

Mudras (ritual hand gestures)

A mudra is a symbolic or ritual hand gesture. Such hand gestures are used in the iconography of Hindu as well as Buddhist art and are described in the scriptures. Mudra positions are usually formed by both the hands and the fingers.

Following are some of the most common mudras with a short description:



The Dharmachakra Mudra or Gesture of Turning the Dharma Wheel

The Buddha preached his first sermon after his Enlightenment in the Deer Park in Sarnath, near Varanasi. The dharmachakra mudra represents that moment. In general, only Gautama Buddha is shown making this mudra, except Maytreya as the dispenser of the Law.

The thumb and index finger of the right hand stand for wisdom and method combined. The other three raised fingers symbolize the teaching of the Buddhist doctrine, which leads sentient beings to the paths of the beings of three capacities. The position of the left hand symbolizes the beings of the three capacities, who follow the combined path of method and wisdom.

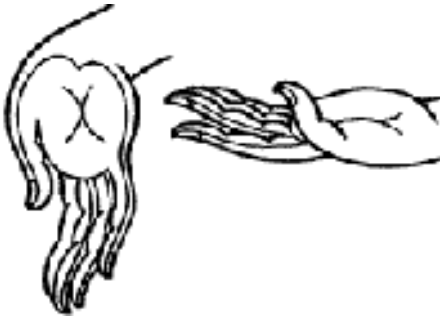


The Dhyana Mudra or Gesture of Meditation

The nerve channel associated with the mind of enlightenment (Bodhichitta) passes through the thumbs. Thus, joining of the two thumbs in this gesture is of auspicious significance for the future development of the mind of enlightenment.

The Dhyana Mudra is the gesture of meditation, of the concentration of the Good Law and the sangha, the Buddhist community. The two hands are placed on the lap, right hand on left with fingers fully stretched (four fingers resting on each other and the thumbs facing upwards towards one another diagonally), palms facing upwards. In this manner, the hands and fingers form the shape of a triangle, which is symbolic of the spiritual fire or the Triratna, the three jewels.

This mudra is used in representations of the Sakyamuni Buddha and Amithaba Buddha, and sometimes used in certain representations of the Medicine Buddha, too, with a medicine bowl placed on the hands.



Gesture of Bestowal of Supreme Accomplishment

The gesture of the right hand symbolizes bestowal of supreme accomplishment. That of the left hand symbolizes meditation.

Together, they stand for the Buddha's power to bestow supreme and general accomplishments on his disciples, while he meditates.



Bhumisparsha Mudra or Gesture of Pressing the Earth

The bhumisparsha mudra of Gautama Buddha is one of the most common iconic images in Tibetan Buddhism. It depicts the Buddha sitting in meditation with his left hand, palm upright, in his lap, and his right hand touching the earth.

It represents the Buddha asking Prthivi, the devi of the earth, that she witness his enlightenment when he was threatened by demon king Mara.



Gesture of Turning the Wheel of Dharma while in Meditation

The gesture of the right hand stands for turning the wheel of Dharma, while that of the left hand symbolizes meditation. The two conjoined symbolize teaching the Dharma while in meditation.

