

*My Symbol*  
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I want to create a symbol for myself, something that represents my physical and mental qualities. In doing so I will create a personal link to my art and my research of symbols. With this process I will be forced to ask questions like “Who am I?” or “What am I?” Asking, and attempting to answer, these questions, will transform the symbol and the process of creating it into a method of solidifying and portraying my identity.

Humans use symbols as a way to give meaning to things, be it an idea or a tangible object. For example, eyes have several meanings: enlightenment, vigilance, and wisdom. Symbols give ideas that do not have a concrete form, like wisdom, love, or anger, something that they can be physically recognized with. This creates a connection between the tangible and the intangible; so when someone sees an eye, they think of wisdom, or vice versa. The connection between the eye’s ability to observe and recognize vast amounts of information is translated into the meanings that it is given when used as a symbol.

Symbols themselves are something that only humans could create because something only has meaning when it is given meaning. This is easy for humans due to our very simple, but elegant, skill of creating something out of nothing; in other words, giving meaning to something that has no meaning. Something we have acquired from thousands of years of evolution maybe just by chance or because of fear, either way it has caused the growth of our species exponentially. Any thing has the possibility to become a symbol or be symbolized. It happens when any kind of parallel is drawn between two things.

Let me give you an example. I am wearing sandals. I put my sandals on because they are easy to put on and are comfortable. With that simple observation, I can now recognize that my sandals are comfortable and I can relax when putting them on and wearing them. By doing so, the sandals become my symbol for relaxation. Now when I think of relaxing I will think of wearing sandals, and when I think of sandals I can think of relaxing.

Humans have an innate fear of the unknown. If something is unknown it has the possibility to be either helpful or harmful. It is a reflex that is ingrained into our very DNA to shy away from something painful or harmful. When a person touches a hot pan, their hand jumps back from the pan. Avoiding pain is an uncontrollable reflex that is part of every human’s subconscious desire for self-preservation. These reflexes are born from experience, so if someone has a bad experience, their body takes that and learns from it. If a similar situation occurs, their body already knows that certain choices lead to an undesirable experience. It is the possibility that something could be harmful that causes humans to fear what we do not understand. By giving something meaning it makes that thing easier to understand and if you can understand it you can know it, thus not fearing it. Maybe this is why we have evolved this skill of making something from nothing. With that, humans can overcome their fear of the unknown by giving meaning to the things that surround them. Thus, it would seem that this skill is actually a defense mechanism we have built up to rid ourselves of our fears. This is what causes humans constant thirst for knowledge. We wish to know everything so that we will fear nothing.

The greatest historical advancements in symbols were when languages and alphabets were created. An alphabet is comprised of symbols that are connected to sounds. When someone sees *A* it is recognized as the symbol for the sound “ah”, but it isn’t named “ah” it is simply just *A*. With the collection of these symbols a person has a whole arsenal of symbols that combine, arrange, and rearrange to create an almost infinite amount of new symbols with an infinite array of new meanings. Even the practice of combining these symbols has a representation, commonly known as words.

Words are symbols that have an enormous amount of meaning. They have their primary definition but are still vastly open to interpretation. The word “lion” represents the species of animals known by the same name. It also is a symbol for strength, pride, and courage. The meaning changes based on the context the word is used in. The phrase, “That man is a lion,” does not mean that the man is actually a lion, but instead suggests, that he is courageous like a lion. Words, just like the alphabet, can be combined, arranged, and rearranged to create new symbols with new meanings. When all of these words are grouped together a language is created.

Language is the amalgamation and technique of arranging words together. Humans used language to create stories. Stories allowed for the exchange of knowledge between people and the generations of people to come. With the creation of stories came the creation of mythology. Mythology allowed an interesting way to create commonly understood reasons for phenomenon that were beyond human understanding at the time. Mythology allowed that one thing that may have been unknown and feared by past generations become understood by newer generations.

By using language, creating new and intricate symbols has never been easier. Look at the modern day, transportation systems. Traffic lights with their simple red, yellow, and green lights are something that is recognizable when driving in any country worldwide. The same goes for the octagonal red stop sign or the “no smoking” signs in airplanes. The whole of the modern world’s transportation systems are based on symbols with the use of color, shape, text, and figures. Symbols appear everywhere throughout the modern world, some more subtle than others but still there.

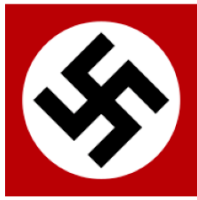
Advertising is a battleground of symbols. Companies are constantly pumping out new logos and brands that are fighting for our attention so that theirs is the product we pick up off the shelves. McDonalds has the big yellow M, also known as the “Golden Arches”. When someone sees those yellow arches, they know what it leads to: cheap, standardized food for the whole family. It is amazing that, in a way, McDonald’s owns the letter M. If they were able to simplify their logo even further to a simple yellow dot, McDonald’s would essentially own the color yellow. By doing so, whenever some one saw the color yellow, they would think of McDonald’s.

It is almost terrifying how powerful symbols can be. The power of the meaning is the beauty of the symbols because symbols are so strong and effective on the human brain. Mostly because of how easy it is for humans to relate to symbols. Surely if humans can give meaning to such simple things such as symbols then human lives must also have a meaning to them. Which would mean that everything that humans do within their short lifespan is not completely in vane.

Symbols can represent a great strength and rally together millions of people under one cause, or they can be used to strike fear into the hearts of people and deter them from something. The frightening part is that a symbol’s meaning can change and adapt freely and with no restraints. The swastika was originally the Hindu symbol for cosmic power. However, during World war Two, Hitler incorporated it within the flag of his regime. The swastika became a symbol for Nazi power and Aryan supremacy. Now the swastika is commonly used by Neo-Nazis and is associated with highly negative connotations such as the genocide of millions of people in Europe. While some symbols may not have changed meaning, some have lost their meaning or are used without full understanding what it is. The Ankh, which is the ancient Egyptian symbol for eternal life, has now become a simple fashion statement and can be seen in jewelry and on cheap key chains.

So with this information I set out to create a symbol for myself. This process began with looking within myself and setting out the qualities that I wanted to portray in my symbol. I want

to show that I have *strength* and *wisdom*. Not to say that I am the strongest or the wisest, but that these qualities are there. Also, I want to show *potential* as one of my qualities within my symbol. I also want to show that I exist and am an individual, saying that there is only one of me.



I have chosen each quality, because of how I view each trait and how it pertains to me. I see *strength* as stability, power, and the ability to protect what is important. The ability to protect is something I admire greatly, which is why I would also include my sense of *justice* within *strength*. I see *wisdom* as knowledge, experience, and learning. So I wish to show more the ability to acquire knowledge. I see *potential* as the best out of all the qualities because I feel that there is still so much that I can do and still so much room for improvement. I see my existence as something important to me because it is my life, my whole being.

So with the qualities of myself laid out I researched into symbols that had similar meanings to the qualities I find important. When I gathered up my symbols I used them as influences to create a single symbol for each of the categories I had chosen allowing me to further distil my symbols so that eventually I would end up with a single symbol that would represent me as a whole.

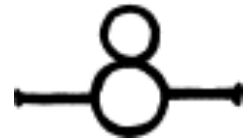
Power is symbolized by a vast amount of symbols the zigzag, the swastika, the tiger, and these are only a few of the many symbols for power. The symbols that stuck out to me the most aesthetically however where the spiral, the swastika, the circle, the triangle, and Fu the Chinese symbol for justice. These symbols hit me the most because of their simplicity. The use of very simple shape appealed to me greatly because simple shapes like a circle or triangle have been drilled into our brains from an early age with toys, TV, and preschool. So without much effort by using these simple shapes they already have a recognizable connection to our brains. Under further observation if you take the swastika it in its most basic form is another spiral only with four tendrils. With that I could tell that what really attracted me to the swastika was its base symbol of the spiral and the kind of movement that it portrays when you view it.



Finding my symbols for wisdom was a bit of a challenge. Some of wisdom is symbols include light, birds, books, eyes, and elephants. The only symbols that really resonated with me however where birds and eyes. Something I noticed though was that birds are used to represent an amazing amount of things but in relation to my process they can be used to represent all three categories of power, wisdom, and existence. When I realized this I was deterred away from birds. So with that I took influence off of symbols like the Wedjat and the eye of the medicine man.



Finally my symbols for existence were the most challenging to find. I took many of the symbols for existences are very vague such as the cosmic soul or the mystic spark. The idea of these symbols appealed to me but they could not be used as an influential reference for my own symbol for existence. Then on the other hand the symbols that were not so vague had very intricate defined shapes like birds, butterflies, and lizards, which didn't allow for much manipulation of their forms. I also realized that I wanted to stray away from using animals within my all my symbols especially for existence because I wanted it to symbolize my existence and not the animal and how it represented existence. The symbols I found that were right for me came mostly from alchemic symbols of essence and soul.



After distilling my three categories down to my own symbol for each my final goal was to create my one symbol for myself. By utilizing parts from all three of the symbols I created I slowly began generating new combinations of my symbols. Soon a obtained a design that felt right, but wasn't quite there yet so I continued to generate new symbols tweaking and fine tuning based on what felt right. Eventually I reached the point where I couldn't take any more frustration and had to step away from my work. I believe its necessary to periodically step away from ones work and return with fresh eyes to allow time to digest any changes or realizations one has while working. When I resumed I don't know what happened but I knew what was the right direction to take. Finally I looked down at my work and there it was, my symbol.

Through out my project I may not have had any life changing, mind altering, or eye opening experiences of self-realization, but I did realize and strengthen the qualities that I find important for myself. I also created something that is connected to and is significant to me. What's more is that this symbol is mine to have and nobody else's. When I look at my symbol now I can proudly say "that is me."

## Bibliography

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