



Mudras: Introduction

Description



The term *mudra* (â??seal,â?• â??mark,â?• â??gestureâ?• or â??symbolâ?•) refers to symbolic positions and practices.

- *Mudras* can refer to body positions, breathing techniques, hand positions and more.
- They are used to influence energies of the body and mind.
- In non-traditional usage, the term *mudra* is often used to refer to hand *mudras*, in particular.
- See also: [Hand Mudras Introduction](#).

POSITION THAT LOCKS & GUIDES ENERGY FLOW

A [mudra is a] gesture or position, usually of the hands, that locks and guides energy flow. By curling, crossing, stretching and touching the fingers and hands, we can talk to the body and mind. KundaliniYoga.org

POSITIONS THAT INFLUENCE ENERGIES OR MOOD

Mudras are positions of the body that have some kind of influence on the energies of the body, or your mood. Mostly the hands and fingers are held in some position, but the whole body may be part of the mudra as well. The most well-known mudras are probably the ones performed while meditating. One sits in lotus position (or with crossed legs) and either puts one's hands on the knees, the tips of the thumb and index finger joining, or in the lap, the fingers of the right hand resting on the left palm. But also the Christian crossing of the fingers for prayer is a mudra, as is the Indian greeting gesture (that is also used while praying), where the hands are held in front of the chest, the palms touching. EclecticEnergies.com

Historical & Philosophical Context

- The original [source texts](#) for *mudras* are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and the *Gheranda Samhita*.
- Hatha Yoga is the branch of yoga that works through the body, rather than through the mind or emotions. Primary practices of Hatha Yoga include *asana*, *pranayama*, *bandha* and *mudra*. (See more: [Branches of Yoga](#))

HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA & GHERANDA SAMHITA

The main texts concerning the use of mudras are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* describes 10 mudras and the *Gheranda Samhita* 25. ArtofLiving.org

SOMETIMES REGARDED AS AN ENTIRE BRANCH OF PRACTICE

Mudras, especially those of the hand, are prominent in the Tantric aspect of the greater yoga tradition, and are sometimes regarded as an entire branch of practice, like *asana*, *pranayama*, *mantra* or *yantra*. Dr. David Frawley

Five Classes

Mudras are divided into five classes:

1. [hasta](#) (hand)
2. *mana* (head)
3. *kaya* (postural)
4. [bandha](#) (lock)
5. *adhara* (base or perineal)

FIVE CLASSES OF MUDRAS TO AFFECT AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



In the Hatha Yoga tradition, mudras are considered precious tools on the path of awakening. There are five classes of such mudras taught in the yoga tradition: hasta (hand), mana (head), kaya (postural), [bandha](#) (lock) and adhara (base or perineal). Although these five are different, they share the common purpose of serving as â??sealsâ?• or â??locksâ?• used to affect the flow of energy in particular organs and channels of the bodyâ?|. Many of the postural mudras and locks form the basis for the internal practices of Hatha Yoga that are aimed primarily at affecting the [autonomic nervous system](#), and have very little to do with the appearance of the musculoskeletal system. â?? Cain and Revital Carroll

EXAMPLE OF A HEAD MUDRA

I learned about Brahma mudra (the Divine Spiritual Gesture) from Dr. Ananda Bhavanani, MD, from Pondicherry, India, who is both a Western trained physician and yoga therapist. Unlike the hand mudra or gestures that I use often in my meditation practice, the Brahma mudra involves movement and sound (NOTE: There is also a hand gesture by the same name, but that is not the subject of this post). Dr. Bhavanani said this mudra can help you on a physical level for pain and stiffness in the head, neck, shoulders, and upper back and for optimizing the overall functions of the neck regionâ?| he also stated this mudra helps cultivate psychosomatic harmony (body-mind balance), can be useful for managing stress and mood swings, cultivating relaxation, instilling a sense of mental lightness, and can enhance and balance our perspectives on life. â?? Baxter Bell MD

Purpose / Effects



- The purpose of *mudras* is to influence the [energy](#) of the body and mind.
- *Mudras* help to increase concentration and focus.
- They tend to elevate mood.
- *Mudras* are reported to provide many health benefits.

RELIEVE STRESS

When Joseph LePage, my primary yoga teacher, first introduced hand mudras into the Integrative Yoga Therapy Training program, I resisted. I simply did not get it. But having been raised a “good girl” with respect for teachers, I went along with the program. He introduced them. I listened. I practiced. And I felt nothing. Nada. No energy shifts, no sensations, no nothing. So much for mudras, I thought.



Then about three months later, I found myself in a stressful situation. My hands automatically moved into one of the grounding mudras I'd been practicing and WOW!!! There it was. My palms tingled, my breath slowed, and I felt a sense of calm in the middle of that most uncomfortable situation. It actually worked. I was amazed and delighted. â?? Beth Gibbs

HAPPINESS & HEALTH

The spiritual importance of the mudras is explained in the *Gherana Samhita*, in which Lord Shiva tells Goddess Parvati that the mudras will grant great happiness and health. The *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika*, meanwhile, states that mudras are a powerful way of activating Kundalini energy. When we practice mudras, the Kundalini energy passes through the pranic centre of the spine (Sushuman nadi). From there, the prana moves through the chakras, activating each one in turn, leading to many spiritual health benefits. There are 60 mudras in common use today, each offering its own unique health benefits. For instance, the *Makara mudra* activates kidney energy and can be used to fight depression. Meanwhile, the *Hakini mudra* enhances communication between brain hemispheres, which leads to improved cognitive function.,,, Another view of the mudras is the esoteric philosophical view. According to the philosophy, the thumbs and fingers represent specific things. â?? Paul Harrison

DEPICT ASPECTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

There are eye positions, body postures, and breathing techniques that are called mudras. These symbolic finger, eye, and body postures can vividly depict certain states or processes of consciousnessâ?|. Specific positions can also lead to the states they symbolizeâ?|. Especially in Kundalini Yoga, the hand mudras are used during the body postures to intensify their effect. â?? Gertrud Hirschi

Why Use Mudras in Teaching



In the article quoted below, Baxter Bell, MD shares these reasons for practicing and teaching *mudras*:

- *Mudras* practiced with meditation and *pranayama* tend to promote calm and deepen concentration as well as bring overall energetic balance.
- Some students may enjoy practicing *mudras* and find them easy to incorporate in home practice.
- *Mudras* appear to have a positive impact on a wide variety of health conditions and have beneficial effects on the hands.
- They are safe and accessible.

As I started to include mudras into my regular morning meditation practices, I very quickly discovered, to my delight, that my mind was more focused during meditation than it had been prior to introducing mudras! I decided to share a new mudra each week with my local yoga classes as part of the initial meditation we do at the start of each class. My students love it! Many have reported that they found the



mudras they added to their home meditation and breath practices to be helpful in calming, energizing, and balancing their minds and bodies! The present challenge with all these "potential" health benefits is that to date we don't have scientific studies looking at the outcomes of practicing mudras regularly, or how they might work. However, they are completely safe to practice and almost anyone can do the hand gestures, even if they cannot do full asana practice, as another way of experiencing yoga. — Baxter Bell MD

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