



Vedanta Letters

by Sanjiv R. Malkan, Ph.D.

Swastika

स्वस्तिकः



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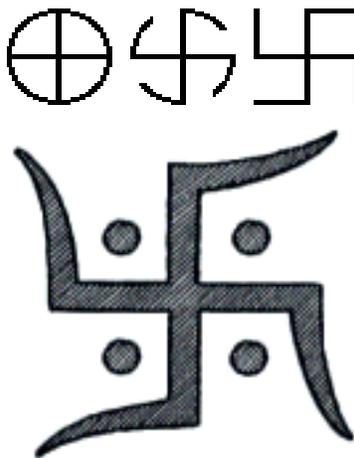
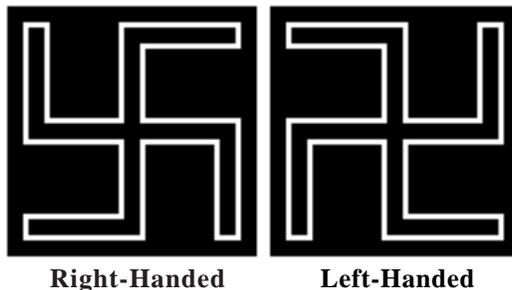
The **Swastika** is the most ancient symbol of prosperity and good fortune. Despite many theories and speculations, its origin is unknown. It began before history, and is properly classed as prehistoric. The swastika has been found in many places on a variety of artifacts—such as coins, prehistoric art work, jewelry, prehistoric buildings, etc. It is believed by some to have been the oldest Aryan symbol.

Symbol Names. The Swastika has been called by different names (such as, Gammadion, Flyfot, Hakwnkreuz etc.) in different parts of the world throughout ages, though nearly all countries have in later years accepted the ancient Sanskrit name of Swastika. This name is considered as the most definite and certain, most general and, indeed, almost universal. Swastika is a Sanskrit word signifying happiness, pleasure, and good luck. It is composed of **Su** and **Asti** with the suffix **Ka**. **Su** means good, **Asti** means good being, and **Ka** is a suffix forming the substantive. Thus it means, "It is a good thing." The word **Svasti** occurs frequently in the Vedas, both as a noun in a sense of happiness, and as an adverb in the sense of well or hail.

Symbol Definition. The symbol Swastika has been defined in many ways by different people in different parts of the world. The most appropriate definition is as follows:

"A monogrammatic sign of four branches, of which the ends are curved at right angles, the name signifying, literally, the sign of benediction or good augury."

Symbol Description. The simplicity of the symbol suggest that it may have emerged from the inner mind independently out to many different people on earth. The Swastika is believed to be derived from a simple cross or from the sun wheel by breaking the circle. The bars of the normal Swastika are straight, of equal thickness throughout, and cross each other at right angles. The four arms at each end of the cross are of equal size, length, and style. The peculiarity of four arms is that all of them are bent at right angles and in the same direction, right or left. The right-handed Swastika represents vernal sun with clockwise movement of the world-wheel, indicating cosmic processions and evolution round a fixed center. It also signifies the male principle. The left-handed swastika (often referred as sauvasatika) represents sun during autumn and winter, and is regarded by some people as inauspicious (American Indian always used left-handed swastika as good luck). It also signifies the female principle. The male and female swastikas maintain perfect balance in the cosmos.



Many theories have been presented concerning the description of the Swastika, its relation to ancient deities and its representation of certain qualities. Of many theories and descriptions, the Jainas description of the Swastika is somewhat appropriate and in-line with the Vedic thoughts and concepts.

The Jaina philosophy states that the horizontal and vertical bars or lines represent spirit and matter. The four right-handed or left-handed bent arms represent four grades of existence of souls in the material universe. The first grade is the lowest life—Archaic or protoplasmic life. The second grade is the earth with its plant and animal life. The third grade is the humans, and the fourth grade is celestial meaning life in other worlds than our own. The symbol further states that one must thrive to attain the spiritual plane where the soul is entirely freed from the bonds of matter or maya. In order to reach the spiritual plane one must have right belief, right conduct, and right knowledge; which are represented by three dots. The fourth dot represents the omniscient state of the soul when it has attained full consciousness, is liberated, and lives apart from the matter or maya.

Symbol Significance. The underlying significance of the symbol according to many beliefs is prosperity and good fortune. In Sanskrit there is a saying—स्वस्तिकः सर्वतो भद्र, which means swastika brings prosperity from all four sides.

For Hindus, the swastika reminds that the path to truth is not straight but subtly winds back to the source through seeming indirection and also one of the many symbols for the Lord Vishnu. *For Jainas,* the swastika is the emblem of their seventh Tiranthkara. *For the Nazis* during World

War II, the symbol signified the superiority of the Aryan race. For Asia Minor, it was a symbol of fertility. *For Buddhist,* it is a symbol of the Sun. *For American Indians* it signifies the sun and infinity.

The symbol swastika is not confined to the temple nor to the priests or monks. In fact, whenever and wherever a benediction or blessing is given, the swastika should be used. However, one must not misuse or mistreat the sacredness of the Swastika symbol.

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