

THE SWASTIKA

Anonymous Author

This article first appeared in the September 1975 issue of *Hermes* and was reproduced with permission in the December 1975 issue of *The American Theosophist*.

“Symbols of divine truth were not invented for the amusement of the ignorant; they are the *alpha* and *omega* of philosophic thought.”

H. P. BLAVATSKY

A Navaho Singer, tracing a rainbow serpent, describes the shores of the heavenly “whirling lake.” Upon the surface of this lake with no outlet and no bottom, he outlines with colored sand the cross of the “whirling logs.” He carefully fashions the eight Yei figures who, two by two, ride astride the ends of the logs. They are the Holy People who balance the divisions of time. They stand as the heavenly feet upon the arms of the swastika. Recreated, they whirl in the universal pattern of differentiated wholeness which this most ancient of symbols represents. The two lines of the cross represent spirit and matter, marking divisions of cycles and indicating the four cardinal points. The feet signify motion and have been called the “ships of life,” barques of Divine Beings who father whole periods of evolution. The completed symbol of the swastika denotes a world in itself, a spatial order of power with elements equidistant from the center. It is the dual glyph of the cosmic and microcosmic, the configuration of movement divided into four parts.

The swastika was impressed on the walls of Christian catacombs in Rome, together with the words *ZWTIKO ZWTIKO*, “Life of Life.” It was a common symbol of ancient England and Ireland, Scandinavia and Mycenae. It was used by all Germanic people, the Gauls, Etruscans, Celts and Slavs as well. It is found throughout ancient and modern India, in Central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, and also in all parts of the New World. The Navaho sand painting depicts the same symbol that is found on Aztec pottery, Mayan sculpture, Incan edifices, Zuni paintings, and Blackfoot shields. A small sculpted figure of a Natchez holy man seated in a lotus position bears a swastika on its forehead, the same mark that designates an Initiate in Asia. In the ancient city of Susa funeral vases were decorated with swastikas, while at Mohenjodaro plaques and button-shaped stamps were engraved with the unmistakable sign. The German archaeologist Schliemann found several swastikas on religious and magical artifacts excavated at Troy, indicating priestly practices similar to those of ancient Peru, Assyria and Chaldea.

In the Bronze Age in Northern Europe, Odin was often represented passing through space as a whirling disk or swastika looking down through all worlds. The swastika symbolized Thor's hammer among Germanic people, especially in Scandinavia, while a representation of this hammer eventually became the symbol on the gavel of Masonic Lodges, "the most ancient Order of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Cross." The ancient Gauls used coins bearing a double 's'-pattern swastika. Many gods of ancient Europe were depicted with wheels, hammers or 's' symbols, and in the Iron Age the swastika came to signify the Supreme Deity. As a seal, it was used on parcels, upon idols, and on the eaves of houses for protection against evil. Similarly, Gorgons in "pinwheel" attitudes representing the swastika guarded the abodes of gods and goddesses in ancient Greece.

In Buddhist tradition the swastika is one of the sixty-five figures of Sripada, the impression of the Buddha's foot, "the step of the Master," and it is the special mark of deities honored by the Lotus School in China. In the neolithic Harappan civilization, the swastika was depicted turning in either direction, as it was in many cultures, and it was connected with the sun. Later, in India, it was also associated with Ganesha the Pathfinder, whose image is often found at crossroads, signifying fortune. In fact, the word *Swastika* derives from the Sanskrit roots *su* and *asti* which means well-being.

The swastika is almost universally seen in terms of time and directions of space manifesting as cycles of existence from a central axis. Thus the Dakota Indians say, "the year is a circle around the world," and the solar wheel has rays and feet at its extremities. The solar swastika representing the eternal round of seasons, peasants in Europe placed cartwheels atop axle poles and ignited them before carrying them down from the tops of hills in mid-summer. In many parts of the world, rock carvings dating back to Neolithic times and earlier represent the sun through the swastika. The Chumash of California have left this same solar design painted on the sandstone walls and ceilings of well-concealed caves frequented at times of initiation.

Diogenes Laertius, writing on Pythagoras, said, "The monad (the manifested One) is the principle of all things. From the monad and the indeterminate duad (Chaos), numbers; from numbers, points; from points, lines; from lines, superficies." The circle represents the Unknown One; the point in the circle signifies the Logos. Daiviprakriti, the light of the Logos, becomes Fohat, the link between spirit and matter. The point becomes a horizontal diameter. This initial, passive duality becomes a conscious activation of duality through human life, symbolized by a vertical diameter cutting across the horizontal, balancing heaven and earth and penetrating both. The swastika is taken from the circumscribed cross; its hooks are portions of the circle now rendered directional. The Logoic point, expanding toward the four cardinal points, has set the wheel in motion.

In the Pythagorean tradition, the swastika stood for the *tetraktys*, the double symbol. It is the link between heaven and earth, its right arm pointing to heaven, its left arm pointing to earth. The Alchemists labeled the heavenward arm "solve" and the earthward arm "coagula," while man stands at the axis, his spiritual nature resolving all form. Like the swastika, he represents the alpha and omega of Universal Creative Force. The central point is not limited to one perfect being, but is God in humanity, the four arms emanating from pure spirit, losing themselves infinitely in matter. Only the balanced cross of spirit-matter fits within the spherical pattern of evolution, exalting the mysteries of each and squaring the circle.

There is a right-handed swastika and a left-handed one, each revolving in opposite directions. The right-handed is called "swastika" while the left-handed is sometimes called "swavastika." If clockwise movement signifies natural evolution and life, and counter-clockwise indicates regression or death and is an inversion of nature, the Nazi "swastika" would represent this inversion. The symbol was chosen possibly because it was thought to be of Nordic origin, and it was used as a caricature of the Christian Cross. The swastika can clearly symbolize good or evil, thus echoing its inherent double nature. But many of its uses in past ages indicate both directions in contexts that were purely spiritual in nature and which strongly suggest another interpretation. The right arm points to heaven, the left to earth, and this varies depending upon the perspective. If the symbol faces away from one, the hooks point counter-clockwise. If the symbol faces one, the hooks point clockwise. These two perspectives symbolize the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. Man, the perceiver, embodies one while reaching out toward the other.

Being a double symbol, the swastika also represents male and female combined in the hermaphrodite. Thus, it is found carved upon the figure of Ardanari in South India, denoting the pre-sexual state of the Third Root Race. In another old Hindu carving, Vishnu is shown as double-sexed, floating on the water which rises in a semi-circle and pours through a swastika representing the source of generation. All subsequent evolution takes place spirally from within, like the directional unfolding of the swastika implicit in the "wheel of Dharma," the sacred law to which the Buddha pointed. The Upanishads teach that in accordance with natural law, it is necessary to turn the wheel from within, to emulate the fohatic force which expands throughout the Cosmos vitalizing every atom and awakening every conscious center.

The swastika itself is symbolized by the number six which signifies the four points—North, South, East and West—and the poles, or Zenith and Nadir, which coincide with the mystic center and represent the origin of the universe. The four points often symbolize the world quarters and their powers, each arm provided with an extension for the support of the genii of each direction, as in the case of the Navaho Yei figures.

The Zenith and Nadir points, however, provide apexes for the upper and lower worlds. Thus there is an arch above and one below in the Pawnee Hako Ceremony, these arches representing the sphere around the swastika. To the Zuni it is the symbol of the cosmic frame of all things. Zuni prayers begin with a prayer to the middle place, then to the North, which represents air and is yellow, the West which represents water and is blue, the South which represents fire and is red, and the East which represents earth and is white. These are followed by a prayer to the Zenith which is all colors, and to the Nadir which is colorless or black. This is the order of their prayers, from the appeal to the most abstract point, to the superficies of all things. One is reminded again of what Diogenes Laertius wrote: From numbers to points, to lines, to superficies, to solids, and “from these solid bodies whose elements are four—Fire, Water, Air, Earth, of all which, transmuted (correlated) and totally changed, the world consists.” This mystery of points becoming solid bodies is recapitulated in space every time the spiraling birth of a star takes place.

As suggested by the fiery cartwheels of the European peasants and the cremation urns of the Bronze Age, there is a profound relationship between the swastika and fire. In esoteric philosophy the swastika is the originator of fire by friction, and of the “Forty-nine Fires.” One of the names for the swastika is *arani*, which refers to a process of kindling fire with a fire drill. A related Sanskrit term is *pramantha*, literally an instrument for kindling fire, *manth* meaning rotary motion, *manthami* meaning to kindle fire. The Greek *prometheia* means fore-knowledge and ultimately the name Prometheus, the Fire Bringer. Prometheus is *pramantha* personified, whose Sanskrit counterpart would be Promati, the son of Fohat. Elsewhere, sacred fire is spoken of as *XPWTOS*, the Christos, Agni, the Divine Babe, is born from the conjunction of *pramantha* and *arani*, the process symbolized by the swastika.

The Secret Doctrine teaches that the swastika is a “summary in a few lines of the whole work of creation or evolution . . . from cosmo-theogony to anthropogony.” It is the worker’s hammer “which striketh sparks from flint,” flint symbolizing space while the sparks symbolize worlds. It is Thor’s hammer brought to consecrate the New Heaven and New Earth. The four-footed cross, which Thor uses to smite the head of the serpent of evil passions, becomes the root power of the macrocosm and the microcosm. The swastika, symbolizing the work of creation, also symbolizes the Builder or Architect. The Father of the Sacred Fire-Christ is Twastri or Joseph the Carpenter, a counterpart of Viswakarma, the “Father of the Gods” and Architect of the Universe. Viswakarma tied Surya (the sun) onto the swastika, cutting away a portion of his brightness, which really means he is sacrificing himself through the swastika, a symbol of himself. Thus he is the Hierophant Initiator on earth.

The number 31415 signifies the sacred numerical hierarchy of the Dhyan Chohans of various orders. When placed at the boundary of the circle of "Pass Not," it is called Dhyanipasa, the rope that divides the phenomenal and noumenal cosmos. It is the number of the circle and the mystic swastika. It is the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle, 3.1415:1 or π , the ratio used by the initiated to calculate various cycles and ages. All of this is majestically symbolized by the swastika, "born in the mystical conceptions of the early Aryans, and by them placed at the very threshold of eternity, or the head of the serpent Ananta." The Great Serpent on which Vishnu rests during Pralaya is the thousand-headed Sesha-Ananta.

Contained within the swastika is the key to the "Seven Great Mysteries of Kosmos" and the cycles of Science, divine and human. He who comprehends it will be delivered from Maha Maya. "One initiated in the mysteries of the Swastika . . . can trace on it, with mathematical precision, the evolution of Kosmos and the whole period of Sandhya . . . [also the relation of the Seen to the Unseen and] the first procreation of man and species." Swastika symbols mark the seven modes of the Kether crown of the seven-headed Serpent of Eternity, while the zones of post-mortem ascent mark the abodes of the seven principles and the approach to the Great Serpent of Divine Wisdom, the circle encompassing the swastika.

Man, the swastika in essence, combines six cosmic aspects and seeks to discover the seventh at the center. If he succeeds, he not only rests at the still central point but upon the Great Cosmic Serpent as well. He becomes a perfected Adept, one who understands the ten thousand truths of the Buddhist Initiate—truths belonging to the mysteries of primordial cosmogony and theogony, known to those who bear the swastika seal. It is the seal placed on the hearts of living Initiates, burnt into the flesh, forever, with some. They have to keep those truths inviolable and intact, in eternal silence and secrecy to the day these are perceived and ready by their chosen successors—new Initiates—"worthy of being entrusted with ten thousand perfections." It is the seal on the foreheads of Buddhas, the swastika fire burning upon the serene brows of those who combine the cosmic perfections with their embodiment in human form.