



## S.K.S. SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE (LONDON) – BAL YUVAK MANDAL

Westfield Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 9EA Est. 1966 Charity Reg. No. 271034

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### KEY SYMBOLS OF HINDUISM

#### The Sacred Cow

The cow is highly respected within the Hindu religion and is often referred to as 'Gao Maata'. The bull represents 'Dharma' and the cow represents 'Bhakti'. The Cow is sacred as it is said to be the incarnation of all the Demi-Gods which reside in the different parts of her body.

The cow is one of the most precious gifts that can be given in a religious ceremony. Hindus have domesticated the cow and all mankind has become dependent on the cow for milk. All products produced by cows are considered pure, which is why they are used in religious ceremonies. E.g. ||The cow's dung is used for fuel, and also when mixed with mud it can be used for plastering walls and screeding floors.||

The cow gives valuable nourishment in the form of milk, this is why she is loved and respected by Hindus like a mother. According to the Vedas there are seven mothers:

1. the earth,
2. the cow,
3. the queen,
4. the nurse,
5. the teacher,
6. the wife of a Brahmin and
7. the natural mother.

Almost every child grows up drinking cow's milk, therefore the cow is considered to be a mother. In the same way in which a bull ploughs the field and helps to grow food is considered as a father. The cow eats what is not important to humans such as grass, hay and straw and turns it into something very nourishing and tasty as milk.

Krishna as a child used to spend a lot of time with cows, protect them and love them. When he used to spend time with the cows he was known as Govinda or Gopala. Krishna also lifted Mount Govardhan to protect his group of cows, cowboys and milkmaids. It is Lord Krishna who gave emphasis to the relationship that we should have for the cow.

#### Swastik

The Swastik has been used as an auspicious symbol in Hinduism over time denoting righteousness and overcoming evil forces. The Swastik of Hinduism is a religious symbol and must not be confused with the Nazi Swastik. This symbol represents life, sun, power, strength and good luck.



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The word “swastik” comes from the Sanskrit word svastika

‘sv’ meaning good  
‘asti’ meaning to be  
‘ka’ is a suffix

It can be found with both right-angled arms, and with curved arms rather like two letters “S” placed over at right-angles to each other. The reason why the Swastik has 4 wings is because the world’s living time is divided into 4 parts Satya Yug, Treta Yug, Dwapar Yug and the Kali Yug. Each curved arm represents each Yug.

It is found all over Mandirs and pictures where it is sacred. It is used in all Hindu weddings, festivals, ceremonies, houses and doorways. The earliest swastika symbols preserved appear on pottery dated from around 4000 BC.

Swastika symbol represents the Vishnu Chakra, it’s a disk that rotates infinite times. It is one of the 108 symbols of Vishnu and represents the sun’s rays. Ganesh is often shown as sitting on a lotus flower on a bed of swastikas.

### Aum

Aum is the Sanskrit name and symbol for God and is used in prayers as it is considered to carry great divine powers. By chanting this mantra it has been proven to have a unique effect on the human mind, by giving inner peace within oneself.

Aum is the most sacred syllable in Hinduism, symbolizing the infinite Brahman and the entire Universe and almost every mantra in our Hindu religion begins with it.

### **The Significance of the Symbol Aum**

The symbol of Om contains of three curves, one semicircle and a dot.

- The large lower curve symbolizes the waking state; the upper curve denotes deep sleep (or the unconscious) state, and the lower curve (which lies between deep sleep and the waking state) signifies the dream state. These three states an individual’s consciousness, and therefore the entire physical phenomenon, are represented by the three curves.
- The dot signifies the Absolute which illuminates the other three states.
- The semicircle symbolizes “Maya” and separates the dot from the other three curves. The semicircle is open on the top, which means that the absolute is infinite and is not affected by Maya. In this way the form of Om symbolizes the infinite Brahman and the entire Universe.



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### Philosophy of AUM

According to Hindu philosophy this syllable is combined of three components:

- The letter **A** which represents creation i.e. Brahma.
- The letter **U** which refers to Vishnu who preserves this world by balancing Brahma on a lotus above himself. The letter U with the A produces the sound of a lengthy "O". Hence sometimes we see it written as "Om" as oppose to "AUM".
- The letter **M** is the final part of the cycle of existence, when Vishnu falls asleep and Brahma has to breathe in so that all the existing things have to separate and condensed their soul to him. This is the M of Mahesha, also known as the great Lord Shiva, whose long period of yoga begins so that the sensual world comes to a close.

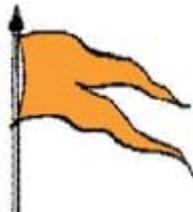
Thus, by the use of Aum:

- one can easily hear their own heart.
- a person can modify the pace of their heart.
- a group of people can synchronize their heartbeats.

Aum is also used in Jain tradition and Buddhist tradition.

### Saffron

### Colour



If there is any colour that can symbolize all aspects of Hinduism, its saffron - the colour of Agni or fire, which symbolizes the Supreme Being. The saffron colour is also auspicious to other religions such as the Sikhs, Buddhists and the Jains.

Worshipping of the fire originated in the Vedic age. When sages moved from one ashram to another, it was customary to carry fire along. The inconvenience to carry a burning substance over long distances may have given rise to the symbol of a saffron flag. Triangular and often forked saffron flags are seen fluttering on the top of most Hindu temples. Santos wear saffron or white coloured vastras as a mark of renunciation of material life and to show they have chosen a spiritual path.

Saffron or white flag on top of the sikhars signifies the kingdom of God. The saffron colour is associated with devotion and godliness and signifies the colour sun and fire.

### Tulsi



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The presence of Tulsi plant symbolizes the religious bent of a Hindu family. A Hindu household is considered incomplete if it doesn't have a Tulsi plant in the courtyard. Many families have the Tulsi planted in a specially built structure, which has images of deities installed on all four sides, and a recessed opening for a small earthen oil lamp.

Devotees wear a holy rosary "Kanthi" which is made of Tulsi. The Kanthi is a double stranded beaded necklace which is a significant symbol of our Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Tulsi is regarded as a Goddess and a consort of Lord Vishnu. A garland of Tulsi leaves is the first offering to the Lord as part of the daily ritual. Tulsi has been given the sixth place among the eight objects of worship in the ritual of the consecration of the kalasha, the container of holy water.

The Tulsi leaves are also used for final rituals. The leaves are placed in the corpse's mouth and a Tulsi garland is placed on the neck when the body is cremated. After placing Tulsi leaves in the mouth of the deceased person the final farewell is considered complete. Also, it releases all the sins and those who wear Tulsi beads get the abode from the God. The Tulsi plant is even known to purify or de-pollute the atmosphere and also works as a repellent to mosquitoes, flies and other harmful insects.

### Divo

A Divo or lamp is an earthen (or metallic) saucer- like tiny pot filled with ghee (clarified butter) or refined oil with a twisted cotton tape (bati) immersed in it. It is lighted in every Hindu household and temple. In nature, the flame is considered to be the source of heat and light. The heat of the fire and hence the flame is also a good germicide.

The sages (rishis) of Vedic India worshipped fire and hence the jyoti (flame) or the divo as a whole, was considered the purest of the pure because it consumes all impurities but yet remains pure by itself. The cultural tradition of ancient India has thus its genesis in the spark of yagya. This spark later assumed the form of a divo.

The divo is worshipped as the symbol of the all-pervading Light of all Lights. Meditation on the standing bright yellow flame of a divo during the treta yoga improves mental concentration and induces sublime energy of positive currents emanating from this symbol of cosmic consciousness.

A divo is used in Aarti of Bhagwan so that we can get clear darshan and observance of Maharaj. The standing Divo symbolizes the dispelling of ignorance and awakening of the divine light within us. Its soft glow illumines the Mandir and keeps the atmosphere pure and serene. The divas are also a symbol for the Hindu festival of Diwali, an Indian festival of lights. It is meant to keep evil forces away, which is why we light Divas on Kali Chaudas. One of many interpretations of Diwali is a celebration of the light of knowledge that chases away the darkness of ignorance.

Five elements represented by the divo:



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- 1) Space (akash),
- 2) Wind (vayu),
- 3) Light (tej),
- 4) Water (jal),
- 5) Earth (pruthvi).

The flame of Divo represents Pure Consciousness or a soul without any bondage (liberated soul).

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*There are many more symbolic things in our religion such as Kanthi, Tilak Chandlo, and Mala etc. which have been discussed in previous lessons.*

*Ask questions on these as a recap to see what your group can remember about the above 4 mentioned symbols.*