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The Shamanism Magazine

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It is based in West Wales, and has been published four times a year since 1993.

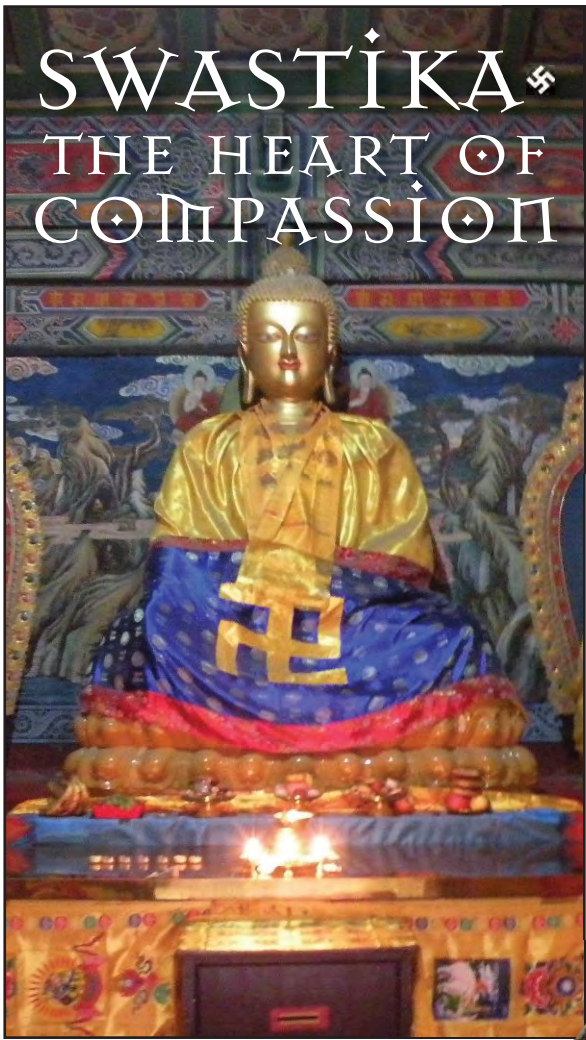
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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)

SWASTIKA

THE HEART OF COMPASSION



If you show almost anyone in the Western world a swastika, they're likely to draw just one conclusion - that it has something to do with the Nazi party and the Second World War. And yet the symbol is actually of great antiquity, and is a universal symbol of peace and blessing.

The 20th of July, 2013 is this year's 'International Swastika Rehabilitation Day,' an annual event, created by the Raelian movement, a new-age UFO cult. But the Raelians are not the only ones seeking to reconnect this ancient symbol back to its sacredness, many people now think it is time to reinstate its true meaning.

The word swastika comes from the Sanskrit *svastika*. This can be translated in a couple of ways, either 'to be auspicious' - *su* (auspicious) *asti* (to be) or 'to be the high self' - *swa* (high self) *asti* (to be).

The swastika is considered to be a positive solar symbol, and many cultures also associate it with the element fire. The earliest archaeological evidence for its use comes from the Indus valley civilisations of India, which date to between 3300 and 1300 BCE, but the symbol can be found in many cultures around the world.

In Hinduism the four arms of the cross symbolise the four *purusharthas*. These are *dharma* (that which makes a human a human), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation). In Jainism it represents a teaching that during the cycles of

birth and death people may be reborn into one of four destinies: heavenly beings, humans, animals, (including birds, insects and plants) and hellish beings. The Zoroastrian religion of Persia have the swastika as a symbol of the revolving sun, infinity, or continuing creation.

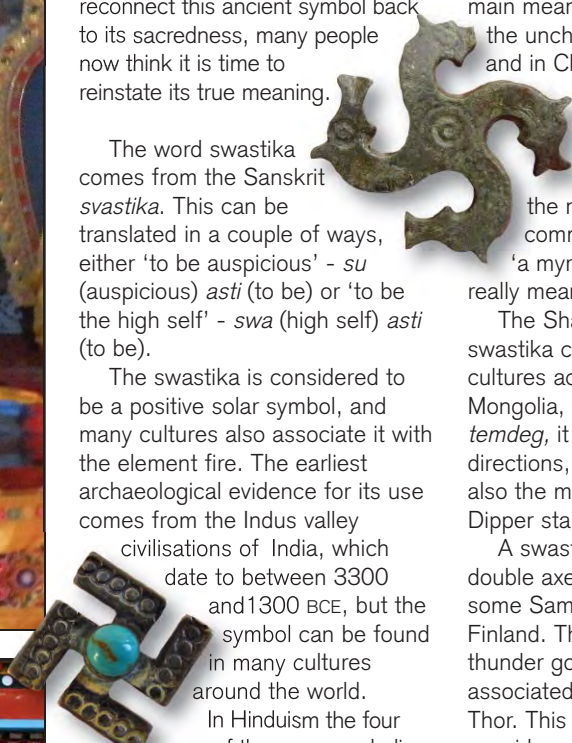
In Tibetan Buddhism (and also in the pre-Buddhist Bon religion of Tibet) the swastika, generally known as a *gyung drung*, is often said to represent the heart of the Buddha and great compassion. Its main meaning however is stability, the unchanging nature of eternity, and in Chinese Taoism it also means eternity.

In Chinese and Japanese script, the swastika can represent the number 10,000, and is commonly used to represent 'a myriad of things,' which really means the whole of Creation.

The Shamanic use of the swastika can be seen in several cultures across the world. In Mongolia, where it is called a *has temdeg*, it represents the four directions, the four elements and also the movement of the Big Dipper star constellation.

A swastika, in the form of a double axe, is a symbol found on some Sami shamanic drums from Finland. The name of the Sami thunder god is Horagalles, who is associated with the Viking god Thor. This has led some people to consider an association between Thor himself and the swastika.

In Native American cultures swastikas occur widely. In Diné (Navaho) traditions it is called the 'whirling log' design, whereas to their neighbours, the Hopi, it



Top left: Tibetan altar with statue of the Buddha decorated with brocades and a swastika

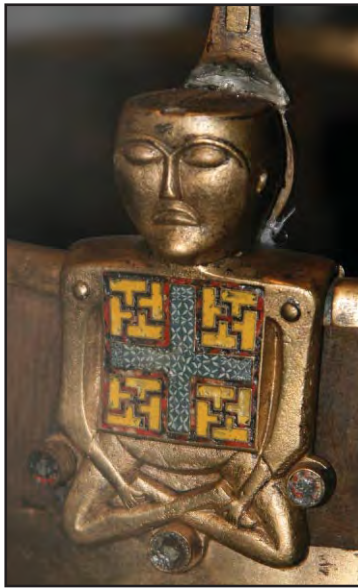
Inset - top: Central Asian *tierwirbel* 'whirl of animals' bronze swastika fibula brooch

Inset - bottom: antique Diné (Navaho) silver and turquoise swastika pin brooch

Left: young Tibetan monks playing in the courtyard of a Buddhist temple

Right: blue Mongolian khadag offering scarf





represents their wandering, historic migrations. It is also found in other Native American cultures, appearing in Lakota beadwork designs, on drums and in pre-Columbian societies such as those in the Mississippi River valley.

Swastikas have also been found on pottery in archaeological digs in Africa, in Iron Age designs in the northern Caucasus Mountains and in Neolithic China. They were also found in Egypt during the early Christian Coptic period.

A related pattern called a *tierwirbel* (German for 'a whirl of animals') is a common motive found in Central Asian cultures, such as those of the Eurasian Steppe like the Scythians. Often the arms of the cross are four bird heads. In Armenia it is known as *vardan*, *arevakhach* or *ker khach*, and is an ancient symbol of eternal light, which can be thought of as a form of God.



In Bronze Age Europe it was a solar cross; the Anglo-Saxon burial at Sutton Hoo, England, contained numerous items bearing swastikas.

In Christianity, the swastika is seen as a hooked version of the Christian cross - the symbol of Jesus' victory over death. Some churches, built in the medieval Romanesque and Gothic eras, are decorated with swastikas, a good example being those found in a mosaic in the St. Sophia Church in Kiev, Ukraine, which date from the C12th. Swastikas also appear on the vestments on an effigy of Bishop William Edington (died 1366) in Winchester Cathedral, England.

In more recent times it was a good luck symbol, used up to the early C20th in greetings cards.

A common myth is that the Nazis used a mirror image of the swastika to reverse its positive qualities - a little like a satanist might turn a Christian crucifix upside down - but this is not the case, as swastikas can be shown facing either way. Ironically, the swastika also appears in some Jewish Kabbalistic manuscripts, and some authorities on ancient symbols think that the star of David, as well as the Christian cross and Islamic crescent moon symbols owe their very existence to the swastika design.

Has there ever been, in the history of the world, a more beautiful symbol representing the sacred which has fallen from grace? Wouldn't it be wonderful to heal its use and bring it back once more to be the positive symbol it has been for so many millennia.

See also: www.reclaimtheswastika.com

Top left: enamel piece from the 'Oseberg Horde,' a find of Viking items discovered near Oslo, Norway

Top right: Mongolian shaman with a swastika on his arm

Centre right: Mongolian shaman playing a drum with a swastika

Bottom right: early C20th mass-produced American good luck card

Bottom left: early C20th Diné (Navaho) rug with swastika design

