

## Mudras

Mudra translates as seal or gesture. It comes from the root 'mud' meaning to delight or protect. Another translation is 'Giver of Joy' implying a wonderful reward or protection from harm, perhaps by harnessing consciousness from the ceaseless activity and distraction of thought.

Mudras can be of the body (kaya), of the hands (hasta), of the feet (pada), of the eyes (chaksu) and the mind itself (mana). We can use mudras in meditation and pranayama to enhance their effects and we can also incorporate mudras into asana by using specific gestures and mantras.

### Benefits of Mudras:

- Harmonize and revitalize systems of the body
- Give ability to control involuntary physiological processes
- Invoke a specific emotional response
- Give an awareness of prana & the ability to use it to heal oneself and others
- Cleanse, strengthen and calm the mind
- Represent or transform the psyche
- Develop pratyahara the ability to control the senses so very good prior to meditation where we need ekagrata, a one pointed mind
- Give siddhis or powers and can help to arouse kundalini

As you can see from the list above there is a spiritual aim but also many mental/emotional and physical benefits to be derived from the practice of mudras. Do note that as always there are some variations in the descriptions of particular mudras and often there are different ways to develop them by for example adding points for mental focus.

### Important mudras within Hatha Yoga you may consider teaching:

#### Hasta Mudras / hand seals

So how do hasta mudras work? In essence we have to see the hand as containing reflex zones for associated parts of the body and brain and indeed many traditional medical systems use this knowledge such as Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, where both possess a five element system whereby different points upon the hands have designated correspondences with areas of the body and brain. So in a way the hand becomes a mirror for our body and for our mind and by changing the positioning of the hands we alter the functioning of our body and mind.

An interesting example is Chin Mudra where the tip of the index finger and thumb lightly touch. In yoga the thumb represents divine consciousness and the index finger represents human consciousness so when they are placed together to create a circle they represent the union of individual human consciousness with divine cosmic consciousness, with the three outstretched fingers representing the tri-gunas of embodied existence. This mudra is therefore often used in meditation practices to both express this desire for union and help to create this union through increased mental focus. Interestingly both the thumb and index finger belong to the metal element within Chinese five element theory where metal is considered to be by far the best conductor, having the ability to help us become more intuitive, helping us to create connections with the cosmos!

To use hasta mudras we simply need to place the fingers together lightly but firmly whilst keeping the hands relaxed and where the hand is not flexible enough to create the position this is often indicative that the corresponding area of the body or brain is not functioning optimally so we can always in the beginning use the other hand to help us create the position.

Here we can see some hasta mudras we can use, although there are many others we can perform.

### **Chin Mudra (gesture of knowledge)**

Here the tip of the index finger and the thumb are placed together, although sometimes the thumb covers the nail of the index finger. Hands are placed on the knees, palms facing upwards.

*This mudra draws attention inwardly so it is good for concentration and meditation techniques. It is said to represent the goal of yoga, the union of atman and brahman. It releases mental tension and develops good concentration and memory. Good for insomnia, depression and high blood pressure.*



### **Jnana Mudra (gesture of consciousness)**

The fingers are placed as for Chin Mudra except here the palms face downwards.



*Benefits are as for Chin Mudra.*

These two hasta mudras are used primarily within pranayama and meditation but can also be used within asana to help keep prana from escaping and create concentration.

### **Dhyana Mudra (seal of submission)**

For this mudra the left hand lies in the right hand and the thumbs touch each other, palms facing upwards.

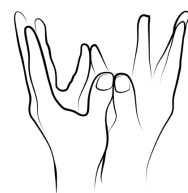
*This is classic mudra for meditation where the bowl represents the emptiness of surrendering to receive the divine. When we employ this mudra there is no special intention but rather the feeling that 'Thy will be done' i.e. of surrender.*



There are also many hasta mudras to create very specific effects, especially therapeutic effects. Some useful examples to include here are:

### **Padmasana Mudra (lotus seal)**

Here we bring the hands to a vertical position then touch the pads of the thumbs and little fingers together. Now we spread the fingers of both hands wide apart representing the open lotus flower. After a few breaths with the open flower we can close the lotus flower by placing the fingernails of the fingers of both hands on top of each other and joining the backs of the fingers, the backs of the hands and allow the hands to hang down for a while. So with awareness within the breath



we can work by opening and closed the lotus.

*This Mudra stimulates the heart and can be used to good effect when we are feeling lonely, misunderstood or exploited.*

### **Prithvi Mudra (earth seal)**

Here we place the tips of the thumb and ring finger together and extend the other fingers away. We apply this to both hands simultaneously.



*This mudra is great to use when we feel we need stability or security. It can also be employed when we wish to increase the health of the skin, bones, teeth and nails, helping us to absorb nutrients.*

### **Garuda Mudra (eagle seal)**



Here we clasp the thumbs and place hands, the right on top of the left, palms facing inwards, spreading fingers wide apart. Initially we place the hands at the level of the lower abdomen, staying here for around 10 breaths, then we position the mudra to the navel, staying here for around 10 breaths, then the stomach and finally at the sternum, with fingers pointing towards the shoulders each time staying for approximately 10 breaths.

*Garuda mudra increases circulation and so caution is ideal for high blood pressure sufferers. It relieves fatigue can also relax us and alleviate pain.*

### **Kubera Mudra (god of wealth seal)**

Here we place the tips of thumbs, index finger and middle fingers together with the other fingers folded inwards.



*This mudra can be used when we wish to reach a goal, whether it is a wish to find a parking place or fulfill a deeper desire. It gives the mind serenity and confidence. It also opens sinuses.*

### **Pran Mudra (life seal)**

Here for both hands we place the tips of the thumb against the tip of the ring finger and little finger, with the other fingers out stretched.

*This mudra activates muladhara chakra increasing vitality and removing anxiety, giving a sense of quiet confidence and inner stability. It is also good for improving the health of eyes.*

### **Apana Mudra (energy seal)**

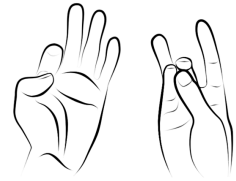
Here for both hands we place the tips of the thumb, middle finger and ring finger together, with remaining fingers out stretched.



*This mudra aids elimination and the removal of toxins. It has a balancing effect upon the liver, which consequently has a balancing effect upon the mind. It helps to create qualities such a patience and serenity and helps us to have clarity in our internal vision & imagination.*

### **Back Mudra**

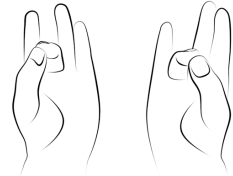
For the right hand place the thumb, middle finger and little finger together. Index finger and ring finger outstretched. For the left hand place the thumb on the nail of the index finger.



*This mudra helps to release backache. It can be done in a position that releases the back such as lying flat to floor with legs raised*

### **Joint Mudra**

For the right hand we place the thumb and ring finger together, other fingers out stretched and for the left hand we place the thumb and middle finger together, other fingers out stretched.



*This mudra balances energy in joints*

### **Chaksu Mudras**

There are many positions for the eyes which will be looked at a later point but meanwhile we can consider the value of drishtis. A drishti is essentially a focal point given where we gently place our vision. Examples could be the toes in Navasana or the middle finger in Virabhadrasana II. By incorporating drishtis or mental focal points within the practices of yoga asana these can be a way to create a quality of concentration for the mind.

### **Tri-Bandhas and Kaya Mudras (whole body mudras)**

We will examine mula bandha, jalandharana bandha and uddiyana bandha at a later point and see how they can be combined as whole body mudras. Kaya Mudras are very intense energetically and will be taught to more experienced students where they often form part of hatha yoga pranayama and meditation techniques.

Meanwhile mula bandha (root lock) and jalandhara bandha (chin lock) can be used in our teaching. For instance Jalandhara bandha naturally occurs in some asana such as sarvangasana (shoulderstand) and setu bandha (bridge) and as you may have already noticed many asana benefit from engaging mula bandha, these include those asana where we need to ground downwards as well as lift upwards such as vrksasana (tree) and utkatasana (squat) because mula bandha helps us energetically to do this. In addition it is very helpful when we need to protect the lower back so is especially useful in any backbends and also twists.

It is also possible to be creative and adopt different hasta mudras within asana so for example we could perform a spread leg boat pose with knees bent and wrap arms around the outside of the legs performing lotus mudra with our hands placed in front of the heart area or in a pose such as virabhadrasana II we could adopt chin mudra to help contain energy within the body. Please feel free to experiment with using mudras within asana, inwardly observing what aids the experience of the asana. They can certainly bring an extra dimension to practice.

### **For further reading:**

A very useful book to buy is Mudras Yoga in your hands by Gertrud Hirschi, 2000, Red Wheel / Weiser

