

The Logo of the Endocrine Society of India

OUR LOGO

The Endocrine Society of India (ESI) recently celebrated its 50th birthday. Its logo, created at its inception, in 1971, features the traditional Greek sign of Caduceus, as well as a Sanskrit shloka ‘*yen sarvam idam tatam*’.^[1] This verse figures not once, but twice, in the Bhagavad Gita.^[2] In chapter 2, verse 17, Lord Krishna replies to Arjuna, saying “*know that since the Spirit which pervades the universe is imperishable and immutable, no one can effect his destruction.*” In Chapter 18, verse 46, toward the end of the celestial song, he says “*By adoration of that God, who has created all beings and who pervades the whole universe, through the undertaking of his natural calling, man attains to final accomplishment.*”

CONTROVERSY

ESI is a scientific organization; one that should stand for rationality and reason, one that should rise above religion and tradition. What is it, then, that the founders of ESI wished to convey through their choice of logo and motto? What wisdom did they wish to hand down to us?

THE CADUCEUS

The Caduceus is an ancient Greco-Roman herald’s wand, with two snakes coiled around it, carried by the Greek God Hermes or Roman god Mercury. It is used as a symbol of medicine, predominantly in the United States. Though there is ample debate regarding the appropriateness of this imagery, as opposed to the Rod of Asclepius,^[3] the Caduceus has a few features that link it closely to endocrinology.

Medicine and chemistry (alchemy) were linked early on the course of evolution, and the Caduceus represents the important role of biochemistry and pharmacotherapeutics in modern endocrinology. Hermes and Mercury were associated with eloquence and negotiation, which are essential skills for chronic disease care professionals. These gods were thought to accompany the soul in the afterlife, and the choice of the Caduceus may have reflected the important role of mind-body medicine in endocrinology.

A much simpler explanation, though, may be that the logo of the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, which includes this symbol, may have served as the inspiration for ESI’s design.

That which pervades all

The choice of “*yen sarvam idam tatam*” (“that which pervades all”) needs deeper thought and analysis. This is a verse that figures at the beginning, as well as the end, of the Bhagavad Gita. This means, certainly, that it is not an afterthought: Neither for the writer of the Gita nor for the crafter of the ESI logo.

Is endocrinology the science that pervades all? Are hormones the spirit that pervade all? Are the feedback mechanisms that govern our body imperishable and immutable?

Endocrinology certainly does pervade every field of medicine. It is hormones that facilitate our birth and growth, our survival and sustenance, and in fact, our emotions and humanness. Though no mortal body can last forever, the basic principles of endocrine function do seem to have an immortal constancy that crosses the boundaries of species as well as generations.

Endocrinology is a “higher calling” for us endocrinologists, who view it not just as a vocation or fiduciary activity, but as a means of achieving a greater good for humankind. Our founder fathers too would have felt the same zeal and zest while forming the ESI. Their choice of the verse “*yen sarvam idam tatam*” reflects their passion and highlights their proactive attitude toward holistic well-being.

COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION

The choice of two motifs, the Caduceus, representing “modern” medicine, and the Bhagavad Gita, highlighting ancient Indian wisdom, is deliberate: It reminds us of the need for coexistence and collaboration, for cooperation and coaction in health care. It also teaches us, perhaps, to be open to what we do not know, and to be understanding of what we do not comprehend. This, we feel, is what our seniors have bequeathed to us, through the ESI logo: A sense of respect for modern metabolism and endocrinology, as well as for ancient wisdom and science; and a sense of appreciation for both “biological” and mind-body medicine.

ESI’s motto sets high standards for us, and we hope that we are able to live up to the expectations of our seniors, our peers, and most important of all, of our fellow citizens, whom we exist to serve.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Submitted: 27-Dec-2022

Accepted: 03-Feb-2023

Revised: 03-Feb-2023

Published: 14-Apr-2023

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Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:
www.ijem.in

DOI:
10.4103/ijem.ijem_468_22

How to cite this article: Kalra S, Saran S, Kasliwal R, Lodha S, Sharma B. The logo of the endocrine society of India. Indian J Endocr Metab 2023;27:185-6.

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