkreuz. Neither has anything to do with the other.

To understand the wrongful association, we must look at Adolf Hitler's German version of *Mein Kampf* (Vol. 2, Ch. 7): *im Hakenkreuz die Mission des Kampfes für den Sieg des arischen Menschen und zugleich mit ihm auch den Sieg des Gedankens der schaffenden Arbeit...* It is important to note that Hitler did not know English or any other languages such as Sanskrit.

The first translation of *Mein Kampf* by E.T.S Dugdale in 1931 correctly uses the word "hooked cross" instead of "swastika."

In 1939, Irish Christian priest, translator and journalist James Vincent Murphy provided the first popular English translation of *Mein Kampf*. However, Murphy mistranslated the Hakenkreuz rather than using the literal translation: *In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the nationalistic idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token, the victory of the idea of creative work... This was despite his familiarity with German words and their specific usage.*

However, the first translation of *Mein Kampf* by E.T.S Dugdale in 1931 correctly uses the word "hooked cross" instead of "swastika." Unfortunately, Dugdale was not successful in getting a publisher for his translation until 1933, and his work was an abridged version of *Mein Kampf*.

It cannot be disputed that, as a boy, Adolf Hitler repeatedly saw the hooked cross in the Christian context of the Benedictine Catholic Monastery where he had his choir lessons and other classes...in an early notebook we do find a sketch of a projected book cover which features a hooked cross on a flag which looks rather like what would become the Nazi banner...German historian Werner Maser believes that this sketch by the future German dictator reflects the influence of the Lambach hooked cross.

– Dr. Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Sign of the Cross: From Golgotha to Genocide*

Abbot Theodorich von Hagen's [hooked cross] was probably the ancestor of the Nazi Hakenkreuz.

– Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler*

Many in the West believe that Hitler invented the swastika symbol. He didn't. Many also believe he invented the word "swastika" to describe it. He didn't do that either. But, he did consciously use a different German word, "Hakenkreuz," and that is more significant because in the use of that word we can see how Hitler saw the symbol...

– Rev. T.K. Nakagaki, *The Buddhist Swastika and Hitler's Cross: Rescuing a Symbol of Peace from the Forces of Hate*

HOOKED CROSSES IN CHRISTIANITY

The hooked cross holds deep significance in Christianity. It can be found across Europe and other places where Christianity is practiced, from the tombs of the Knights Templar to mosaic on the floor of the Byzantine Church in Shavei-Zion, on the walls of the Lalibela Church in Ethiopia, in churches in Mexico and in Macedonia, etc. The hooked cross symbolized Jesus' victory over death and persecution. Thus, for Hitler, who was exposed to such teachings at the Lambach Abbey, it was quite natural to see this connection and twist it into a powerful yet evil symbol. In fact, German Christians at that time were fully aware of the hooked cross' connections with Christianity and nothing else.



Hooked cross in the mosaic of the excavated Byzantine church in Shavei Tzion, Israel. Photo Credit: Etan J. Tal, Wikimedia Commons.



Hooked crosses seen on the floor of a church in Tampico, Mexico. Photo Credit: Catedrales e Iglesias.



Hooked cross seen alongside the Christian Cross on a floor mosaic at Plaošnik Baptistery, Macedonia. Photo Credit: Journey



Hooked cross seen on the medieval cross at the Lalibela Church, Ethiopia. Photo Credit: Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes 2019.



Hooked crosses seen in geometric roman mosaic in Roman village of La Olmeda, Pedrosa de la Vega (Palencia, Castile and León). Photo Credit: Valdavia, Wikimedia Commons.



Hooked crosses on the vestments of the effigy of Bishop William Edington (d. 1366) in Winchester Cathedral. Photo Credit: Ealdgyth,



Order of the Cross of Liberty, Finland, which has the President of Finland as its Grand Master. Photo Credit: eMedals.