



August 2013

Free online magazine from village earth



Whose swastika is it anyway?



**When will the grave injustice end for
1.5 billion Hindus, Buddhists and Jains ?**



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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was started in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Civil and human rights activists, animal rights activists, poets, writers, journalists, social workers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of the magazine.

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Live
encounters

August 2013

"You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind." - Mahatma Gandhi

Dear Readers,

We thank: Dr Peter Phipps, Randhir Khare, Chris Hedges, Natalie Wood, Candess M Campbell, Raphael Susewind, Terry McDongah, Farrukh Dhondy and Joachim Peter for their articles, poems, photography, guidance on health issues and more.

This issue tackles some areas that continue to fester due to ignorance.

Someone once said that people should be kept ignorant for it is in this state that those wielding power can operate with impunity.

We hope that you will share this edition with your family and friends.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

Cover Design : Mark Ulyseas

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Whose swastika is it anyway?

Mark Ulyseas

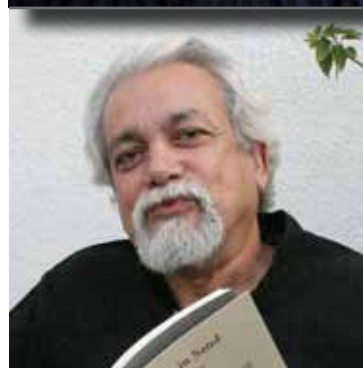
After wading through historical evidence of the origins of the swastika one is left with continuity; Continuity of purpose – the uninterrupted use of the swastika across millennia to the 21st century CE. And here is where the Hindu/Buddhist/Jain swastika remains constant. Thus, this confirms that the swastika is an integral part, a crucial 'element' in the spiritual world of these three religions. And therefore the present attempt to criminalise its usage amounts to nothing short of racism spiced with regional bigotry, which emanates from Europe and North America.



Photo Gallery - Bali Swastika

Joo Peter

Aka Joachim Peter is a Visual artist and writer based in Southwest Germany, presently working on documentary & travel photography in Asia right. He loves to explore and combine all arts in his work. Joo has studied Arts; painting and graphics, worked for theatre (designing stage, costume and light), did some work for television and film, went into teaching. He writes essays and a blog in his native tongue, German, for he feels his language combines philosophy and humour. www.joo-peter.photoshelter.com



Singing The Sea

Randhir Khare

Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. Executive Editor of Heritage India, the International Culture Journal, a Director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy and Visiting Professor to the Dept Of English, Pune University. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures. www.randhirkhare.in



Prophet of Love

Farrukh Dhondy in an exclusive interview

Dhondy is a screenwriter, playwright and bestselling novelist. Born in Pune, India in 1944 he went to school and college in Pune and then to Pembroke College, Cambridge. He graduated in '67 having read Natural Sciences and English. He went on to do a thesis on Rudyard Kipling at Leicester University and then taught in various London schools. He has written several books including The Bikini Murders which was on top of the Indian bestseller lists for three weeks, Bombay Duck, Poona Company and the screenplay of Split Wide Open among others. [Published by Harper Perennial](#)



In the end...

Terry McDonagh

Irish poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the Int. School Hamburg for 15 years. He now works freelance; has been writer in residence in Europe, Asia, Australia; published seven poetry collections, book of letters, prose and poetry for young people translated into Indonesian and German, distributed internationally by Syracuse Uni. Press; latest poetry collection Ripple Effect due for publication in May/June 2013, Arlen House; next children's story, Michel the Merman, illustrated by Marc Barnes (NZ) to be published in September 2013. He lives in Hamburg and Ireland. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



Indigenous Festivals in Australia: Performing cultural survival

Peter Phipps

Phipps is a senior lecturer in Global Studies at RMIT University; post-graduate training in cultural anthropology at the University of California Berkeley; PhD on the cultural politics of postcolonial theory at Melbourne University. He has published on Indigenous festivals, tourism and the politics of cultural globalization; founding member of the Globalism Research Centre and has consulted to a number of organizations and government bodies including the City of Melbourne, Victorian Multicultural Commission, the PNG Department for Community Development, ATSIC, ATSIAB (Australia Council), UNDP (Sarajevo), Yothu Yindi Foundation.



Being Muslim and Working For Peace - Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Gujarat

Raphael Susewind

Susewind is a Doctoral Candidate in Social Anthropology (Universität Bielefeld) and Associate of the Contemporary South Asia Studies Programme (University of Oxford). In his research and teaching, he explores Muslim belonging, the ambivalence of the sacred and electoral politics in India; he also sometimes writes on Indian diplomacy. Recently, Sage published his monograph on Muslim peace activists in Gujarat; he currently conducts research on the poetics and politics of Muslim belonging in contemporary Lucknow. [Website](#) [Published by Sage Publications](#)



We Are All Aboard the Pequod

Chris Hedges - This article was first published on [Truthdig](#)

Chris Hedges was a foreign correspondent for the New York Times and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, and his War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Nonfiction. Hedges is a senior fellow at the Nation Institute, a columnist for Truthdig, and the Anschutz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.



Israel's Stumbling Block Before The Blind

Natalie Wood

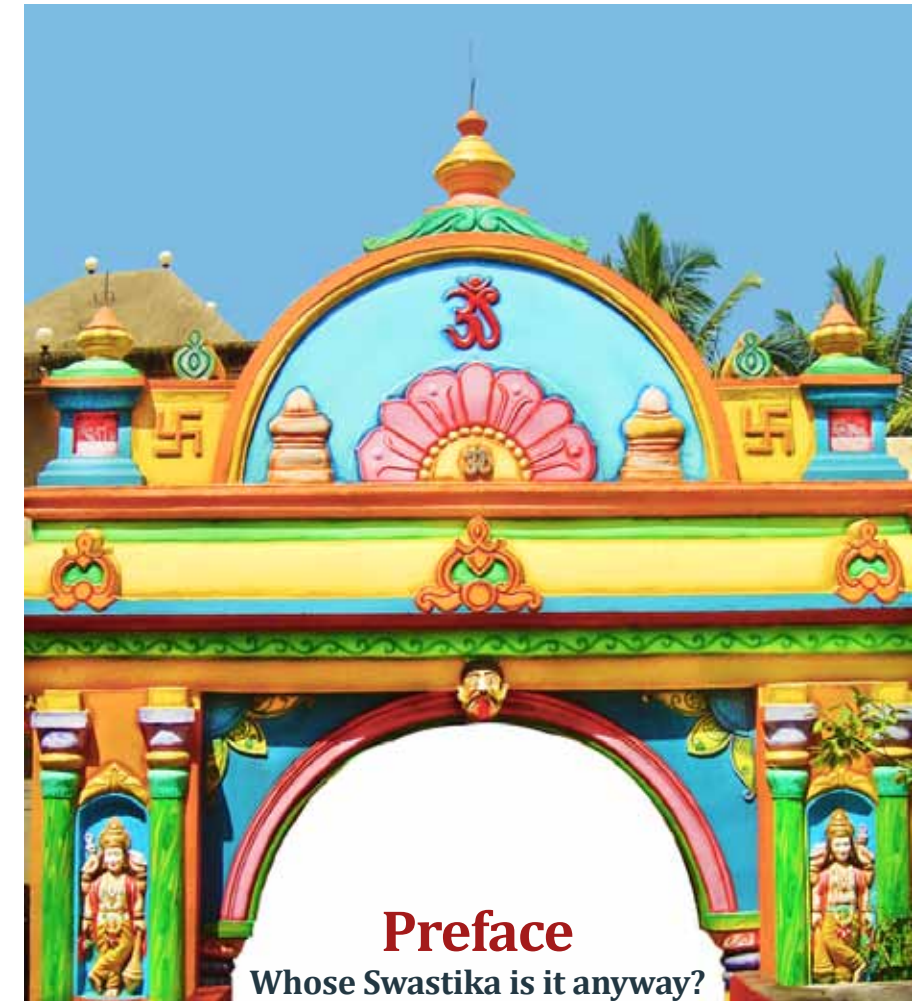
Born in Birmingham, England, U.K., Natalie Wood began working in journalism a month prior to outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. She remained in regional Jewish journalism for over 20 years, leaving full-time writing to help run a family business and then completed a range of general office work. Wood and her husband, Brian Fink emigrated from Manchester to Israel in March 2010 and live in Karmiel, Galilee where she continues to work, concentrating on creative writing. She features in *Smith Magazine's* new *Six Word Memoirs On Jewish Life* and contributes to *Technorati*, *Blogcritics* and *Live Encounters* magazine. Her stories - [Website](#) and journalism - [Website](#)



Prayer and Meditation

Candess M Campbell

Candess M. Campbell, PhD is an internationally known Intuitive Life Coach, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Seminar leader, Hypnotherapist and Author. She specializes in assisting others to gain their own personal power and to live a life of abundance, happiness and joy. Early 2012 she will be releasing her book *12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine*. www.12weekstoselfhealing.com



Preface

Whose Swastika is it anyway?

Whose swastika is it anyway is a question I asked myself sometime ago. It was prompted by an encounter with a German journalist in his thirties, who quizzed me about the Hindu swastika above my door mistaking it for the hated Nazi symbol. In the same year I met two Germans from Hamburg: one, a retired international corporate lawyer and the other a former German Law maker still advising the government administration in his area. Both were appalled when confronted with the images of the swastika on homes, shops, restaurants, vehicles etc.

After so many decades the brainwashing continues...that the swastika was/is/will always be the symbol of evil incarnate because it represents all that Hitler and the hated Nazis did – the torture, incarceration and gassing of millions of Jews and others. To reject the Nazi symbol and what it stood for is to rightly honour those that suffered and died in inhuman conditions during WW11.

But should we deliberately confuse the distorted symbol of the Nazis with the sacred swastika... a symbol intrinsic to the spiritual life of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains for millennia?



Hindu



Nazi

Whose swastika is it anyway?

An overview by Mark Ulyseas

For millennia the swastika has been and continues to be the sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The desecration by Hitler is compounded by Western countries that continue the fraud by associating it solely with the Nazis thereby 'socially' banning it. In some cases laws have been enacted to jail those displaying the swastika. The resultant effect has been devastating: Westerners viewing the swastika in their homeland and/or while travelling in Asia instantly associate it with the Nazi symbol. The brainwashing is complete.

I have written this article in an attempt to bring a vestige of enlightenment however small to those that are ignorant of or prejudiced towards the swastika by showing the profound significance of this symbol in the ancient Asian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

We must ask ourselves this question: How do we sift truth from faction (fact + fiction) when propaganda turns us into bigots?

May I humbly suggest a solution: Let us promote people-to-people dialogue on this subject through the sharing of ideas, views and cultural exchanges involving poets, writers, artists of all hues, school children, rights activists et al.

And while we tread this peaceful path towards greater enlightenment we must be aware of the ever present danger of puerile politics, insidious racism and rancid fundamentalism lurking in our societies.

“Yes I am, I am also a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist, and a Jew.”
Mahatma Gandhi, when asked if he was a Hindu.

We asked a few people to respond to the title of this article prior to publication.

Natalie Irene Wood, Journalist and Flash Fiction Writer, Galilee, Israel - Today, because so many people are woefully ignorant, the origins of the swastika are not generally known. I once possessed a copy of Kipling's 'Just So Stories', whose cover was emblazoned with a swastika motif. The remarkable thing about the book was that it arrived in our family during the 1930s as a barmitzvah gift for my maternal uncle, Sidney Saltman. That such a book could be given for such an occasion shows how much social attitudes and values have changed. That aside, you may know Kipling was a rank racist anti-Semite, as is evident from the many snide anti-Jewish, anti-non-white references in his stories, but I don't believe the use of the swastika on his book fronts meant he necessarily had Nazi sympathies. I think it was purely because of his love of India, knowledge of Hinduism, etc. [LINK](#)

Terry McDonagh, Irish writer, poet and playwright, Kiltimagh Mayo County, Ireland - I remember being shocked at seeing the swastika for the first time in Indonesia. It was only then that I grasped its history. [LINK](#)

Rainer Tormin, former student activist and Law Maker, Hamburg, Germany - When I saw a swastika in India for the first time, I was more than confused. You must know that to show the swastika in Germany is not only forbidden by law but also threatened with jail. But my second thought was that it was the other way round. The Nazis - as a right wing political organization - of course used it turning right. (A common mistake many people make. The swastika is in the same direction as the Hindu swastika but at a 45° angle. It is the Buddhist swastika in countries other than India which is anti-clockwise. The Hindu Swastika anti-clockwise is used in tantra in India – MU). With my third thought I remembered having read about the swastika being a traditional Hindu symbol. That calms me down. But I am still a little bit confused, whenever I see the swastika in India. [LINK](#)

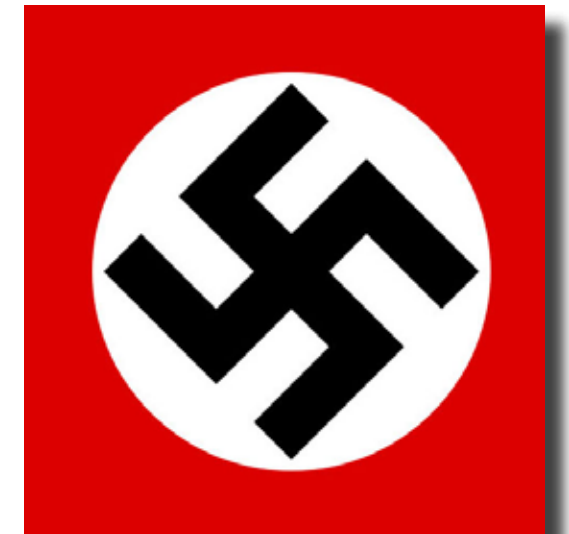
Joachim Peter, International Photographer, Berlin, Germany - First time I saw the swastika outside Germany was in Bali. In Germany, the symbol is closely connected with killing of 50 million people in WW11. The symbol is prohibited in my country. Police and attorneys get active immediately, when this sign is displayed in public. Most Germans know very little about the origins of the swastika in Hindu and Buddhist culture. Hitler chose the sign simply for propaganda purpose; he and his followers had little to no education about the origins of the swastika or Hindu culture. Swastika is not called 'swastika' in Germany, but 'Hakenkreuz', meaning 'cross with hooks' – for most people in Europe those hooks were stabbing knives. Some Germans think, swastika is an Indian symbol of the sun, the turning wheel of the sun, however, this is also just one of the limited interpretations of early 20th century German popular myths. In Asia, I have encountered different versions of the swastika - Buddhism from Nepal to Japan; Hinduism in India or Bali where it is a symbol of Shiva and Dharma, symbol of cosmic law. [LINK](#)



Hindu Swastika
c. 3000 BCE +

The word Swastika came from the Sanskrit word Svastika, meaning lucky or auspicious object. It is composed of *su* meaning good, well and *asti* meaning to be - '*svasti*'. The *ka* is probably added to intensify the meaning. It means that which is associated with well being. The shape represents a monogram formed by interlacing of the letters of the auspicious words *su-asti* written in Brahmi which predates Sanskrit. It is one of the 108 symbols of Lord Vishnu of the Hindu Trinity – *Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh* - which signifies the rays of the sun: four directions NSEW, and four elements earth, wind, fire, water etc. This auspicious symbol is used in all *Hindu Yantras*, religious ceremonies etc. In Buddhism it represents resignation. Usually found in the images of Buddha on his chest, palms, soles of feet, it originally symbolised the footsteps of the Buddha. And in Jainism the Swastika represents Jainism's seventh *Trithankara* (saint) and the four arms placed clockwise also stand for the four possible places of rebirth: the animal or plant world, hell, earth, or the spirit world.

(Detailed explanation in following pages)



Nazi - Hakenkreuz
20th Century CE

The Germans never called this symbol a Swastika. It is believed that the major European colonial powers in Asia at that time viewed the swastika as an exotic good luck charm from the East but quickly rejected it when the Nazis arrived on the scene and preferred to call it a swastika because of its similarity with the Asian religious symbol instead of using the same term as the Germans - *Cross with hooks*. In the 1870s the swastika was popularized by the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who found many examples of it during his diggings at ancient Troy and Mycenae. He deliberately referred to it as an Aryan religious symbol. Hitler was greatly influenced by the work of the fanatical Aryan supremacist Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, who used the swastika as the symbol of his cult as early as 1907. Anti-Semitic/militarist groups had adopted it as well by the time Hitler appropriated it for the Nazis around 1920. The swastika soon became a symbol of hate, anti-semitism, violence, death, and murder in the West.

It was after the destruction of the Jewish settlement at Cranganore (*associated with the ancient port of Miziris, near Cochin, in modern day Kerala*), that they (Jews) sought shelter with the Hindu Rajah of Cochin, who in the words of an English historian, “with a liberality that can hardly be understood” granted them a site for a town by the side of his own palace and temple. Jew Town was built in 1567 and the synagogue in 1568 (it still functions today).

Prior to publishing this article I mailed it to an Indian Jew in Israel for his valued comment (the Jews settled in India over 2500 years ago). This is what he had to say:

“This article, especially the cover of the magazine, is disturbing because I as a Jew am faced with a reality that cannot be brushed aside. However, I cannot be disrespectful to a billion Hindus’ religious feelings. As an Indian Jew I grew up among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis etc.

There was never a moment when I felt different or made to feel different. We were one community. And yes I saw how the swastika was used by my Hindu friends but it never struck me to associate it with the Nazi symbol...for me they were both very different objects...I can’t explain it in words...it was with great religious reverence that Hindus drew it for ceremonies, at the entrance of their homes and even on their clothes. It was for them what the Star of David means to us Jews.

And to think after so many years, now we are in a new millennium, people in the West and even in Israel have rejected any form of the swastika...in a manner that makes even the Hindu swastika a symbol of evil. This is very sad, very sad indeed.

How can I as a Jew disrespect the religious feelings of my Hindu friends...people I grew up with...people who have used the swastika for thousands of years? I think the time has come to openly discuss this issue...I am too old now to be actively involved but this I say we have to find a way...we must find a way. Maybe the time has come to honour the Hindus who gave us a home when we had none thousands of years ago. Shalom.”

Here is an instance of how Hindus have given shelter to the Jews from persecution by Europeans, in particular the Portuguese: **In the year 1500 CE the Portuguese arrived in Malabar, and soon began persecuting and torturing the Jews. The 160 years of Portuguese occupation of Cochin were the darkest period in the history of the Jews of Malabar. In a letter written by Albuquerque he brought to the attention of the King of Portugal that there were at that time a large influx of Portuguese and Castilian Jews and enquired of His Majesty whether permission would be given to exterminate them one by one as he came across them. [LINK](#)**

Interestingly, it was after the destruction of the Jewish settlement at Cranganore (*associated with the ancient port of Miziris, near Cochin, in modern day Kerala*), that they (Jews) sought shelter with the Hindu Rajah of Cochin, who in the words of an English historian, “with a liberality that can hardly be understood” granted them a site for a town by the side of his own palace and temple. Jew Town was built in 1567 and the synagogue in 1568 (it still functions today).

Europe and USA have accepted the swastika as solely a Nazi emblem. They have all but done away with the knowledge that the Swastika is an Asian religious symbol for millennia. So for generations now the truth has been converted to a lie and in effect Hitler has won. The Third Reich didn’t last for a 1000 years but its insidious appropriation of the swastika apparently will, thanks to the jaundiced views of Western governments.

In 2005, Germany proposed the banning of the swastika in Europe. This caused outrage in the Hindu community across the world. Fortunately, the Member States did not go along and the proposal was dropped. (In July 2012, Germany banned male circumcision. It had to retract this law after protests by Jewish and Muslim communities).

Here’s what the media had to say:

A ban on the swastika would not in itself remove racism or silence those who wish to express such views. For many in the world a ban on the swastika would be quite bewildering - the equivalent of banning the cross or the crescent. And, in ignoring the sensitivities of people in the East, such a ban would itself be an act of Western arrogance - the very kind of attitude Hitler encouraged. [LINK](#)

What we are witnessing is a despicable form of transnational racism that is deliberately/permanently brainwashing Westerners. The laws enacted in Europe and USA have been made to perpetuate this fraud. The whole system of ‘education’ appears to be aimed at completely obliterating the true origin and sanctity of the swastika and replacing it with its misuse by an European megalomaniac of the previous century.

In the USA for instance the prevailing ignorance of the swastika as an ancient religious symbol is evident in this news report:

N.J. school criticized for counselling kid who drew swastika - OLD BRIDGE, N.J. — A group that promotes the swastika criticized a New Jersey school district for requiring counseling for an 8-year-old student of Hindu heritage who included the symbol in a holiday drawing. The International Raelian Movement, which believes humans were created by extraterrestrials, said the swastika is actually a symbol of peace and beauty that was corrupted by Nazis. The group said the unidentified child was “subjected to traumatic reprimand and racial bias counseling without parental approval.” School officials have since apologized to the third-grader at James McDivitt Elementary School and his parents. [LINK](#)

Another example: the Federation of Jain Associations in North America uses a modified version of the standard Jain symbol. It replaces the Swastika with the Om, because the Swastika is not considered a pious symbol in the Western world.

Europe and USA have accepted the swastika as solely a Nazi emblem. They have all but done away with the knowledge that the Swastika is an Asian religious symbol for millennia. So for generations now the truth has been converted to a lie and in effect Hitler has won. The Third Reich didn’t last for a 1000 years but its *insidious appropriation* of the swastika apparently will, thanks to the jaundiced views of Western governments.



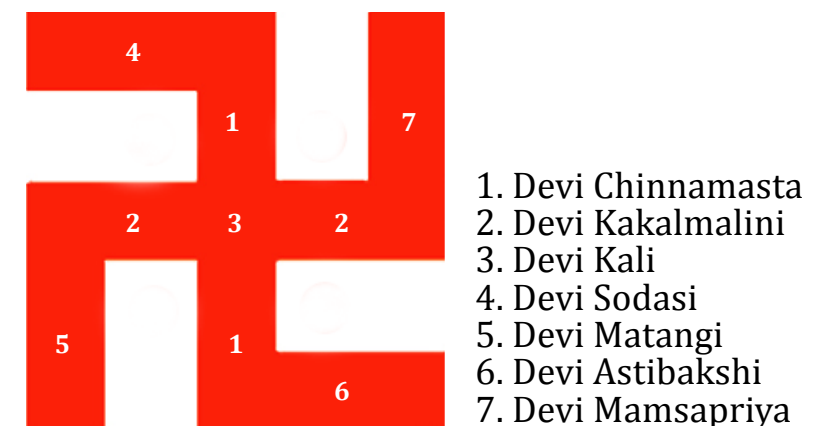
The Hindu Swastika explained:

- 4 Vedas – Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda - Symbolizing auspiciousness
- 4 goals of life - Dharma (*virtue*), Artha (*success*), Kama (*pleasure*) and Moksha (*release*) - denoting prosperity in each area.
- 4 stages of life – Brahmacharya (*Student*), Grihasta (*Householder*), Vanaprastha (*Retired person*) and Sanyasa (*Ascetic*) - signifying good fortune for each stage
- 4 directions – North, South, East and West - symbolizing the Divine omnipresence
- 4 seasons - Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter - symbolizing the cyclic nature of time
- 4 Yugas (*era*) of the world-cycle - Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga and Kali Yuga - symbolizing the natural evolution of the universe
- 4 Varnas (*social classes*) – Brahmins (*Priests, Teachers, and Intellectuals*), Kshatriyas (*Warriors, Police, and Administrators*), Vaishyas (*Farmers, Merchants, and Business People*) and Shudras (*Artisans and Workers*) – symbolizing the progress and synergy among social classes.
- 4 paths of Yoga – Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Raja Yoga - symbolizing union with the divine.

Clockwise Swastika is used in all the Hindu rituals like opening new account books, marriage, Mundan ceremony and other religious rituals.



Anti-clockwise or feminine Swastika is rarely used and is considered inauspicious. Tantrics following the Vamamarga (left handed path or sexually oriented Tantra) use this feminine Swastika to invoke Goddess Kali for getting the best results of the Chakra-puja. *None in whole of the three cosmos can handle Shakti once awakened except Lord Shiva in the Ugra rupa.- Mamsadayini Tantra*



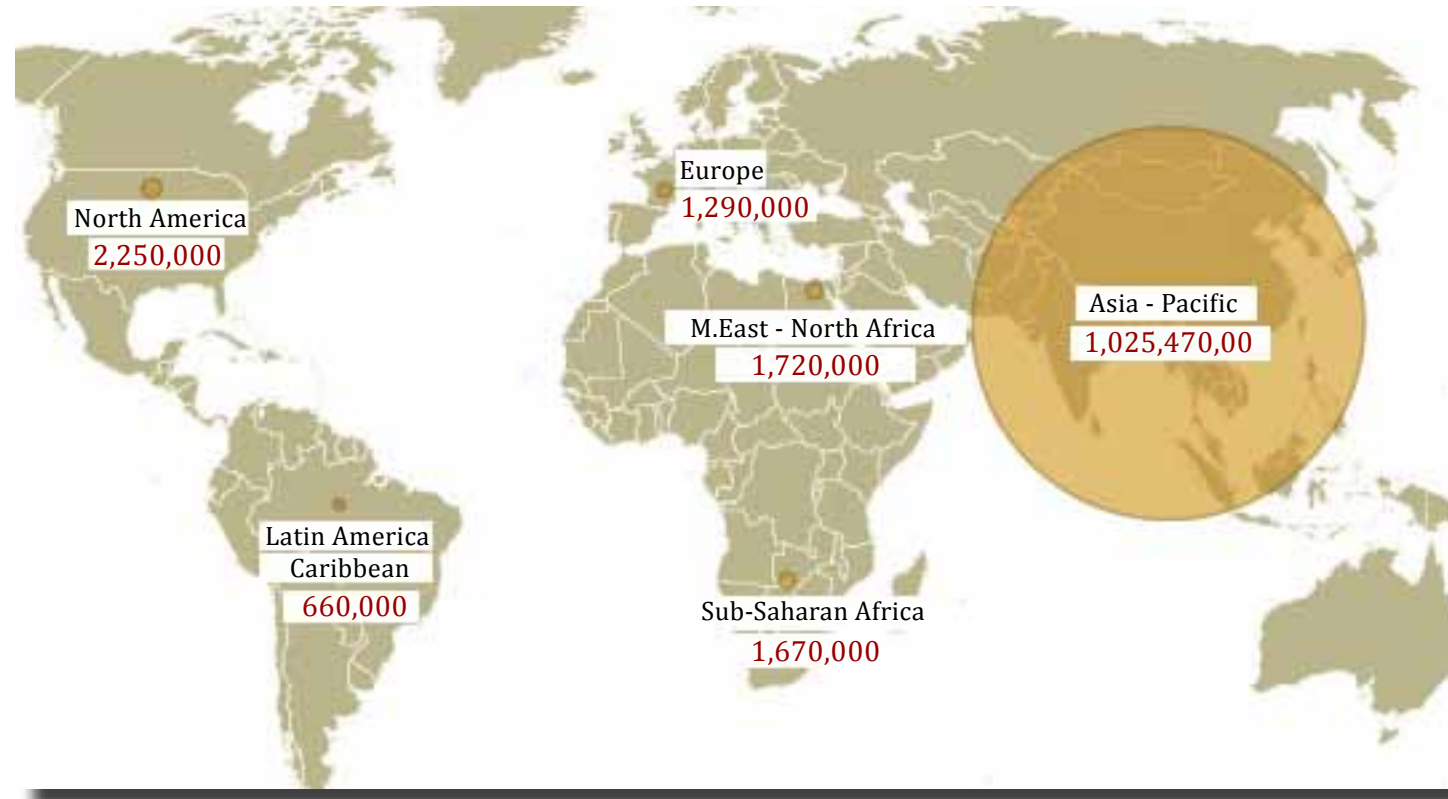
Regional Distribution of Hindus

Population by region as of 2010

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life

Global Religious Landscape, December 2012 [LINK](#)

99.3% of Hindus worldwide are in Asia-Pacific Region



Total world population of Hindus - 1,033,080,000 as of 2010



In India, the Hindu swastika appears with the dots and without the dots depending upon the usage. For rituals/homes etc. it is with the dots; for signage on temples it is without the dots. It is claimed the dots are for *invoking* the powers of the elements. That's why the swastika on a temple does not have the dots, in most cases. However, the *usage* differs according to religious practices/interpretations across the country. The swastika is applied on different bases and so there is no fixed background colour. I have given an auspicious saffron background colour (on the cover and elsewhere in this article) as the Hindu swastika is never drawn on a black background for religious ceremonies etc. but can be drawn, for instance, on a new black coloured car!

The swastika anti-clockwise is used in Indian Tantra.

Buddhism in India uses the swastika clockwise without the dots whereas elsewhere in Asia it is anti-clockwise without the dots.

For Jainism please refer to the separate section in the following pages.

Regional Distribution of Buddhists

Population by region as of 2010

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life

Global Religious Landscape, December 2012 [LINK](#)

98.7% of Buddhists worldwide are in Asia-Pacific Region



Total world population of Buddhists - 487,540,000 as of 2010

Hindus 1.034 billion + Buddhists 0.488 + Jains 0.007 = 1.529 billion*

Data for the regional distribution of Jains worldwide is unavailable. It is estimated that the population should not exceed approximately 7 million worldwide with the maximum being in India. However, this figure is hotly disputed.

The symbol of the swastika has significant meaning in cultures across continents and is not exclusive to one country. The swastika is also known as ; **China** – *wan*, **England** – *fylfot*, **Germany** – Hakenkreuz, **Greece** – *tetraskelion/gammadion* etc. [LINK](#). It is claimed that Australia is the only continent where the swastika has not been found (artefacts/archeology) till date.

From the Hindu and Buddhist population maps one can observe the majority of followers are in the Asia-Pacific region. Coupled with this is the fact that the swastika is an intrinsic part of the *spiritual life* of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains for millennia. Therefore, the insult to 1.5 billion Hindus/Buddhists/Jains by the West due to its continuing *insistence* that the swastika is solely the symbol of the Nazi regime is untenable, and further smacks of deep seated racism.

* Total rounded off

**Aum bhoohr bhuwah swaha; Tat savitar varenyam
Bhargo devasaya dheemahi; Dhiyo yonaha prachodayat**

**The lord of water, earth and heaven; Oh sun, the great god,
We worship your glory; Give us insight into the secret of your creation.**

- Gayatri Mantra, Rigveda c.2500 BCE (?)



Evolution of the swastika from the Sun circle.

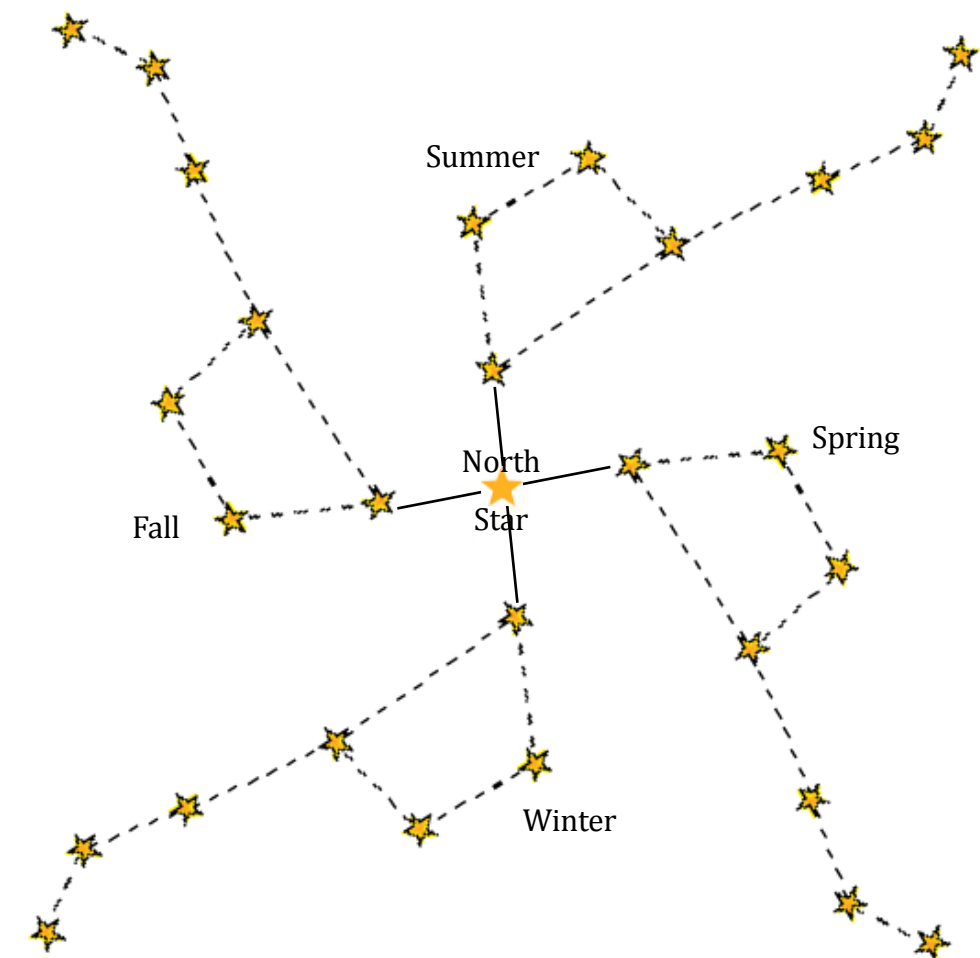
This is an informal telephone discussion (paraphrased below) I had with an Indian professor lecturing in a Western university who has put forth his view on the swastika. He wishes his name to be withheld because of the perceived 'negative' reaction he may receive from sources known and unknown.

"Take a close look at the swastika. What do you see? How did this sign come about? How has it become a powerful spiritual symbol for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, in particular? To understand this complex subject you have to go back in time to the beginnings of Man on earth. When he 'discovered' fire and what impact this made on humanity as a whole. How was 'fire' invented? How do we answer this question without stepping on the toes of those who follow religion? Some say with flint stones... others by divine intervention.

As Man progressed through the ages the symbol of the Sun became the symbol of fire (Agni). The sun emitted light, gave warmth and nurtured life. The sun became the focal point in man's spiritual development. You had 'fire worshipper', sun worshippers etc. The symbol of the sun was then gradually translated into drawing...drawing of a circle. This circle morphed into the four points of the compass, four seasons and even the four elements. As cultures developed the sign took on different meanings in different cultures. This is best depicted in artefacts and architecture across the world... in different cultures, religious beliefs. The circle was divided into four parts (seasons/NSEW etc.) and in some cultures an extension was added probably to denote a religious sentiment at that prevailing time. For instance the swastika (anti-clockwise in Tantra) is considered by some to be the dance of Shiva, arms and legs rotating like the sun rays, Shiva's Tandava dance...the dance of creation, the dance of destruction and rebirth of the Universe...the eternal celestial cycle of existence...it is also viewed as the feminine energy... in the form of Kali. And by others it is a symbol (swastika clockwise) of Lord Vishnu for auspicious ceremonies, also a symbol of Ganesha, son of Shiva...shakti...

It is believed that the sacred fire was started by rubbing two sticks together. The wooden sticks were taken from the Banyan and Pipal trees. These trees have deep spiritual significance in all three religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism). These two sticks were incorporated into the sun circle and it was probably then that the Hindu swastika in its present form came into being. Prior to any auspicious/religious event/ceremony the swastika is drawn...a representation of the ancient symbol of lighting the holy fire that represents Surya (sun), Brahma, the Creator...seeking his blessings. This is my hypothesis.

And as the swastika was born so did its religious interpretations, permutations and combinations. I do not recall the Hindus, Buddhists or Jains ever using it as a symbol of hate, violence and destruction. However, fundamentalists exist in all religions and one must discount such provocations as these are usually motivated by extraneous elements other than of a religious nature.



Big Dipper

(Its position in the firmament according to the seasons. Not to scale)

There is also an interesting theory which I believe is closer to the Truth. I read this somewhere but can't recall the exact reference link:

Swami Vivekananda, a well known Vedic scholar, made a reference to the Big Dipper. **He explained that the Dipper was shaped like a plough and was used to determine agrarian planting and harvesting seasons. Therefore, it may be the reason why the swastika symbolized "Good Harvest" and "Good Health," or "Svasta" in Sanskrit. Even today, farm implements in India have the Swastika drawn on them, with a prayer "May your good harvest be as regular as the rotation of stars." The swastika could represent the Big Dipper and not the Sun as is the popular belief.**

As for your question about the reaction to the swastika in Europe and America...well it is merely a case of lack of application of mind. **However, racism too is an issue here because Westerners have banned/ or maligned the swastika purely on the basis of the Nazi misuse overlooking evidence that it is an integral part of Eastern religions for millennia. And I presume this could be deliberate because it acts as a leverage to keep people ignorant for this ignorance can then be put to 'use' whenever the need arises.**

Finally we come to the Aryan theory...this is nonsense. In science Man evolved from Africa and he was not a tall super human but probably someone who was short, dark and apish. And for the religious minded, Man was created by God. Either way this talk of the Master race is mere propaganda. Wherever Man is there will always be conflict because of ignorance. If it is not colour then it is religion. If it is not religion then it is business."



315. Faience button seal (H99-3814/8756-01) with swastika motif found on the floor of Room 202 (Trench 43). [LINK](#) Indus Valley Civilisation c 3000 BCE - 1300 BCE

Archeologists reveal that the first known swastika was discovered in the remains of the Indus Valley Civilisation (Bronze Age 3300-1300 BCE) in the form of seals. There are some who believe that this actually post dates the find in Mezine, Ukraine – a swastika carved on late paleolithic figurine of mammoth ivory (dated about 10,000 BCE). However, this has been refuted by some as the stylized figure of a stork in flight! Bronze Age stone carvings were also found on Ilkley Moor, England. *Swastikas have also been found on pottery in archaeological digs in Africa, in the area of Kush and on pottery at the Jebel Barkal temples, in Iron Age designs of the northern Caucasus (Koban culture), and in Neolithic China in the Majiabang, Dawenkou and Xiaohedian cultures. Other Iron Age attestations of the swastika can be associated with Indo-European cultures such as the Indo-Iranians, Celts, Greeks, Germanic peoples and Slavs. The swastika is also seen in Egypt during the Coptic period. Textile number T.231-1923 held at the V&A Museum in London includes small swastikas in its design. This piece was found at Qau-el-Kebir, near Asyut, and is dated between AD300-600. The Tierwirbel (the German for “animal whorl” or “whirl of animals”) is a characteristic motive in Bronze Age Central Asia, the Eurasian Steppe, and later also in Iron Age Scythian and European (Baltic and Germanic) culture, showing rotational symmetric arrangement of an animal motive, often four birds’ heads. Even wider diffusion of this “Asiatic” theme has been proposed, to the Pacific and even North America.* [LINK](#)

So how has the confusion come about that it is the symbol of the Master Race as claimed by white supremacists? This dubious claim can be traced to the following developments: *In the 1870s the swastika was popularized by the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who found many examples of it during his diggings at ancient Troy and Mycenae. Schliemann was fascinated by the swastika and publicized it in his books, referring to it as an Aryan religious symbol. Schliemann himself wasn’t a racist, but the swastika was soon taken up by less principled writers, who were attracted by the Aryan connection as well as by the symbol’s strangely compelling appearance. In the early 20th century, Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, a former monk and founder of magazine Ostara, in which he published anti-semitic and völkisch theories (ethnicity, racial purity) used this discovery as the emblem of the Aryan connection. The first time the swastika was used with an “Aryan” meaning was on 25 December 1907, when the self-named Order of the New Templars, a secret society founded by Lanz von Liebenfels, hoisted at Werfenstein Castle (Austria) a yellow flag with a swastika and four fleurs-de-lys. Hitler in his youth had met Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels and was deeply influenced by his Aryan theory of white supremacy. He wrote in Mein Kampf (My Struggle): “the basic ideas of the National-Socialist movement are populist (völkisch) and the populist (völkisch) ideas are National-Socialist.” Nazi racial pseudo-science was couched in Völkisch terms, as when Eugen Fischer delivered his inaugural address as Nazi rector, The Conception of the Völkisch State in the view of Biology (29 July 1933).* [LINK](#)

The Nazis *believed* that the swastika was the symbol used by the Aryans as a sign of domination of the indigenous people. Therefore, the symbol was always placed at the entrance of every home.

This study (inter-continental research in cellular molecular biology) effectively puts to rest the argument that south Indians are Dravidians and were driven to the peninsula by Aryans who invaded North India by proving that people all over India have common genetic traits/origins with the same DNA structure. No foreign genes or DNA has entered the Indian mainstream in the last 60,000 years. Africans came to India through Central Asia between 80,000 to 60,000 BCE. They moved to Europe sometime around 30,000 BCE (The American Journal of Human Genetics - 9 December 2011 Volume 89, Issue 6). This evidence exposes the colonial powers’ subjective history of the Aryans - a people that never existed and furthermore demolishes the ‘story of the Vedas and the swastika having been brought to India’. Hitler was a product of this historical travesty, a travesty scripted by Eurocentrics with the intention of creating a history of racial superiority. Incidentally, the term Aryan in Sanskrit means ‘Noble’ not Race or language.

The Aryan Invasion Theory debunked: The *Aryan Invasion Theory* that was postulated in the 19th century by Europeans and Late Prof. Max Müller, in particular, claimed that the Aryans invaded India in around 1500 BCE. Apparently they brought with them a more advanced civilisation (including the Vedas) to the Dravidians...the indigenous people of India who were considered to be short, dark and backward in comparison to the Aryans in question who were said to be tall, fair, blonde and originating from Eastern Persia. These mythical people were called Indo-Aryans. And after conquering India and bringing *civilisation* to the indigenous people they travelled across Asia to Europe...thus the link in the languages of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin (*Indo-European Languages*). Since the 19th century this theory has been finely crafted into history books.

In 2011 this Aryan Invasion Theory was debunked by inter-continental research in cellular molecular biology. It has conclusively proved that there never existed any Aryans or Dravidians on the Indian sub continent. The findings of a *three-year research* by a team of scientists from various countries, has been published by **The American Journal of Human Genetics - 9 December 2011 Volume 89, Issue 6** (*Shared and Unique Components of Human Population Structure and Genome-Wide Signals of Positive Selection in South Asia p731*).

This study effectively puts to rest the argument that south Indians are Dravidians and were driven to the peninsula by Aryans who invaded North India by proving that people all over India have common genetic traits and origin. **All Indians have the same DNA structure. No foreign genes or DNA has entered the Indian mainstream in the last 60,000 years.**

Dr Gyaneshwer Chaubey, Estonian Biocentre, Tartu, Estonia, who was an Indian member of the international team said, “This time we have used autosomes, which means all major 23 chromosomes, for our studies. The decoding of human genome and other advances in this area helped us in unraveling the ancestry in 60,000 years.” **The findings disprove the caste theory prevailing in India. Interestingly, the team found that instead of Aryan invasion, it was Indians who moved from the subcontinent to Europe. That’s the reason behind the findings of the same genetic traits in Eurasian regions.** “Africans came to India through Central Asia between 80,000 to 60,000 BCE and they moved to Europe sometime around 30,000 BCE. Indian Vedic literature and the epics are all silent about the Aryan-Dravidian conflict,” said Dr. S. Kalyanaraman, a proponent of the Saraswathi civilization (*Indus Valley Civilisation?*), which developed along the banks of the now defunct River Saraswathi.

This evidence exposes the colonial powers’ subjective history of the Aryans - a people that never existed and furthermore demolishes the ‘story of the Vedas and the swastika having been brought to India’. It appears that racism is the motive...to perpetuate the myth of white supremacy. Hitler was a product of this historical travesty, a travesty scripted by Eurocentrics with the intention of creating a history of racial superiority.



Ahimsa Parmo Dharma

Nonviolence is the Supreme Religion

Know other creatures' love for life, for they are like you.

Kill them not; save their life from fear and enmity.

All creatures desire to live, not to die.

Hence to kill is to sin.

A godly man does not kill.

Therefore, kill not yourself, consciously or unconsciously, living organisms which move or move not, nor cause slaughter of them.

- Words of Lord Mahavira as found in *A Source Book for Earth's Community of Religions*, p. 63.

Opposite Pic: Idol of Lord Mahavir [LINK](#)

Jainism began in India and is one of the oldest religions of the world. Jain history can be viewed as a cycle. A period of rising called an Utsarpini in which human and natural conditions improve followed by a period of decline or Avasarpini in which things gradually get worse, weaken and corrupt. During the period of decline twenty-four persons are born who are unlike others of their time. When they see the suffering and misery in the world they renounce it and lead a path to perfection. They are called Crossing Makers or Tirthankaras and are born for the improvement of all living things. Their job as Jinas or Conquerors is to teach people how to follow the noble path of the Three Jewels or Triranta --right faith, right conduct and right knowledge." Jains do not believe in god but rather use the Tirthankaras as guides for their daily lives.

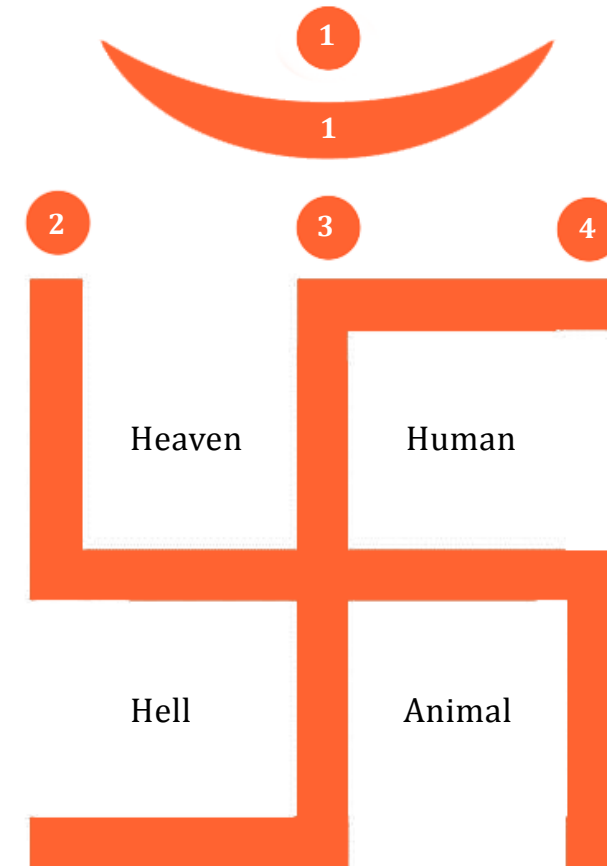
Mahavira (born c.599 BCE) is perhaps the most important figure of Jainism. He is the last Crossing Maker of the present declining era. He was born in India to the warrior caste but he left home as a young man to become a monk. He fasted and meditated for twelve years. gradually he feed himself from the concerns of the world. In doing so he gained enlightenment. From this point on, as a Jina or Conqueror, he began preaching and teaching. This process of first gaining enlightenment then teaching is the process by which the twenty-four spiritual guides have helped Jainism evolve. Mahavira gained many followers. This is how Jainism spread.

The Jains believe in rebirth of the soul. That means they believe that when a living being dies the soul is born in another body. Eventually Jains hope to break free of the cycle of birth and rebirth and gain salvation. By leading a good life, Jains believe they will have a better rebirth and move closer to salvation. The code of conduct for leading a good life is truthfulness, not stealing, not being possessive, non-violence, and chastity.

From the beginning, Jainism has been based on the concept of non-violence or ahimsa. Jains believe that every living thing, no matter how small, has a soul and should not be harmed. This is why Jains are strict vegetarians. This is also why you might see a very devout Jain sweeping the ground in front of him to avoid stepping on insects and wearing a mask of fabric over his/her mouth to avoid swallowing them.

May I always have a friendly feeling towards all living beings of the world and may the stream of compassion always flow from my heart towards distressed and afflicted living beings. - A Jain prayer (taken from p. 64 of *A Source Book for Earth's Community of Religions*)

Link: www.uri.org



LEGEND

- 1 – Siddha Loka – Abode of the liberated soul
- 2 – Samyak Darshan – Right Faith
- 3 – Samyak Gyan – Right Knowledge
- 4 – Samyak Charita – Right Conduct

Four States the soul may live in

Heaven
Human
Hell
Animal



L to R: Buddha Statue/news.palyul.org, Monk/Jill Gocher, Dalai Lama/reclaimtheswastikasymbol.tumblr.com

Gautama Buddha, (between 6th and 4th centuries BCE) also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, Shakyamuni, or simply the Buddha, was a sage on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. A native of the ancient Shakya republic in the Himalayan foothills, Gautama Buddha taught primarily in northeastern India.

Buddha means “awakened one” or “the enlightened one.” He taught a Middle Way between sensual indulgence and the severe asceticism found in the Sramana (renunciation) movement common in his region. He later taught throughout regions of eastern India such as Magadha and Kośala. Accounts of his life, discourses, and monastic rules are believed by Buddhists to have been summarized after his death and memorized by his followers. Various collections of teachings attributed to him were passed down by oral tradition, and first committed to writing about 400 years later. Buddhists explicitly rejected the usefulness of the elaborate Vedic rites and refused to accept the caste system as authoritative. Despite these differences, however, Buddhism shares many fundamental beliefs with Hinduism, including the concepts of reincarnation, karma, and entering Nirvana, or absolute liberation. Buddhism spread across Asia. [LINK](#)

The Buddha laid out the Four Noble Truths, which believers could follow to avoid the obstacles that prevent them from understanding their true nature.

1. **Life is suffering:** The very nature of human existence is inherently painful. Because of the cyclical nature of death and rebirth, death does not bring an end to suffering.
2. **Suffering has a cause:** craving and attachment. Suffering is the result of our selfish craving and clinging. This in turn reflects our ignorance of reality.
3. **Craving and attachment can be overcome:** When one completely transcends selfish craving, one enters the state of Nirvana, and suffering ceases.
4. **The path toward the cessation of craving and attachment is an Eightfold Path:**
 1. Right understanding
 2. Right purpose
 3. Right speech
 4. Right conduct
 5. Right livelihood
 6. Right effort
 7. Right alertness
 8. Right concentration



L to R: Tibetan Bon swastika (gyung-drung bon), Manji sign on Saisen box/ Dr. H. Sulzer, Senso-ji Temple/openplac.es

The Buddhist swastika in India is clockwise whilst elsewhere across Asia it is anti-clockwise.

In ancient China the swastika (**wan**) was originally Taoist symbol of eternity, and as the ‘**wan-tzu**’ or ‘ten thousand character sign’ it represented the ten thousand things under heaven.

In Tibetan Bon tradition the swastika (**gyung-drung bon**) rotates anti-clockwise. For this reason the practitioners of Bon tradition circumambulate sacred buildings or pilgrimage sites anti-clockwise.

In Vajrayana Buddhism the swastika symbolises the element of earth and its indestructible stability.

The swastika used in Buddhist art and scripture is known as a **Manji** (**whirlwind/character of eternity**), and represents Dharma, universal harmony, and the balance of opposites. It is derived from the Hindu religious swastika, but it is not identical in meaning. The Manji is made up of several elements- a vertical axis representing the joining of heaven and earth, a horizontal axis representing the connection of yin and yang, and the four arms, representing movement- the whirling force created by the interaction of these elements. When facing left, it is the **Omote** (front facing) Manji, representing love and mercy. Facing right, it represents strength and intelligence, and is called the **Ura** (rear facing) Manji. **In Zen Buddhism, the Manji represents an ideal harmony between love and intellect.**

Spiritual Movement - Falun Gong or Falun Dafa (*Dharma Wheel Practice - work/power/energy*) is a spiritual discipline first introduced in China in 1992 through public lectures by its founder, **Li Hongzhi**. The configuration of Falun is a miniature of the universe. The swastika symbol represents the **Buddha School** and **Taiji** (**Yin-Yang**) symbols represent the Tao School. [LINK](#)



Falun Gong



Mosaic antique swastikas in ancient synagogue, Israel. (Yana Falik/The Epoch Times) [LINK](#)

Here is a news report by Yana Falik, Epoch Times Israel Staff, Feb. 16, 2007 [LINK](#) - In 1974, the kibbutz founder Avshalom Yakobi lied to the soldiers who were about to commence construction of a military project on this land. They had accidentally come across some archeological treasures of antiquity and he told them that it was a synagogue. One of the officers replied, "When guns roar, muses become silent." But in the end, the construction work was cancelled. After his work day was over, he would go and dig out the ancient relics. It was thus that he labored for 3 additional hours every day. One day he had dug no more than 8 inches, and discovered a red ornament depicting a menorah. Avshalom informed the Department of Archeology about "the underground miracle," and since then, archeologists have unearthed the entire synagogue. What Avshalom had originally believed to be a lie turned out to be true! During further scientific inspection and analysis, it was found that there were 3 synagogues. Originally, it was just a simple structure, but later some Roman basilica-style structures with windows that were traditionally pointed towards Jerusalem were added.

The floors were paved with small stones of about 70 different hues depicting Itzhak's sacrifice, the Ark of the Covenant, inscriptions in Hebrew and Aramaic, traditional Jewish symbols, such as the menorah, customary national ornaments, and many different swastikas. Avshalom, who is 91, has an excellent memory and possesses a detailed historical knowledge of this place, which dates back to 400-600 A.D. He relayed his fascinating story over the course of 3 hours. As it turned out, there was an ancient Bedouin cemetery and an ancient Arabian village under the base of the synagogue. In the next layer of the excavation, they found the 3rd century Jewish settlement named Baala, where Jews had lived for more than 300 years (the settlement of Baala is mentioned in 1 of the 3 parts of the Old Testament).



Avshalom Yakobi. (Yana Falik/The Epoch Times)

When asked about how swastikas found their way into a synagogue, Avshalom answered, "All Jewish archeologists that had been working here did not pay any attention to swastikas. People all over the world have been using this ancient symbol of happiness for millennia. This swastika is hundreds of years old. At that time, Hitler was not born yet, how could this fiend be more powerful than the world's history, world's art, and world's culture? I think now it is a right time for all of mankind to put in order some acquired erroneous concepts regarding the swastika symbol."

The Jewish Swastika ?



A mandala-like swastika, composed of Hebrew letters and surrounded by a circle and a mystical hymn in Aramaic. **Appears in the Kabbalistic work "Parashat Eliezer" by Rabbi Eliezer ben Isaac Fischel of Strizhov, a commentary on the ancient eschatological book "Karnayim", ascribed to Rabbi Aharon of Kardina.** The shape of the symbol and the contents of the hymn show strong solar symbolism. (c. 18 century CE) [LINK](#)

The book was republished in Jerusalem by Avraham Yaakov Bombach.

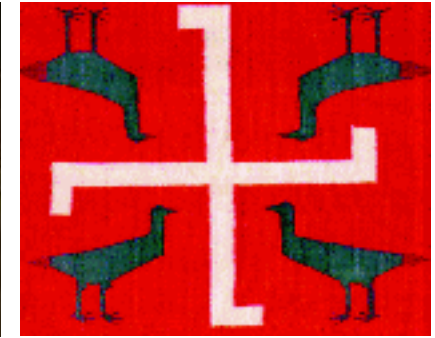
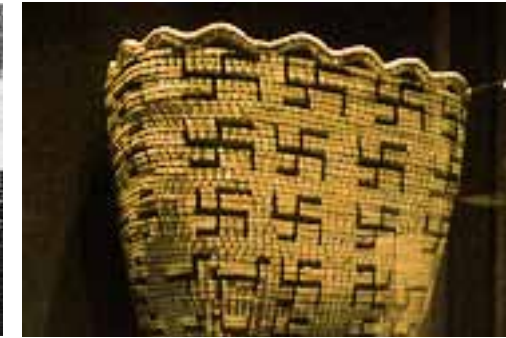


Native American Indians relinquish the use of their sacred swastika.



Four tribes of Arizona Indians, the Navajos, Papagos, Apaches, and Hopis, through their head men at an Indian conclave have banned the use of the traditional swastika symbol from all designs in their basket weaving and blanket making as a protest against Nazi "acts of oppression." Fred Kaboti, Hopi (left), and Miguel Flores, Apache, are about to sign a parchment document proclaiming the ban in 1940.

The declaration reads - "Because the above ornament, which has been a symbol of friendship among our forefathers for many centuries, has been desecrated recently by another nation of peoples, therefore it is resolved that henceforth from this date on and forever more our tribes renounce the use of the emblem commonly known today as the swastika . . . on our blankets, baskets, art objects, sand paintings and clothing."



Kindly click on the above photographs for the photo credit.

The Hopi legends say that the swastika describes the pattern the ancestors followed when they journeyed outward from Oraibi, the center of the universe. The Hopi and Navaho use the swastika in their healing ceremonies and sand paintings. They refer to it as the *Whirling Logs of Healing*. With colored sand a Navaho singer forms the cross of the Whirling Logs on the ground. Painstakingly he draws the *eight Holy People* who ride on the ends of the logs forming the feet of the swastika. They whirl in a pattern of holy power which this most ancient of symbols represents. Spirit and matter become one causing healing to occur through integration. The sand painting is then destroyed! [LINK](#)

Following the Civil War, the United States began a military campaign to confine all Indians to reservations. By the 1880s it had largely achieved this goal. The more settled tribes, such as the Pueblos, fared the best during this period, retaining at least part of their traditional lands and largely avoiding the starvation, mass deportations, and attendant suffering that were the fate of the more nomadic and defiant tribes such as the Apaches and Navajos. Loss of land and liberty was almost always accompanied by new religious persecution, this time at the hands of Protestant missionaries. [LINK](#)

Is there any difference between the events of the last century and those of the 19th century? The photograph (opposite) is evidence of the prevailing mindset of those that continue to enforce their warped perception of the swastika, which originates from stunning ignorance coupled with racism that appears to be exclusive to Western sensibilities in the case of the swastika. And this is best reflected in the following news reports:

- Local authorities requested a store in a New York borough to stop selling swastika-shaped earrings because they deemed them offensive. "Let me be clear – a swastika is not a fashion statement. It is the most hateful symbol in our culture, and an insult to any civilized person," Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer said in a statement, adding that selling the earrings amounted to a "hate crime." Arguing that the sale of the swastika earrings was "shocking to the sensibilities of all New Yorkers." [LINK](#) ("an insult to any civilized person"? - MU).

- Three McDonald's workers have been charged with hate crimes after allegedly carrying out a gruesome attack on a mentally disabled customer. William Hatch, 29, Paul Beebe, 26 and Jesse Sanford, 25, are said to have branded a swastika on the 22-year-old Navajo man's arm in April using a coat hanger heated on a stove. Prosecutors say the men then shaved another swastika on the back of the victim's head and used marker pens to scrawl on his body, including 'KKK', 'White Power', a pentagram and a sexually graphic image. [LINK](#) (Isn't this ironic that right wing supremacists are using the swastika which is the sacred symbol of the Navajos? This is ignorance personified - MU).

- Controversy flared up at Pretend City, a children's museum in Irvine, when a few visitors recently complained about a Hindu swastika woven on a tapestry in one of the museum's exhibits. The offended visitors apparently were unaware that the swastika is an old religious symbol in Hinduism and that members of many other cultures around the globe revere it, among them some Native Americans. [LINK](#) (This confirms that the education system is at best, suspect - MU).

Prior to the 1920s the swastika was considered a *God Luck Charm* adopted by immigrants from the indigenous people of America and by the European colonial powers from the East. For the ignorant it was an exotic symbol. It was very popular with aviators. So when the Nazi's began using the symbol "*Westerners*" quickly dropped it and banned its use. For them it was nothing more than an exotic *Good Luck Charm*.



American volunteer pilots used the swastika on their planes when they fought for the French in WW1. The emblem of the Lafayette Escadrille (little squadron) was of a Native American Chief whose headgear had the sacred swastika emblazoned on it.



L to R - The Edmonton Swastikas, a Canadian womens' ice hockey team, c.1916., Original insignia of the US 45th Infantry Division, Coca-cola watch fob. Photographs/[Credit](#)



Pura (temple) Tuluk Biyu Batur, Kintamani, Bali. Pic by Mark Ulyseas

It is time we stop dishonouring the religious symbol of over one billion five hundred million Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

Civil and Human Rights extends to the Rights of an individual to peacefully follow one's religion and its attendant practices, including venerating the respective religious symbols. A State that proclaims to follow these basic rules cannot enforce its diktat by unilaterally, either 'socially' and/or 'legally', outlawing a religious symbol based merely on the fact that one of their own had misused it in the Past. Sadly, this is the case with the swastika in most Western countries. They continue to remain aloof from educating their citizens and thereby not ensuring that the rights of the religious minorities are protected. The act of the Native American Indians in 1940 to give up their spiritual symbol, the swastika, because it was misused by Hitler was an act of submission to the immigrant culture.

Those who write history are the ones that decide the fate of a culture and all its appendages. Any government can brainwash its citizens by projecting its policies through education. And what better way to do this than by creatively writing history?

Colonial powers and immigrant countries have played a significant role in writing the history of the colonies, interpreting and recording for posterity a jaundiced view of socio-political events. The hangover from the heady days of colonising a country and then making it one's own continues even today in world politics with the jousting for eco-political power in foreign countries.

The 'fate' of the swastika in the West has been decided by these very powers that apparently exhibit a spectacular ignorance of the deep religious significance that the symbol has in the ancient religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. One suspects that this is a deliberate attempt to enforce a benign form of cultural genocide through a deliberate campaign of misinformation...*don't ask, don't tell, on a need to know basis etc.*

It is time we stop dishonouring the religious sensitivities of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. And if we don't, it is conceivable that we could pay the price sooner rather than later.



Children carry the effigy, near Bangli, of a protecting spirit to ward off bad spirits at a cremation ceremony, similar to the Ogoh-Ogoh effigies that are paraded on the night before the day of silence (Nyepi - Bali New Year).

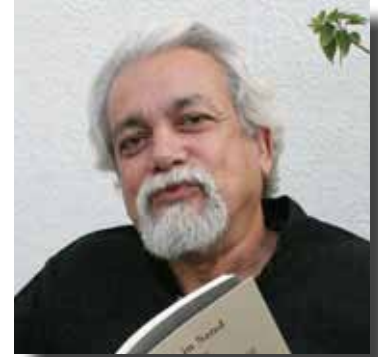


Cremation, Tampak Siring; Relatives set up a symbolic hut for the deceased as a next step in the circle of life where the purified soul takes shelter and will be taken to the sea and holy mountain later only to return to the ancestral shrine in the family compound after several days of ceremony.



Padmasana (shrine), Lovina.





This is an exclusive for Live Encounters Magazine.
Here is a poem series from Randhir Khare's new volume
MEMORY LAND: New & Selected Poems (1970 to 2013)
which is due out by the end of this year.

The Sea At Night

The raw sea rolls restlessly all night
Burning the windswept dark with flames of foam,
A fever rises in my drunken blood
Pores beading sweat that smells of home...

A lost home long ago when I lay ill
Torn by the wrench of life and death
And mother's voice falling like cool rain
To soothe the parched skin of my sickly breath.

So many fevered nights have filled my life
That I have learned to cherish every day
Reach out and touch the angel wings of light
And celebrate my dreams that fade away.

Along The Shore

Walking the shore, against the wind and rain,
Hand holding hand and water spearing skin,
We move between the folds of dark and light,
One with the gurgling sea that bursts within.

We do not speak and let our silence taste
The fervour of the growing waves that crack,
Dreams bursting in a spray of muddy foam,
So many lives now lived, death rides each back

We breathe into the heavy monsoon air
The lightness of our beings, our hopes and love,
Then draw the turgid grey into our lungs,
With worlds dripping like rain from wombs above.

Lover, companion, fellow traveller,
Share the bread of dark and wine of light with me
Caught between worlds that close from either side,
And walk the waves we thought would set us free.

The Sea Took You Camilla

You gave your heart to the sea one day Camilla;
Heavy thighed, broad shouldered, heaving through
Flesh of waves you stroked your way –
Towards a warm red sun squatting on the skyline
Throbbing with dolphins,
Your lungs thrusting bubbles into the darkening air
Crying with evening birds;
You gave your heart to the sea one day Camilla
And only your body returned, broken and cold;
Your void was filled with shells and weeds and brine,
Face down on the sand, you lay,
Exposed to unfamiliar eyes.

You gave your heart to the sea one day Camilla
With the holy passion of a lover,
Wind singing in your ears the songs of the drowned
And the quiet lament of the living.

Waterline

Along the waterline the rain flew low like gulls,
Skimming the skin of sea and sand,
Dissolving with the fading light,
Smell of feathers rising from the land.

I walked into the dark and trailed the cry
Of curlews stalking up the empty shore,
Until I reached the place where rocks turned mist
And dreams in waves exploded with a roar.

My feet sank in the sand and I went down
Until I felt the foam about my ears,
Crabs floated in and filled my void
And snails inhabited my world of fears.

Sea Song

Sing me the song that only shadows know -
As clouds drift over a sun licked blue,
Dance me a dance that only dolphins play,
Touch me a touch with wind that sets me free.

Kiss me a kiss that waves do with the land -
Nibbling their way up with a rising tide,
Hug me a hug as salt air wraps my skin,
Cry me a cry that only seagulls can.

Love me with love that only loss can give -
Sucking the heart out with its last dear breath,
Wish me a wish that shells ask of the sand -
The fellowship of oneness in the end.

Morning Sea

I am the morning sea
Mouth full with gulls
Dolphin dreams flood my heart,
Sun-ground sand rests in my veins -
Lost souls waiting for freedom.

Above me hangs a kite
Floating in spirals,
Fish-watching, diving,
Tearing my blue skin
In a flash of light.

And when silver
Rises in its claws
Yanked from my flesh
I feel my world expand,
One with the wind,
One with the sun-shot sky.

Farrukh Dhondy



Author - Prophet of Love
in an interview with Mark Ulyseas

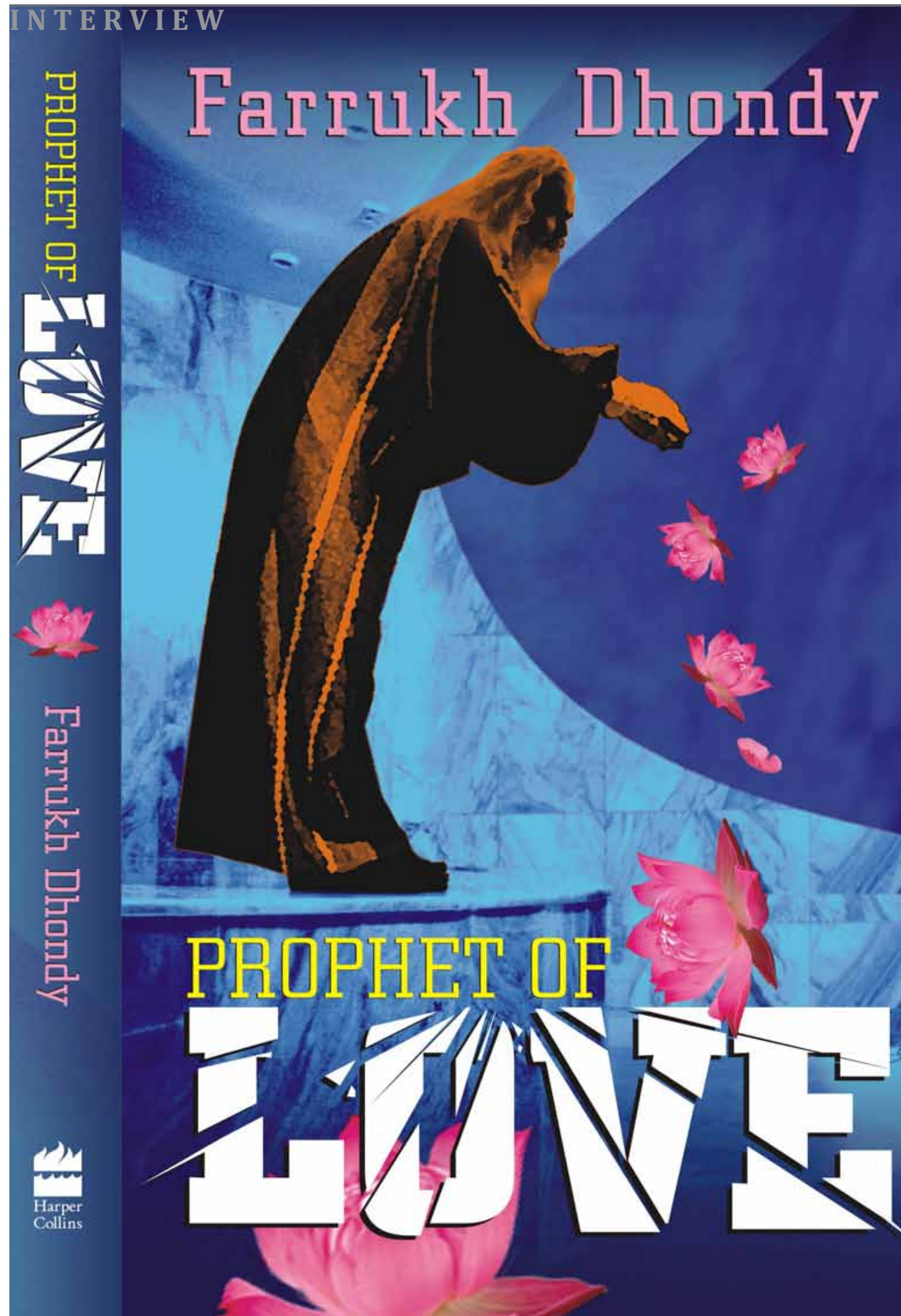
Published by Harper Perennial



The title and setting in an ashram is reminiscent of the 'heyday' of the 70s when Westerners flocked to the Ashram of Bhagwan Rajneesh, a self styled Godman, in Pune (then Poona) in search of the guru who spoke of Love...uninhibited spontaneous universal love. It is believed that many such 'followers' often referred to him as the Guru of Love...the media called him the Sex Guru. Did you derive your inspiration from this and thus the title reads as "Prophet of Love"? But why Prophet and not Guru?

I have never read any work of Rajneesh apart from stray quotations in newspapers etc. Yes, the story is about a Godman who plagiarises from and simplifies the work of several traditions so those who don't want to do any serious study can relate stray ideas to the mundane circumstance of their lives. A guru imparts wisdom that has been gained and tested. A false guru talks nonsense. A prophet prophecies and since love and the future are uncertain it was the most appropriate title. It could have been called the Prophet of Sex but my publishers thought it would put off potential readers who think they are in the love rather than sex camp.





Is this novel an honest mix of fact and fiction? I ask this question because it is said that your novel *The Bikini Murders* was loosely based on the 'murderous activities' of Charles Sobhraj?

As with most fiction, *Prophet of Love* has its origin in my experience. I did go on a journalistic mission to research the activities and proclivities of an ashram and I did have aunts and friends in Pune. I did meet several characters there and have now; years later twisted them imaginatively into fiction. None of the characters are actual portraits and none of the action is a factually accurate account of real events.

It is also believed that many followers fell afoul of Bhagwan Rajneesh aka Osho and his coterie and thus paid the price by being banned from the ashram...in a sense being derobed (the followers wore the uniform of the ashram— maroon colour robes similar to Buddhist monks). Is the story of Diamond aka Ma Vidhyadhari representative of this reality?

I have met people who dissented from one cult or the other and were expelled and even punished for it and yes, Diamond is such an one

Why did it have to be a young journalist that Diamond approached to help rescue her daughter from the ashram and not her embassy or another Westerner?

The novel doesn't give the reader any certainty about Diamond's nationality. Does she have American or Israeli citizenship? Would she appeal to an embassy rather than a journalist boyfriend who had befriended her? Is her story true? Does she have a child held by the ashram. The prophet says she doesn't and in the end she doesn't mention the child.

Did you write this novel because you wanted to expose the seedy underbelly of the goings-on in some ashrams that everybody knows about but refuses to acknowledge because it has to do with a portent concoction of faith, spirituality and sex?

Yes. I wanted to tackle a universally known reality about contemporary India. And yes, I remain unconvinced by the spiritual quest and by god-men, but that needn't apply to the reader. I didn't write it to convert anyone spiritually, only to convert my publishers into greater generosity with advances and percentages.



The role of the guru in your novel appears similar to the role of a guru in reality...an unquestionable power that he exerts even on politicians and business folk, in general. Was this intentional? And what do you hope to achieve with this depiction? To set the record straight?

I haven't directly incorporated politicians and business folk in the story. I do strongly believe that those who are elected in a democracy ought to follow discernible laws and accountable disciplines and not the ramblings of irrational cultists. I don't know if fiction can ever 'achieve' anything apart from imparting the possibilities of life and thought to the reader and entertaining him or her through the force of narrative or drama or even accuracy of ear such as Kipling has or twists of invention such as Salman exhibits.

Why in your opinion do Westerners still flock to gurus in India? Have their cultures failed them or are they attempting to escape from their own inadequacies to seek shelter in ashrams, far from the madding crowd?

I have met Western Buddhists who ignore the fact that Buddhism is atheistic and non-material and believe that chanting will bring them worldly goods (lots!) and prosperity and power. Very many victims of cults want to be controlled by a 'philosophy' and assume the disciplines of a religion or a cult which gets them away from the indiscipline or even chaos of their own lives. Think of Malcolm X who was a self-confessed thief and pimp before he found the discipline of Islam which made him abandon his criminal existence and pray five times a day – of course he grew out of it and came as close to Marxism as a very practical American leader can.

Would you agree that gurus of the Hindu persuasion always appear to be in the majority and one never seems to hear about gurus from other faiths? Why is this? Has this got to do with the perceived 'exotic' spirituality that does not have a formal organisational structure and relies solely on a guru to dispense spirituality in a subjective manner that is palatable to those seeking emancipation from a material world – one on one with a godman?

In Britain the 'godmen' one hears about are Islamic preachers who get a following of would-be jihadis. The Hindu cults exist but they are quieter and go about their business without bombing people or slaughtering soldiers on the streets of London. There are of course gurus of the internet age who are amateur philosophers and sometimes open frauds who charge you money to tell you to stay silent for ten minutes a day and breathe deeply or concoct more complicated formulae to convince you that you are being redeemed. Hindu ideas and stray terms such as Yoga assist them in convincing people that their prescriptions have tradition and ancient wisdom behind them.

Why do you write?

Four answers:

To earn a living

To find out what I think

To win the respect of people I respect

Why do bees make honey?

What are you working on now?

Two screenplays, a stage play and I have two prose manuscripts drafted and waiting to be published.

What is your message to aspiring writers?

Don't imitate any modern writing and don't write 'for yourself'- that, like blogging, is for amateurs.



This poem, *In the End*, was commissioned by Tuam Cancer Care in County Galway, Ireland. Being such a sensitive subject, it took me a long time to write. I was aware that people who come to this centre don't usually survive cancer. I imagined a person coming to terms with their destiny, waiting for their spirit to float out through the 'open window'.



In the End...

maybe it was your picture
of a boatman on a lake

and the shadow of a child
along an autumn horizon

that made me look inwards
and not out to galaxies

where dreams are stars –
eclipses are closer to home.

I need more twilight now
to shut down on bustle, and

a place to lie down with kin
next to an open window.

Commissioned by Tuam Cancer Care

Indigenous Festivals in Australia

Performing cultural survival



Dr Peter Phipps
RMIT Globalism Research Centre
Melbourne



Innovation and tradition: Chooky Dancers from Elcho Island, Arnhem Land, dancing Zorba the Greek at the 'Festival of the Dreaming, Woodford, Qld', 2007.
© Peter Phipps

Indigenous festivals are booming. There are well over 100 Indigenous festivals in Australia annually; from small, one-day events with a focus on sport, music, culture, history or a mix of these, to a smaller number of large, complex tourism-arts events such as Garma or The Dreaming. The vast majority of Indigenous festivals are small, locally oriented events held primarily for their local Indigenous communities without dedicated festival administration or support, but pulled together by local communities and organisations often on short time-frames.

While being framed very differently by the destructive experiences of colonialism and cultural repression, many of the features of the Indigenous festival scene are similar to the mainstream non-Indigenous community. The broad range of demonstrated community benefits generated through festivals from the most intangible aspects of identity and wellbeing, through to a significant local economic impact (estimated in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania alone to be nearly \$10 billion annually). While economic and social impacts vary, these positive outcomes particularly important for generating hope in disadvantaged Indigenous communities.



Galpu clan bunggul, Garma, NE Arnhem Land, 2008. © Yothu Yindi Foundation

Corroborees to Festivals

Celebrations and rituals are a key dimension of human cultures. Indigenous peoples have been conducting ceremonies and rituals on this country for an extremely long time. Among of the functions of Aboriginal ceremonial life is to bring together different clan groups to perform and renew the law at significant times and places in the presence of related peoples. It is common for people entering one another's country to engage in ritual and ceremonial exchanges, frequently exchanging songs, dances and stories with people from far away. In the early and later colonial periods non-Indigenous settlers were drawn in to witness these performative exchanges between Aboriginal people, which came to be widely known and popularised as the 'corroboree'.

In the early colonial period corroborees were a highly regarded hybrid entertainment performed widely in south-eastern Australia to large, enthusiastic audiences in the first part of the nineteenth century, and then spreading from South Australia into what is now the Northern Territory. Regular entertainments in Melbourne and Adelaide from the 1830s to 1840s were large, lucrative entrepreneurial events run by Aboriginal, and later in partnership with non-Indigenous promoters and sporting clubs as pioneers of modern 'leisure culture'. It was only the intervention of colonial governments banning these events, and policies driving Aboriginal people out of the cities (and labour markets) and into controlled reserves and missions that dampened this thriving market.

Mission and government authorities tried to regulate Indigenous performance on their own terms: for important visitors to reserves, or in cities and towns on significant national occasions such as settlement centenaries, royal jubilees, coronation celebrations and so on. Despite this control Aboriginal people kept running their own corroborees on the fringes of rural fairs and sporting events, some exclusively as traditional ceremonial business, others as public events drawing in a broad audience, and sometimes a complex combination of these.

The cultural assertiveness of Aboriginal communities following the 1967 referendum has found many outlets in sports, the visual and performing arts, popular music, film and festivals. Festivals are just one of these expressive spaces, but one with the broadest range of purposes, forms of participation and opportunities. This period in which many of the controls were being lifted on Aboriginal people's lives coincided with significant social transformations in the Australian mainstream. This period has seen the strengthening of movements for human rights and specifically Indigenous rights as part of that struggle, and a media and migration-driven cultural transformation involving greater openness to cultural diversity at home and abroad.

In the early colonial period corroborees were a highly regarded hybrid entertainment performed widely in south-eastern Australia to large, enthusiastic audiences in the first part of the nineteenth century, and then spreading from South Australia into what is now the Northern Territory. Regular entertainments in Melbourne and Adelaide from the 1830s to 1840s were large, lucrative entrepreneurial events run by Aboriginal, and later in partnership with non-Indigenous promoters and sporting clubs as pioneers of modern 'leisure culture'.

Throughout the leisure societies of the world 'festivals' have become ubiquitous spaces: the extension of music festivals, cultural festivals, sport and lifestyle festivals as an established, substantial industry and part of the cultural landscape. This 'training' has produced a very large market of experienced festival-goers familiar with the rituals of tickets and passes, tent cities, portable toilets and food stalls. As with the earlier corroborees, Indigenous festivals are a potent site for cross-cultural negotiations of meaning and spaces where Indigenous people can actively represent themselves and their culture in a positive light, as well as providing opportunities for economic participation on Indigenous terms.

Indigenous Festivals now

The Indigenous visual arts story is now legendary: a relatively marginal art practice largely situated as 'tourist crafts' boomed over a thirty year period to the point where it became a major cultural industry and an international art phenomenon with multiple benefits to Indigenous communities. Along with the visual arts, cultural festivals are one of the few consistently positive spaces for Indigenous communities to show their kids, and the world, a more positive view of their culture. Cultural festivals involve intercultural negotiation and learning on Indigenous terms, and actually do provide the multiple benefits of employment, economic development and cultural renewal that governments say they want.

Indigenous communities maintain some of the oldest and most vulnerable precious cultural assets of humanity. They have a well-spring of 'story' - cultural creativity- the world is eager to see, hear and experience. Despite this richness Aboriginal people are represented as always failing in key mainstream indicators: not healthy, educated, employed, etcetera. Festivals are a space that pushes this discussion beyond the 'deficit model' in Indigenous affairs to recognise the enormous wealth of cultural creativity and individual talent that resides in Indigenous Australia.

Two of the most prominent of these festivals are Garma, held annually on Yolngu land in Arnhem land, and the Dreaming Festival, on Jinibara land at Woodford in Queensland. Garma is a gathering of national political, cultural and academic significance, and yet remains a very local gathering of Yolngu clans on Yolngu land for Yolngu purposes. Garma is also a national academic and policy forum on Indigenous issues, a local employment initiative, a youth music development and industry training opportunity for young people from Indigenous communities across the Top End, a local youth forum, and most importantly a celebration of Yolngu song, dance traditions in daily *bunggul* performances, among many other things.

There is clear evidence throughout my 2010 report on Indigenous Festivals (see [LINK](#)) in Australia that they are already contributing significantly to Indigenous community wellbeing from the less tangible areas of cultural maintenance to direct economic benefits. It is clear that with more systematic policy and program support this contribution could be much greater still.

Running since 1999, Garma has accumulated a remarkable array of community development initiatives that run outside of the festival timeframe, including a women's healing initiative, a men's alcohol diversionary program and a cultural services business providing cultural inductions to new Rio Tinto mine employees.

The Dreaming Festival is very different again, having more of a national and international Indigenous arts showcase emphasis, the impact of which is much more broadly dispersed amongst participating artists (both professional and community-based) and audiences (Indigenous and non-Indigenous). By promoting the best of local and international Indigenous performance the Dreaming Festival promotes Indigenous creativity, identity and wellbeing.

Policy Context

There are obvious, pressing social and demographic reasons to support, engage and deploy any and all areas of Indigenous social and economic strength in the broader project of Indigenous community development. In the knowledge and service-oriented economy of contemporary Australia (not to mention the mining boom on Aboriginal lands) there has never been a firmer economic foundation from which to support and cultivate this talent. Yet remarkably, policy and programs in this area are severely neglected in terms of attention and funding. While Commonwealth Indigenous policy and programs remain adrift, and in some instances (such as housing or health outcomes in the NT 'Intervention') notoriously ineffective, this is one area where some coordination and even a modest doubling of existing funding could make a huge difference to communities.

There is clear evidence throughout my 2010 report on Indigenous Festivals (see <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/ufwg124fk6adz.pdf>) in Australia that they are already contributing significantly to Indigenous community wellbeing from the less tangible areas of cultural maintenance to direct economic benefits. It is clear that with more systematic policy and program support this contribution could be much greater still. Understood as an industry sector, Indigenous festivals are both extremely dynamic, with enormous development potential, and at the same time they are very vulnerable in a number of ways. The key strength in the sector is the cultural expression that has been long-repressed, and the talented and creative individuals and communities who want to share that culture both among themselves, and with others. The key risk factor for individual festivals, and reflected in the sector generally, are the vulnerable, limited and inconsistent resource bases they draw on for their success: human resources, organisational infrastructure and funding. The first and most crucial of these is the human and cultural resources in Indigenous communities which are too often in crisis; dealing with



Witiana Marika oversees smoking ceremony for youth forum participants at Garma Festival, 2007. © Yothu Yindi Foundation

the loss of key organisers and knowledge holders to premature death, disability or other pressing responsibilities; 'too much sorry business' as is often reported by Indigenous people and borne out in much-quoted mortality figures.

In relation to some of these festivals there is an immediate employment and training opportunity for Indigenous cultural specialists and others, 'at home' in their own communities or region. As just one example, the Garma festival in Arnhem Land employs 130 Yolngu during the festival in roles ranging from cultural tourism services, to the women's healing program, to festival site security. In the case of regional festivals this transforms some of the limitations of remote and rural locality into an advantage, and presents positive models and networks for Indigenous people to further develop their entrepreneurship and work skills in the cultural, tourism and other service sectors.

The cultivation of local Indigenous community management has tended to borrow talent from other organisations out of necessity, rather than the festival sector building its own capacity. Training and mentorship in organising a festival and other events requires, firstly, having long-term organisational capacity which most festivals cannot afford. Secondly it requires sustained, long-term partnerships with government agencies, funders and education providers to support the training process, fund traineeships and then ensure that there are real jobs to move into from those training positions. Up to this point there is little evidence of government or other agencies providing this kind of long-term support.

Governments look for a simple, short-term 'fix' in 'Indigenous affairs' leading to inconsistent policy made on the run (like the NT intervention) in defiance of the evidence. In the 1990s 'Indigenous affairs' became a destructively politicised object in a broader ideological contestation going on in Australian politics, to the detriment of Indigenous Australians and the policies and programs that frame their opportunities. But by listening carefully to Indigenous communities and properly resourcing sustained programs and genuine, respectful partnerships, incremental, long-term benefits can happen.

Festivals are organised by a wide variety of institutions with varied capacities. Of the festivals we studied they are variously run by an Indigenous cultural foundation (Garma), a non-Indigenous company (CrocFest), a local government (Yalukit Willam Ngargee) and a folk music festival foundation (The Dreaming Festival). Added to this are education providers, sports clubs, individual philanthropists, health centres, media organisations and others. Some of these organisations are able to absorb much of the organisational costs of festivals into their general operating expenses, while others rely heavily on volunteer labour, external funding and gate revenues to make them viable.



Gunditjmara dancers ceremonial exchange with Cape York Wik dancers with whale art installation behind them, on the beach at Tararer Festival, 2011 © Peter Phipps

Funding

Festival managers repeat a dilemma common to other small arts and cultural organisations: their organisations are structured for cultural purposes but in order to produce cultural events they have to mobilise themselves for rounds of competitive funding applications with long lead times, uncertain outcomes and demanding reporting requirements.

The three main programs that support Indigenous festivals are: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council (ATSIB) Celebrations program; Festivals Australia (one-off grants of less than \$10,000); and the Indigenous Culture Support (ICS) program which supports the maintenance and continued development of Indigenous culture at the community level.

There is no coordination of these sources of Commonwealth funding or other levels of government. The Federal department responsible for Indigenous affairs (FaHCSIA) does not have identifiable programs supporting Indigenous community festivals. Government priorities for festivals can be summed up by then Education Minister Gillard in 2008,

The festivals will promote contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, with activities including access to role models, and workshops focusing on literacy, numeracy, confidence building, teamwork, sustainability and tolerance. There will also be information and advice on health and well being, careers and educational opportunities.

The philanthropic sector varies widely in its interests and approach, from a close partnership model with a particular community or organisation to a more generic funding model focused on the arts or Indigenous community development.

Corporate sponsorship can range from small to medium-scale local businesses supplying goods or services for free or at cost or making donations, to very large national or multinational corporations contributing to communities in their region of operations, with an interest in being identified with iconic events.

Most of these events also depend on large numbers of volunteers drawn from the local community and sometimes elsewhere providing a lot of the logistical services from parking to toilet cleaning required to keep an event running.



Gunditjmara dancers at Tararer Festival, Kilarney (near Port Fairy), Victoria, 2011. © Peter Phipps

Conclusion

Indigenous people around the world face daily struggles for survival: in disputes about land-use; resource allocation; language; religious and cultural freedoms and education; health; employment and livelihoods. They are up against multinational mining companies, loggers, ranchers, assimilationist, corrupt or indifferent governments, armies and militias, the pressures of demography and poverty, everyday racism and exclusion; all of which conspire against the sustainability of Indigenous cultures and their communities. Through all these circumstances it is remarkable that many communities continue to offer up rich treasures of cultural wealth as a gift to share with anyone willing to learn.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Indigenous peoples in Australia and across the Asia-Pacific are loudly asserting that they and their distinctive cultures are very much alive. Despite the pressures on them, these communities are using cultural festivals as a space to celebrate, renew and reinvent their cultural traditions.



Gunditjmara dancers, Tararer Festival, 2011. © Peter Phipps



Raphael Susewind
author of
Being Muslim and Working for Peace
Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Gujarat

speaks to Mark Ulyseas

What does it mean to be Muslim and working for peace? And what is this peace? And how is it defined?

What came out most clearly from my research in Gujarat is that there is no single way in which religion and politics relate to each other if one takes individual lives seriously. Muslims work for peace in a variety of ways. Some will draw strength from a strong sense of community and be inspired by religious sources, perhaps even consider peace activism their moral duty. Such "faith-based actors" are perhaps the most well known kind of Muslim activist. Other Muslims, however, do not care much for religious sources or community. As "secular technocrats", they are not necessarily opposed to these dimensions of life, but experience themselves as "religiously unmusical", as Max Weber famously coined it. In a world where many believe that Muslims are religious by default it is important not to forget that this is not true for everybody, perhaps not even for most. Still another kind of Muslim peace activists are the "emancipating women" whom I encountered in Gujarat: victims of the pogrom, who regain their agency through activism in a challenging struggle with the ambivalence of religion. "Doubting professionals", finally, discovered the complexity and ambiguity of religion in conflict after 2002, and began to question their own previous certainties about development as well as about their own identities.

Like there are many ways in which Muslims work for peace, there are also many ideas of what exactly it is that they are fighting for. This begins with the term "peace" itself; alongside the English word, activists in Gujarat spoke of shanti, sukun, aman or nyay: peace can be personal healing and reconciliation, basic absence of violence, or a comprehensive pursuit of social justice. Peace activists not only argue about peace, but also about the best way of reaching it. Some for instance work in conflict, systematically including people from different groups in programs that otherwise don't specifically address the riots (for example in micro-credit schemes where both Muslims and non-Muslims participate). Other activists argue this would not be enough, that one should work directly on conflict (for instance in religious education, or inter-communal celebration of religious festivals). Unfortunately, the various kinds of activists do not always recognize each other, a tension particularly pronounced between expressly Islamic charitable organizations and traditional NGOs."

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Most Muslim victims of the Gujarat riots had nothing to do with the Godhra incident, either – even if one were to see revenge as an acceptable medium of justice, it is hard to see why such “revenge” had to target innocent people. But contemporary Muslims are neither allowed to be individual people, nor to be people for whom being Muslim isn’t all that important. They are not allowed to be innocent, either. While such “groupism” isn’t confined to India – we find it in Germany, too – the ignorance towards individuals even among some of the peace activists I spoke with is very widespread still. I frankly find it very problematic.

In your opinion, are Indian Muslims generally considered ‘aliens’ by the dominant Hindu culture and therefore ‘viewed’ with some degree of suspicion? And has this acted as fuel to ignite areas of disagreement across India, Gujarat being a case in point?

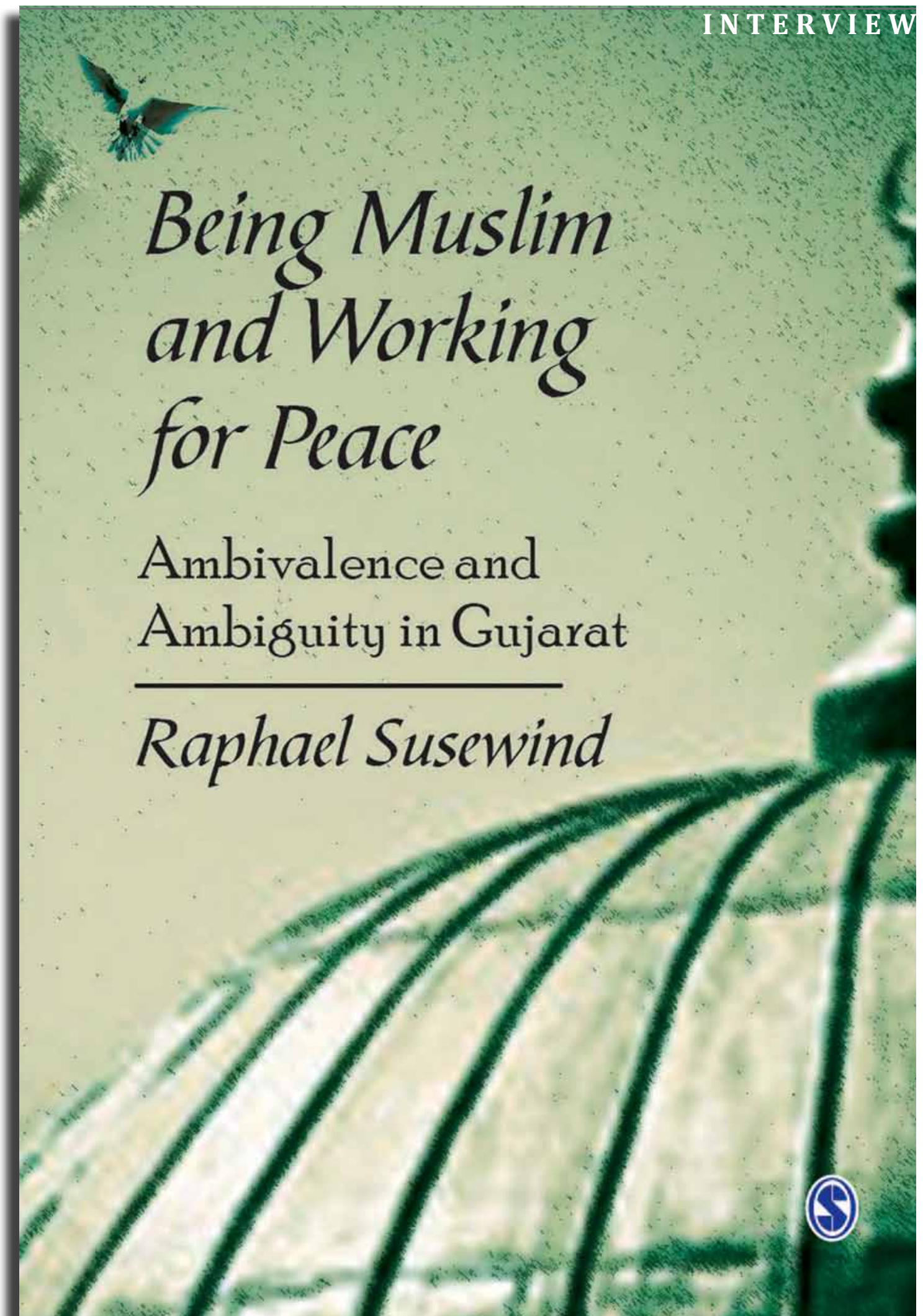
I have done research in India since more than five years now, and came across many Hindu friends who do not consider Muslim Indians ‘alien’ or suspicious. One should not let Hindutva define Hindu culture, as one should not reduce Islam to a narrow set of moral commandments or a specific theological position.

This is not to deny that many people, in India as much as elsewhere, strive hard to clearly classify people and to collapse various contextual ways of being in the world (being Muslim or Hindu, being religious or not, being Indian or German, being nationalistic or cosmopolitan, to name just a few) into narrow sets of acceptable “cultures”. Such intolerance of ambiguity is, however, more a characteristic of modernity than one of religious tradition. Modern people, or more specifically those aspiring to a specific kind of modernity (often those in India’s “rising middle classes”), often find it hard to tolerate differences, particularly if these differences are muddled and ambiguous.

In the case of Muslim Indians being reduced to ‘aliens’ in their own country, however, another, wider tendency is very troublesome – a tendency which the sociologist Rogers Brubaker called “groupism”. Often, Muslim Indians are not only reduced to being Muslims, but also conflated with each other and collectively made responsible for acts that might have nothing to do with them in the first place. Nobody living today is responsible for the partition of the subcontinent, nor for the historic role of Moghul emperors (who often ruled in collusion with Hindu kings, but this is another debate).

Most Muslim victims of the Gujarat riots had nothing to do with the Godhra incident, either – even if one were to see revenge as an acceptable medium of justice, it is hard to see why such “revenge” had to target innocent people. But contemporary Muslims are neither allowed to be individual people, nor to be people for whom being Muslim isn’t all that important. They are not allowed to be innocent, either.

While such “groupism” isn’t confined to India – we find it in Germany, too – the ignorance towards individuals even among some of the peace activists I spoke with is very widespread still. I frankly find it very problematic.



I also believe that it is important to widen the debate beyond a focus on the state, or a focus on Narendra Modi as an individual who might become the next Indian Prime Minister. I do not want to release the state from its responsibility, but think it equally important to unpack the complicity of large sections of Gujarati society which sustains the state's culture of impunity – and enabled the pogrom in the first place.

What do you hope to achieve by writing this book?

I want to shed light on the diversity of Muslim civil society and Muslims in civil society, and through this example to better understand the role of religion in contemporary India. On an academic level, I also wish to contribute to an ongoing debate on the “ambivalence of the sacred”. With this, conflict researchers sum up their insight that religion and religions are not per se violent or per se peaceful – they bear the potential for both. Religion has produced terrorists and peace makers. I think this is an important step beyond perspectives that declare religion either irrelevant (which it is not) or inherently violent (which it is neither). But most scholars still attribute this ambivalence neatly to specific people: terrorists versus peace makers, this-worldly versus other-worldly religion, spiritualism versus political involvement, etc. My research demonstrates that such neat categories overlook how the ambivalence of the sacred is experienced on an individual level. One need not contrast terrorists with peace makers to discover ambivalence; ambivalence is felt by either kind of activist.

Furthermore, I argue that scholars should more carefully distinguish between ambivalence and ambiguity. Ambivalence is a relation of either-or: religion is experienced as either good or bad. Ambiguity in contrast is a relation of neither-nor: religion is experienced as both good and bad, or more precisely: as neither clearly good nor clearly bad. My book explores the implication of this distinction for the personal lives and political projects of Muslim peace activists in Gujarat. I argue that the transformation of ambivalence into ambiguity, in fact the recovery of an ambiguity which has long been celebrated in Islam (and perhaps in India at large), but is increasingly under threat, might be a central requirement of our time.

What is the difference between the Gujarat riots and those in other parts of the country, if any?

The key difference for me was not the involvement of the state, as many argue – but more specifically the fact that the state never made even a shallow attempt to acknowledge this involvement, acknowledge wrongdoing on the part of politicians, police, and the judicial system. While I do believe that the non-apologetic involvement of the state sets the Gujarat riots apart, however, I also believe that it is important to widen the debate beyond a focus on the state, or a focus on Narendra Modi as an individual who might become the next Indian Prime Minister. I do not want to release the state from its responsibility, but think it equally important to unpack the complicity of large sections of Gujarati society which sustains the state's culture of impunity – and enabled the pogrom in the first place. It is too easy to blame it all on politics, or the politicians, avoiding to ask more uncomfortable questions: what is the relationship between aspirations to a specific kind of neoliberal development and hatred for ‘alien’ Muslims?

For the “secular technocrats” I encountered, for instance, secularism as an ideology isn't very important. They live by what I call a “secularized secularism”, a secularism devoid of quasi-religious zeal, a relaxed everyday practice. This need not be the only way in which one can live a secular life, but it shows that secularism has made deep inroads into Indian society despite heated ideological debate, and can even be found in such unexpected circles as among Muslim peace activists.

Communalism is a byword in India and in a way defines the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Why does this conflict arise? Does it have its roots in history from the time of the first Muslim invasions? Or, is it a potent mix of religious fundamentalism, political septicaemia, matters to do with land or commerce?

I think decades of research have clearly demonstrated that communalism is a fairly modern phenomenon. This is not to deny earlier conflicts between different sections of society – but the idea that Muslims and Hindus constitute two mutually exclusive groups, that each Indian (and not just the rulers or religious elite) have to belong to one of these groups, and that they are naturally opposed is a fairly new thought.

Such emphasis on the modern character of communalism should, however, not be confused with instrumental explanations. While politics, land, etc all play a role in explaining communal riots (as foremost the research of Paul Brass has shown), it is wrong to release religion of the hook too easily: as I argued earlier, and more comprehensively in my book, religion is an ambivalent force – and it is an independent factor, which cannot be fully reduced to an instrumental front for political ends. But importantly it is modern religion that struggles to come to grips with ambivalence, including with its own ambivalence.

Does true secularism exist in India or is it a catch phrase for votes?

Can't it be both? I think with such “catch phrases”, it is always instructive to look at lived realities, which by default are more diverse, complex, and ambiguous than ideology suggests. Clearly, secularism as an ideology is a potent rhetoric tool in the political arena, both for those promoting it and for those opposing it (or propagating different versions thereof).

But my research in Gujarat – particularly the experience of those activists whom I called “secular technocrats” – is instructive to see how secularism is experienced in everyday lives. Unfortunately, scholars only now start to examine lived secularism with the same earnesty that they examine lived religion.

For the “secular technocrats” I encountered, for instance, secularism as an ideology isn't very important. They live by what I call a “secularized secularism”, a secularism devoid of quasi-religious zeal, a relaxed everyday practice. This need not be the only way in which one can live a secular life, but it shows that secularism has made deep inroads into Indian society despite heated ideological debate, and can even be found in such unexpected circles as among Muslim peace activists.

While my book unpacked four various ways of “being Muslim and working for peace” – those which I encountered in Gujarat – one should not forget that most terrorists, too, claim to work for peace. Once you start to think about it: people who claim they do not want to live in peace are very rare indeed. But once one begins to look into the specifics, into what people actually mean when they say “peace”, into how peace comes to life, reality becomes more complex, more ambivalent, and more ambiguous.

Violence does erupt between Shia and Sunni in India. How can a Muslim peace maker work effectively without identifying oneself as either Shia or Sunni? Or for that matter violence between two different castes – how does a Muslim working for peace operate?

I can only reiterate what I said earlier: there are many ways. In 2011-12, I lived in Lucknow for my next project – a city well-known for sectarian tension. In fact, my own neighbourhood witnessed a particularly violent episode when family members of the local (Sunni) corporator opened fire on a (Shia) religious assembly in January this year. Some people argue that it is important to emphasize one’s Muslim identity over one’s being Shia or Sunni in order to mediate in such situations.

Other activist claim the opposite, and argue that it is precisely their sectarian identity which makes them oppose sectarianism; many Shia in Lucknow for instance use the emphasis that their tradition places on solidarity with all human suffering to work for better Shia-Sunni relations. And others still argue that one should not stress religion too much in the first place, let alone sectarian identity – and highlight, for instance, that both the corporator mentioned earlier and his victim have been locked into a business rivalry for years. On what ground are we treating this incident as an instance of sectarian rather than, say, economic conflict? Again, it is perhaps both – only that we unlearned how to accept that, sometimes, neither one explanation nor the other are sufficient in themselves.

This complexity of social life also automatically means that there are multiple ways in which one should deal with conflict – and I think my work both in Gujarat and in Lucknow demonstrates this complexity fairly well.

Did you have any encounter with people in Gujarat which reflects the truth – that people wherever they maybe want to live in peace?

Obviously – but the question is what people mean by that word, and how they want to achieve it. While my book unpacked four various ways of “being Muslim and working for peace” – those which I encountered in Gujarat – one should not forget that most terrorists, too, claim to work for peace. Once you start to think about it: people who claim they do not want to live in peace are very rare indeed. But once one begins to look into the specifics, into what people actually mean when they say “peace”, into how peace comes to life, reality becomes more complex, more ambivalent, and more ambiguous.

I am a practicing, liberal, islamophile Catholic Christian, a happily married husband, a young aspiring scholar in the multidisciplinary social sciences, someone privileged to be born in the richer part of our world. I try to not reconcile the ambivalences between and within these conflicting identities while navigating my life – but to embrace their ambiguity.

Could you give us a glimpse of your own life and works? What are you working on now?

I was born and raised in Germany, and later studied in Germany, India and the UK. I am a practicing, liberal, islamophile Catholic Christian, a happily married husband, a young aspiring scholar in the multidisciplinary social sciences, someone privileged to be born in the richer part of our world. I try to not reconcile the ambivalences between and within these conflicting identities while navigating my life – but to embrace their ambiguity. I also try to ensure that this appreciation of ambiguity does not prevent me from taking a stance when it matters: to highlight injustice, to broaden freedom, to encourage deeper enquiry.

As an academic, I am intrigued by the resilience of the individual in groupist contexts, and by India in particular, where East and West met for centuries, and where both the problems as well as chances of living with diversity are very apparent. After my book on Gujarat, I am now more broadly interested in what it means to be Muslim and belong as Muslim in contemporary North India; as mentioned earlier, I currently explore this theme with a case study of Lucknow. I am especially curious to see in which various ways different Muslims with their respective personal biographies navigate, combine and ignore normative discourses on Muslimness. This project also included quite a bit of mapping, which has been fun – generally much of my academic work is multi-disciplinary and employs whatever method appears best suited for the task at hand. A few months ago, for instance, I became the first anthropologist who was granted access to the Oxford Supercomputing Centre – for an analysis of Muslim politics in the last elections in Uttar Pradesh...

More on this and on my different academic projects – as well as a more detailed introduction to the book and an interactive way to explore the typology of “being Muslim and working for peace” in contemporary Gujarat – can be found on my [Website](#) and . If you are interested to engage with my work, or just read what I am up to, you can also follow me on [Twitter](#) – and if you do find time to read my book, I am curious to hear what you have to say..



We Are All Aboard the Pequod

This article was first published on [Truthdig](https://www.truthdig.com/)

Our country (USA) is given shape in the form of the ship, the Pequod, named after the Indian tribe exterminated in 1638 by the Puritans and their Native American allies.

The most prescient portrait of the American character and our ultimate fate as a species is found in Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." Melville makes our murderous obsessions, our hubris, violent impulses, moral weakness and inevitable self-destruction visible in his chronicle of a whaling voyage. He is our foremost oracle. He is to us what William Shakespeare was to Elizabethan England or Fyodor Dostoyevsky to czarist Russia.

Our country is given shape in the form of the ship, the Pequod, named after the **Indian tribe exterminated** in 1638 by the Puritans and their Native American allies. The ship's 30-man crew—there were 30 states in the Union when Melville wrote the novel—is a mixture of races and creeds. The object of the hunt is a massive white whale, Moby Dick, which, in a previous encounter, maimed the ship's captain, Ahab, by biting off one of his legs. The self-destructive fury of the quest, much like that of the one we are on, assures the Pequod's destruction. And those on the ship, on some level, know they are doomed—just as many of us know that a consumer culture based on corporate profit, limitless exploitation and the continued extraction of fossil fuels is doomed.

"If I had been downright honest with myself," Ishmael admits, "I would have seen very plainly in my heart that I did but half fancy being committed this way to so long a voyage, without once laying my eyes on the man who was to be the absolute dictator of it, so soon as the ship sailed out upon the open sea. But when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up his suspicions even from himself. And much this way it was with me. I said nothing, and tried to think nothing."

We, like Ahab and his crew, rationalize madness. All calls for prudence, for halting the march toward environmental catastrophe, for sane limits on carbon emissions, are ignored or ridiculed. Even with the flashing red lights before us, the increased droughts, rapid melting of glaciers and Arctic ice, monster tornadoes, vast hurricanes, crop failures, floods, raging wildfires and soaring temperatures, we bow slavishly before hedonism and greed and the enticing illusion of limitless power, intelligence and prowess. We believe in the eternal wellspring of material progress. We are our own idols. Nothing will halt our voyage; it seems to us to have been decreed by natural law. "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run," Ahab declares. We have surrendered our lives to corporate forces that ultimately serve systems of death. Microbes will inherit the earth.

In our decline, hatred becomes our primary lust, our highest form of patriotism and a form of eroticism. We are made supine by hatred and fear. We deploy vast resources to hunt down jihadists and terrorists, real and phantom. We destroy our civil society in the name of a war on terror. We persecute those, from Julian Assange to Bradley Manning to Edward Snowden, who expose the dark machinations

After the attacks of 9/11, Edward Said saw the parallel with "Moby Dick" and wrote in the London newspaper The Observer: Osama bin Laden's name and face have become so numbingly familiar to Americans as in effect to obliterate any history he and his shadowy followers might have had before they became stock symbols of everything loathsome and hateful to the collective imagination. Inevitably, then, collective passions are being funneled into a drive for war that uncannily resembles Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick, rather than what is going on, an imperial power injured for the first time, pursuing its interests systematically in what has become a suddenly reconfigured geography of conflict.

of power. We believe, because we have externalized evil, that we can purify the earth. We are blind to the evil within us. Melville's description of Ahab is a description of the bankers, corporate boards, politicians, television personalities and generals who through the power of propaganda fill our heads with seductive images of glory and lust for wealth and power. We are consumed with self-induced obsessions that spur us toward self-annihilation.

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Ahab, as the historian Richard Slotkin points out in his book "Regeneration Through Violence," is "the true American hero, worthy to be captain of a ship whose 'wood could only be American.'" Melville offers us a vision, one that D.H. Lawrence later understood, of the inevitable fatality of white civilization brought about by our ceaseless lust for material progress, imperial expansion, white supremacy and exploitation of nature.

Melville, who had been a sailor on clipper ships and whalers, was keenly aware that the wealth of industrialized societies came from the exploited of the earth. "Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans," Ishmael says of New England's prosperity. "One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea." All the authority figures on the ship are white men—Ahab, Starbuck, Flask and Stubb. The hard, dirty work, from harpooning to gutting the carcasses of the whales, is the task of the poor, mostly men of color.

Ahab, when he first appears on the quarterdeck after being in his cabin for the first few days of the voyage, holds up a doubloon, an extravagant gold coin, and promises it to the crew member who first spots the white whale. He knows that "the permanent constitutional condition of the manufactured man ... is sordidness." And he plays to this sordidness. The whale becomes a commodity, a source of personal profit. A murderous greed, one that Starbuck denounces as "blasphemous," grips the crew. Ahab's obsession infects the ship.

Ahab's secret, private whale boat crew, which has a feral lust for blood, keeps the rest of the ship in abject submission. The art of propaganda and the use of brutal coercion, the mark of tyranny, define our lives just as they mark those on Melville's ship. C.L.R. James, for this reason, describes "Moby Dick" as "the biography of the last days of Adolf Hitler."

"I see in him [Moby Dick] outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it," Ahab tells Starbuck. "That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."

Ahab conducts a dark Mass, a Eucharist of violence and blood, on the deck with the crew. He orders the men to circle around him. He makes them drink from a flagon that is passed from man to man, filled with draughts "hot as Satan's hoof." Ahab tells the harpooners to cross their lances before him. The captain grasps the harpoons and anoints the ships' harpooners—Queequeg, Tashtego and Daggoo—his "three pagan kinsmen." He orders them to detach the iron sections of their harpoons and fills the sockets "with the fiery waters from the pewter." "Drink, ye harpooners! Drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow—Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" And with the crew bonded to him in his infernal quest he knows that Starbuck is helpless "amid the general hurricane." "Starbuck now is mine," Ahab says, "cannot oppose me now, without rebellion." "The honest eye of Starbuck," Melville writes, "fell downright."

The ship, described by Melville as a hearse, was painted black. It was adorned with gruesome trophies of the hunt, festooned with the huge teeth and bones of sperm whales. It was, Melville writes, a "cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies." The fires used to melt the whale blubber at night turned the Pequod into a "red hell." Our own raging fires, leaping up from our oil refineries and the explosions of our ordinance across the Middle East, bespeak our Stygian heart. And in our mad pursuit we ignore the suffering of others, just as Ahab does when he refuses to help the captain of a passing ship who is frantically searching for his son who has fallen overboard.

Ahab is described by Melville's biographer Andrew Delbanco as "a suicidal charismatic who denounced as a blasphemer anyone who would deflect him from his purpose—an invention that shows no sign of becoming obsolete anytime soon." Ahab has not only the heated rhetoric of persuasion; he is master of a terrifying internal security force on the ship, the five "dusky phantoms that seemed fresh formed out of air." Ahab's secret, private whale boat crew, which has a feral lust for blood, keeps the rest of the ship in abject submission. The art of propaganda and the use of brutal coercion, the mark of tyranny, define our lives just as they mark those on Melville's ship. **C.L.R. James**, for this reason, describes "Moby Dick" as "the biography of the last days of Adolf Hitler."

And yet Ahab is no simple tyrant. Melville toward the end of the novel gives us two glimpses into the internal battle between Ahab's maniacal hubris and his humanity. Ahab, too, has a yearning for love. He harbors regrets over his deformed life. The black cabin boy Pip is the only crew member who

And so we plunge forward in our doomed quest to master the forces that will finally smite us. Those who see where we are going lack the fortitude to rebel. Mutiny was the only salvation for the Pequod's crew. It is our only salvation. But moral cowardice turns us into hostages.

evokes any tenderness in the captain. Ahab is aware of this tenderness. He fears its power. Pip functions as the Fool did in Shakespeare's "King Lear." Ahab warns Pip of Ahab. "Lad, lad," says Ahab, "I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health. ... If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be." A few pages later, "untottering Ahab stood forth in the clearness of the morn; lifting his splintered helmet of a brow to the fair girl's forehead of heaven. ... From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop." Starbuck approaches him. Ahab, for the only time in the book, is vulnerable. He speaks to Starbuck of his "forty years on the pitiless sea! ... the desolation of solitude it has been. ... Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? How the richer or better is Ahab now?" He thinks of his young wife—"I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck"—and of his little boy: "About this time—yes, it is his noon nap now—the boy vivaciously wakes; sits up in bed; and his mother tells him of me, of cannibal old me; how I am abroad upon the deep, but will yet come back to dance him again."

Ahab's thirst for dominance, vengeance and destruction, however, overpowers these faint regrets of lost love and thwarted compassion. Hatred wins. "What is it," Ahab finally asks, "what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time. ..."

Melville knew that physical courage and moral courage are distinct. One can be brave on a whaling ship or a battlefield, yet a coward when called on to stand up to human evil. Starbuck elucidates this peculiar division. The first mate is tormented by his complicity in what he foresees as Ahab's "impious end." Starbuck, "while generally abiding firm in the conflict with seas, or winds, or whales, or any of the ordinary irrational horrors of the world, yet cannot withstand those more terrific, because spiritual terrors, which sometimes menace you from the concentrating brow of an enraged and mighty man." And so we plunge forward in our doomed quest to master the forces that will finally smite us. Those who see where we are going lack the fortitude to rebel. Mutiny was the only salvation for the Pequod's crew. It is our only salvation. But moral cowardice turns us into hostages.

Moby Dick rams and sinks the Pequod. The waves swallow up Ahab and all who followed him, except one. A vortex formed by the ship's descent collapses, "and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago."



Israel's Stumbling Block Before The Blind

Our crowd is now of an age when body parts drop off at a rate of knots.

Coping with illness can be especially difficult for older Karmielis as the city has no full-scale hospital and travelling out of town for treatment can be arduous for the many pensioners who have disposed of their vehicles due to atrociously high petrol and maintenance costs.

Further, as Israel is such a small country, the number of senior surgeons is limited, resulting in a dearth of skilled individuals in various fields. Some complex heart or eye surgery, for example, may be accomplished by only one expert based, most often, at a hospital in Tel Aviv.

In very rough terms, this may enforce a Karmieli patient to take a round trip of almost 132 miles to T.A., while similar visits to nearer hospitals in Nahariya, Tzfat or Haifa would be about 35 miles or 50 miles respectively.

So imagine the distress of someone who has bussed to Haifa at an ungodly hour only to discover his appointment has been cancelled; or the anger of another individual when she learns too late that her consultation has been rescheduled, as staff claim that they did not have her contact details.

It is not surprising, therefore, that we're all a mite cynical and that expat-Brits like me say that despite Israel's much-lauded bio-medical and scientific advances, grassroots patient care is on a par with the U.K.'s troubled National Health Service.

Indeed when someone quipped that I was becoming a 'professional' patient, I decided to take instant 'retirement'! I don't want to spend my time in Israel hanging about in waiting rooms for the length of a working day – precious hours in which I'd be better employed writing and researching.

Much more seriously, barely months after I arrived here, two of my new friends died quite suddenly in hospital. I am sure even now that they would both have had a much better chance of survival if they had not been forced to travel out of town for treatment and that, in one particular instance, post-operative care could have been markedly improved.

It's considered unprofessional to personalise these issues, but here I will ignore convention. I suffer a



very high myopia and am convinced that 'computer vision syndrome' – an umbrella term for a wide range of problems - has exacerbated several related conditions.

Ideally, I would have written this piece in long-hand before typing a fair copy for publication. But it's not that easy. I need the Web for research, so it's easier to remain seated at the screen for everything – and simply use the '20/20' technique – twenty second breaks every twenty minutes.

Heavy computer use was linked with [glaucoma](#) among people with a high myopia almost ten years ago. Now I challenge ophthalmologists to examine a possible link between 'CVS' and conditions including macular degeneration and the development of '[epiretinal membranes](#)' ('macular pucker').

I understand that juvenile macular degeneration has a genetic cause while my own condition is most probably age-related. Further, although I have never smoked, both my parents were heavy smokers and I spent much of my working life in smoky offices, before the current laws were enforced. This almost certainly contributed to my present problems.

But it also seems too much of a coincidence that matters became worse when I stopped using an old-fashioned typewriter and then a word processor in favour of a computer. Furthermore, in the past two years I have been diagnosed with epiretinal membranes. These seem to have 'shed' occasionally when I have not used a computer for some days and have instead read an ordinary print book without using my spectacles.

I have refused surgery to remove the membranes because the present technique appears to be a hazardous business with a fairly high risk of infection and even a detached retina. I am not prepared to take the challenge!

Instead, I will conclude with a story about a surgeon I met recently in Haifa who, I believe, enjoys sparring with his patients.

"You don't want surgery?" he said. "Well, we could always talk about the weather."



Prayer and Meditation

In this series on self-healing and transformation, prayer and meditation play an important part. Given these writings are from the book *12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine*, this Live Encounters article will not be a overview of world wide prayer and meditation practices, but rather some of my own experiences and some tools for developing a practice.

When you have experienced pain or illness for a long period, I would imagine you turned to prayer. In exploring how important prayer is, let's examine and revisit the way in which you pray.

Prayer

A verse in the Christian New Testament Bible assures that, "You will receive all that you pray for, provided you have faith" (Matthew 21:22). The way your parents and grandparents prayed may be different from how you pray today. Dr. Larry Dossey writes extensively about the power of prayer and healing in his 1993 book, *Healing Words*. In it, he cites a study by Herbert Benson of Harvard University Medical School.

Working with his fellow researcher and physiologist, Robert Keith Wallace, Benson showed that when subjects meditated with a mantra that consisted of an Asian word containing no meaning for the meditator, with use it became charged with ritualistic value, and healthful body changes occurred. These included lower blood pressure, slower heart rate, and lower metabolic rates. Benson believed there was no magic in the mantra.

To test this suspicion, he taught people to meditate using the word one or any other phrase they found comfortable. He then studied Christians and Jews who prayed regularly. He asked Catholics to use mantra phrases such as "Hail Mary, full of grace," or "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me." Jews mainly used either the peace greeting of *shalom* or *echad*, which means "one." Protestants frequently chose the first line of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," or "The Lord is my shepherd," which is the opening of the Twenty-third Psalm. All of the mantras worked, and all were equally effective in stimulating the healthful physiological changes in the body that Benson called the "relaxation response." But Benson also found that those who used the word one, or similar simple phrases, didn't stick with the program. Conversely, those who used prayers rather than meaningless phrases continued.



Prayer *(contd...)*

One way to pray is to be repetitive and this study shows using a word or words that are meaningful to you, affect your consistency. If you have ever used prayer beads or the rosary, you know this. Recital is another form of prayer. Many people use scripture from their religion as prayer. They may do this repetitively, or they may read scripture and then reflect on what it means. Others talk to God, Buddha, Allah, or their Higher Power as they would to a friend. I have often heard it said that prayer is talking to God, and meditation is listening.

Journaling is another way to connect with the Divine. “Dear God” letters are often effective in clarifying where you have become stuck. Having a heart full of gratitude is another way of praying. When you expand your view of prayer this way, you may find that you pray often through the day. I am a believer in the notion that whatever we focus on becomes greater and grander in our lives, so take some time to focus on gratitude and love. See how this affects your pain.

Meditation

Before I share with you about meditation, I want to acknowledge that you may experience resistance to meditation at first. You may be fearful to sit and really experience what you are thinking or feeling, or you may not want to become aware of the sensations in your body. Even this morning as I awoke, I quickly shifted my thoughts from meditation to something else. Why did I do that? Why was I so afraid to listen to what my mind was saying? Usually I awake with new ideas and plans and creative ventures. This morning I didn’t want to hear what I was thinking. I went back to catch the thought, and it was gone. When I sat up to read on my Kindle, I felt good. I looked at the calendar in my iPhone, and my day was set to write. It was a good day. What was I afraid to think about? I am sure it will surface in my meditation.

You may have this same experience. You may think there is just too much information in your mind, and you would never be able to quiet yourself, but it’s really not so difficult. Take a moment and just sit with your eyes open. Look at what is in front of you. Look at whatever you see and focus on the detail. Experience your senses. Feel the chair under you. Notice how your breath changes. You are becoming more aware, more awake, more alive, and you are beginning to come to a meditative state. Another way to do this is to close your eyes and listen. Listen to the sounds that are far away. Now listen to the sounds that are close by. Allow yourself to become more aware and more meditative!

Here are a few choices to begin a meditation practice.

Concentration Meditation

When practicing concentration meditation, you focus your attention on your breath, an image, or a sound (mantra) in order to still your mind and allow a greater awareness and clarity to emerge. This is similar to zooming in and narrowing the focus to a particular object or field.



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Breathing Meditation

The most common meditation practice is focusing on your breath. Through this continued focus, the “mind clutter” begins to quiet, and you gain a sense of calmness and relaxation. Over time and with practice, the thoughts that were once racing or popping into your mind calm down, and a sense of peace takes over. As you focus on the breath, the rhythmic inhalation and exhalation deepens the breathing, and your mind and body become tranquil.

A more intense practice of focusing on the breath is pranayama breathing, which is a yogic practice. According to Swami Sivananda Rhada, this is a process of breath control. She says the purpose of this type of meditation is to connect with the cosmos and gain control over your central nervous system and mind. It is best practiced with character building and to learn to manage the lower physical self. This is a practice of alternate nostril breathing. “Character building” and “managing your lower physical self” means taking control over your thoughts and behaviors that no longer serve you, while creating new, positive, healthy thoughts and behaviors.

I first became aware of pranayama breathing when I traveled to India with a friend of mine who has a home in India but currently lives in the United States. He said that his uncle taught him this practice. When we were at his home in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), he sat cross-legged on the floor every morning and practiced this breathing for twenty to thirty minutes. This practice increases the alpha waves, and the benefits if executed correctly are to calm the mind, gain control over the emotions, refine the senses, and remove all selfish desires while gaining a sense of peace and harmony. It has also been said to balance the right and left brain.

Various teachers may instruct you to do this differently, but a simple method follows:

1. Close the right nostril with your right thumb, and inhale through the left nostril to the count of four seconds.
2. Then close the left nostril with your right ring finger and little finger. At the same time, remove your thumb from the right nostril. Exhale through this nostril to the count of eight seconds.
3. Next, inhale through the right nostril to the count of four seconds. Close your right nostril with your right thumb, and exhale through the left nostril to the count of eight seconds.
4. This is one round. It is recommended to start slowly with a few rounds and build up.



Focusing on an Object

Focusing on an object is another choice for concentration meditation. There are several objects you can use, but I suggest you find one that is pleasing to you. You could focus on an external object such as a candle flame, a bowl, a flower, or a photo of someone you love. You could also choose a photo of Jesus, Buddha, or an angel. Another method is to focus in the center of your head—the space above and behind your eyes, in the middle of your head. This is a place of neutrality. You may instead choose to focus either between your eyes or in the center of your heart. Another commonplace to practice focus is in your belly, three fingers below your belly button and inside a few inches. The conscious focus in the above examples is on the candle, photo, or particular body part. However, in focusing on those literal objects, you become aware of the breathing as well, and you experience a calm, relaxed, tranquil state of being.

Using a Mantra

A third concentration meditation involves using a mantra. A mantra is a short phrase with an easy rhythm used to increase results. A mantra is used to suggest a favorable state of being. My favorite walking mantra is, “I am strong, healthy, and fit.” Mantras originated in the Vedic tradition of enlightenment in India and have since been incorporated by many traditions.

According to “The Power of Mantra Chanting,” an article by Gyan Rajhans, “The sacred utterances or chanting of Sanskrit Mantras provide us with the power to attain our goals and lift ourselves from the ordinary to the higher level of consciousness.” This is believed to be so because “different sounds have different effects on the human psyche.” Repeating a mantra is a spiritual technique that calms the mind and makes one more attuned to Spirit.

Mindfulness Meditation

The practice of mindfulness meditation comes from Buddhism and has been also been taught by many in the West. In mindfulness meditation, you focus on the present moment and not the past or the future. While you notice your thoughts, you realize that they are just thoughts and let them go by. This is done with awareness that your thoughts are simply your thoughts, and that you are not your thoughts. This meditation can be done at any time. It is a daily practice of awareness in the present moment.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness meditation. One that I particularly enjoy is to focus on the sounds close by and then the sounds that are far away. This takes me into a state of meditation that I enjoy, which is just being present.



Guided Meditation

Guided meditation is similar to hypnotherapy. In guided meditation, a person or a recorded script guides you into a meditative state. You can also take yourself through guided imagery with a script or with awareness of the images you would like to create.

As with hypnotherapy, guided imagery uses all of your senses, yet guided imagery is different in that it focuses and directs your imagination. When your mind is imagining, your body responds as if what it sees is true. An example of this might include imagining a vacation. Let’s pick a beach resort. As you are sitting at your desk at work, you find yourself drifting to the beach, feeling the sun on your face, smelling the sea, and imaging the taste of a fresh, cold lemonade next to you. Your body may relax as your breathing slows down and time speeds up. This is an example of going into trance and experiencing whatever you imagine.

Guided imagery is used for many purposes, and the imagery selected will depend on your goal. For instance, if you want to manage your pain, the imagery may be full of metaphors that help you to connect with your subconscious mind. For example, when I awake in the morning with pain in my neck from sleeping, during meditation I image a blue light coming down from the top of my head into the painful areas of my neck and shoulders. As I do this, I see the blue light cooling off the inflammation in my neck and shoulders. Within a minute or so, the pain is gone. (Remember that I have been practicing for quite some time, and this technique is a result of the practice. Do not be discouraged if you try this and it does not work for you immediately. Keep practicing!)

If you are interested in learning a guided meditation that teaches you self-healing tools and takes you through a process of clearing your chakras, you can use my CD, [Chakra Clearing](#). (Mark please link)

Make no mistake, whether prayer or meditation, the process stills the chatter and voices within so you can hear your own inner guidance—the voice of the Divine, God, the Goddess or your Guides. Prayer and meditation allow you to open yourself to wisdom and healing beyond what your Ego dictates or allows. No matter what you call it, when you achieve inner peace, you affect the world around you by increasing the peace of others.

You can find more information about the book [12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine](#)

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