

# HASTA MUDRA

by Swamini Kaliji

Why do we have five fingers, five toes, and five senses? It is due to the maha Prana dividing itself five-fold upon entering this creation. The panca pranas are udana prana, prana prana, samana prana, vyana prana, and apana prana. These five pranas are represented with each of the five fingers. The way the fingers connect with one another have the potential to increase the prana flow in body/mind.

The hands express our thoughts and feelings. We see this in communication with one another. The hands move, appearing to further communicate what one is speaking. The hands also move reflecting the state of mind even when one isn't speaking. For example, when one is nervous the fingers often fidget or when one is upset the hands can begin to clutch. If anger intensifies the hand becomes a fist that is used to attack.

The opposite of such intense negative emotion are feelings of caring, loving emotions. For example, when we meet one another we either greet with anjali mudra, hands placed together at the heart level, or with a handshake.

In Samkhya Yoga, one of the five karma-indriyas is the power to grasp. Our hands grasp various objects, and perform various feats from simple tasks to inspired arts. All are reflecting the state of mind.

From ancient times, the placement of hands during meditation has been practiced. Using the classic jnana mudra, with the first and second fingertips touching, aids in supporting meditation. The hands can be placed up or down on the knees. The photos or murtis of the deities have their hands in a precise gesture. From the hand gesture, one can understand the aspect of the Divine that is being represented. Imagine a deity with the hands clutched. It wouldn't have the same effect as one such as abhaya mudra, the gesture of fearlessness and protection.

In the same way, in viewing the body language of someone, a sense of how they are feeling can be known. Imagine someone sitting for meditation, yet, their hands were not in a conscious position but rather like a half fist. This would reveal the mind is truly not in meditation but in a thinking mode. However, when jnana mudra is applied, it doesn't necessarily mean one is in meditation. Still the hand gesture helps to direct the energy. It aids in supporting the energy to make a circuit of energy to flow inside, countering the outer flow of thoughts.

In various cultures throughout the world, anjali mudra is a natural gesture that often takes place when one prays. The hands being placed at the heart is the Self being felt in the anahata chakra. It also helps to direct the energy upward, calming the mind. But the hands aren't the only type of mudra. The way the body and the eyes are placed are also important for the direction of energy.

Mudra means to 'seal' in energy, to focus the energy. Various yogasanas can be classified as a mudra depending on how it focuses energy. For example, when the body is in a relaxed seated posture, with the spine lengthened, it becomes a mudra.

The eyes can also be placed in a mudra such as the classic bhrumadhya mudra, with the eyelids closed, the inner gaze placed between the eyebrows. The eyes should not be placed too high, as this creates a rajasic state of mind, nor too low as this creates a tamasic state. Placed in a relaxed position between the eyebrows supports a witness state of mind.

When the eyes are opened one can practice trataka, which is another type of mudra as it focuses the mind. The eyes have a relaxed, steady gaze at one object. By placing a candle flame an arm's distance at eye level gives a favorable subject on which to focus the eyes. The flame is an aspect of agni (fire). This corresponds to manipura chakra, the seat of sight. Trataka is excellent for strengthening the inner and outer vision. The flame is focused upon with the aim of not blinking the eyes unless necessary, prior to tiredness. The eyes blink an average of 15 times per minute. When one is nervous the eyes blink more frequently. When one blinks fewer times per minute it is more relaxing and less wear and tear for the eyes. Through gazing at the flame, it strengthens the six eye muscles, improving eyesight.

When the eyes begin to tire or water, the eyelids should close. During this rest period, one should aim to see the flame in the inner eye. The eyes should remain steady in bhrumadhya mudra. Through placing the eye position at ajna chakra, the witness state emerges with greater ease. Ajna chakra is the seat of intuition, higher wisdom. One can see into the mind, and the inner workings of antarkarana (manas - mental screen; ahamkara - sense of I; chitta - memory bank where samskaras are stored; buddhi - intellect).

Hatha yoga is a trinity of yogasana, pranayama, and mudra. Hasta mudras accompany yogasanas and pranayama. Yogasana and pranayama are most effective with the corresponding hasta mudra. Hasta mudra can also be used in daily life to maintain yoga awareness in all activities.

Hasta mudras can be practiced individually or as a series of hand gestures flowing one into the next. Each mudra should be felt like an offering to the Divine. It is optional to repeat a mantra, prayer, or a positive affirmation, corresponding to the specific mudra used. When both hands are flowing through the same hasta mudras, it balances the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This naturally calms the mind. Most of the time, our hands are doing something different from one another even though they can be working on the same project. When the hands mirror one another, the intuitive and logical brain are harmonized, allowing for a natural meditation.