

Religious Symbols

The following symbols are some of the most common symbols found in Hinduism.

Aum/Om

Hindus consider *Aum* (or *Om*) to be the sound of creation and the universe. It is composed of three syllables: ah, oo, and mmm.

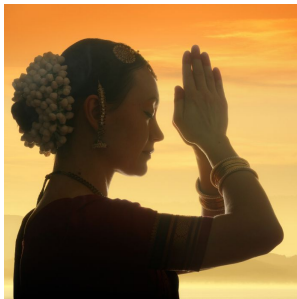
The Mandukya Upanishad, an ancient Hindu scripture, is entirely devoted to *Om*. It begins like this:

Om is the imperishable word
Om is the universe, and this is the exposition of Om
The past, the present, and the future, all that was, all that is, all
that will be is Om
Likewise, all else that may exist beyond the bounds of time, that too is Om



Hindus believe that the very vibrations created by the chanting of *Om* are sacred and powerful. They believe that the vibrations of *Om* help the person chanting to align their mind, body, and spirit with the vibration of the universe.

Namaste



Hindus traditionally greet each other by bringing their palms together in the middle of their chest and saying *namaste*. The word *namaste* means “the divine within me bows to the divine within you.” The greeting reflects the respect that Hindus have for the divinity all around them. [This short video](#) depicts this thought.

Bindi/Tilak

The "red dot" or *bindi*, once primarily a symbol of marriage, has largely become a fashionable accessory for Hindu females of all ages, regardless of their marital status. Traditionally, *bindis* were red or maroon in color and made of vermilion paste (*kumkum*). Today, *bindis* come in all shapes, sizes, and colors.

The male version of forehead markings is called a *tilak* and can be made of *kumkum*, sandalwood, or sacred ash in a variety of shapes



including lines, U-shapes, and dots. The *tilak* can be representative of an individual's deity tradition. The marking of either is amongst the first requisite steps in most rituals and sacred ceremonies.

Both *bindis* and *tilaks* are placed approximately one centimeter above the center of the eyebrows, which is considered to be the sixth chakra, *ajna*, in *Kundalini Yoga*. The *bindi* is associated with the worship of God as the feminine divine. It is also indicative of the conceptual "third eye of spiritual wisdom," that Shiva is depicted as having. *Bindis* and *tilaks* may also represent interdependence of both the feminine and masculine aspects of the divine. Lastly, the *bindi* and *tilak* serve as reminders of a seeker's ultimate goal of enlightenment, liberation, or *moksha*.

Swastika



Contrary to the hateful meaning the *Swastika* has come to take on for many since its misappropriation by the Nazis, the original *Swastika* (as pictured above) is an ancient and holy for many cultures. For Hindus, the swastika is a symbol of auspiciousness and good fortune. It is still commonly used at the entrance of Hindu homes, as an integral part of worship rituals, in temples, and on invitations to special occasions such as weddings and other rites of passage.

In Sanskrit, the word is a combination of "Su," meaning "good," and "Asti," meaning "to exist." The four limbs of the Hindu *Swastika* have diverse symbolic meanings: the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva), the four stages of life (*Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha*, *Sannyasa*), the four goals of life (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha*), the four *Yugas* (*Satya*, *Treta*, *Dvapara*, *Kali*), the four seasons, and the four directions. The *Swastika* is also a sacred symbol for Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.

Key Takeaways

- Om is a Hindu symbol with many meanings and represents the sound of the universe.
- Hindus greet each other with the greeting "Namaste" which stems from the belief in divinity existing within everyone and everything.
- Hindus don bindis or tilaks to remind themselves of the ultimate goal of liberation.
- The Hindu Swastika is a symbol of good fortune.