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# Hand Mudrās as a Practice of Connecting to the Divine

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Hand Mudrās  
as a Practice of Connecting to the Divine

by  
Ana Maria Galarraga (Rydell)

A thesis presented to the  
  
Faculty of the Department of  
Yoga Studies  
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Requirements for the Degree  
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Professor Christopher Key Chapple,  
Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology,  
Director, Master of Arts in Yoga Studies,  
Thesis Advisor

Often the hands will solve a mystery that the intellect has struggled with in vain.

— Carl G. Jung

In the absence of any other proof,  
the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence.

— Sir Isaac Newton

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Margaret and Herbert,  
for their undying love for me and revealing the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary;  
and my father, Juan José,  
for teaching me it is never too late to begin anew.



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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### Hand Mudrās as a Practice of Connecting to the Divine

by

Ana Maria Galarraga (Rydell)  
Master of Arts in Yoga Studies  
Loyola Marymount University, 2017

Our hands hold an innate healing power. *Mudrās* are positions of the hands that are said to influence the energy of the physical, emotional and spiritual body. Mudrās have been used in Asia for thousands of years and were practiced by many spiritual leaders. Sometimes we may subconsciously place our hands into mudrā positions without even knowing it, helping us to channel and stimulate healing. Within this thesis, the author (a yoga teacher and educator) asserts there is need for greater understanding of the many dimensions of this ancient practice that is grounded in Indian philosophy and yet reflects a universal understanding of the power we hold in our hands as seen in the context of art and culture.

This thesis is an interpretation of mudrās as a practice of awareness that may hold value in daily life as a means of becoming more integrated with oneself, with others and with the world. The author begins with the premise that most people are not fully present with the bodily experience of using their hands. Techniques of awareness may help one to be more present, to become the observer, to feel sensations, to transform the ordinary into the

extraordinary and shift habitual tasks we do with our hands to mindful opportunities to reconnect with divine energy. This process of developing awareness of the hand can be viewed as a meditation, a deepening of interior awareness. It requires attunement to sensation. Consciousness of the hand can be a way of understanding how small movements can manifest healing.

Mudrā is explored here, through the view of traditional Hindu philosophy, exploring various types of mudrās, and the elements and cakras in relation to mudrā. The term mudrā is analyzed by tracing its development since its earliest recorded occurrence in the Sanskrit language, and by identifying its component parts.<sup>1</sup>

Mudrā is compared briefly with Western and East Asian art and therapeutic approaches. The author outlines the techniques of mudrā and illustrates, through personal experience, how the practice engenders an embodied relationship with Self. Ultimately, mudrā integrates a greater awareness of how we use our hands in the course of a day and the power we have, literally, at our finger tips. This might result in a state of *samādhi* wherein there is “cosmic consciousness” of being totally aware of the present moment.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

On any given day, a barrage of tasks needs to be accomplished by using the hands, whether it be writing, gardening, cooking, and so on. As a yoga instructor and educator, I am

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<sup>1</sup> Deshpande, Madhav M. *A Sanskrit Primer = Saṃskṛtasubodhinī*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 2001), xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Chapple, Christopher. *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali's Spiritual Path to Freedom*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 45.

fascinated by the application of yoga in seemingly ordinary life apart from *āsana* practice. Very often, the unconscious use of hands conveys the inner world, expressing hope, love, preferences, and desires in a way that links to the experience of yoga. Actions taken by the hands impact our well-being, beyond the obvious fruit of our labor. Yoga is the method through which the individual self transcends its individuality and attains an experience of universality. *Karma* Yoga is the practice through which the individual self, the ego self, is transcended by performing actions in the world for the good of others, in selfless service.<sup>3</sup> The spirit of Karma Yoga is performing duty with tenderness, care and sincerity. Reorienting the work of the hands in the framework of yoga and in the spirit of Karma Yoga, offers a path to Self-realization.

It is easy to observe the passing of life through repetitive and mindless actions, often taken without concern for the energy these actions require. Typically people are often over run by worry, unwanted thoughts, and preoccupations of what needs to be done next. To address this reality of distracted behaviors, it is important to step back and acknowledge we are more than the physicality of our bodies. Killian McDonald in his book, *The Other Hand of God* quotes, William of St. Thierry's, *On the Nature and Dignity of Love*: "Be entirely present to yourself, and use all of your faculties to know yourself and know whose image you are, so that you can discern and understand what you are, and what you can do in the one in

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<sup>3</sup> Dāss, Bābā Hari. *Essays On The Search For Peace in Daily Life*. (Santa Cruz, CA: Sri Rama Publishing, 1995), 1.

whose image you are.”<sup>4</sup> This passage describes the conviction of *Imago Trinitatis*, the divine essence, which parallels many ideas in Indian Philosophy on transcendence, a universal theme.

In Hinduism “originally called not ‘Hinduism’ but *sanātana dharma*,” *Brahman* is conceptualized as the creative truth which lies realized in the whole world.<sup>5</sup> *Brahman* connotes the highest universal principle, the ultimate reality in the universe. *Brahman* is discussed in Hindu texts with the concept of *Ātman* (Soul, Self) in various combinations depending on the philosophical school. David Gordon White explains in his book *Yoga in Practice*, that the term *Ātman* “is etymologically linked to the Sanskrit verb *\*an*, ‘breathe’, and it is via breath channels leading up from the heart channels that merge with the rays of the sun.” He goes on to say, “these descriptions of the breath channels also lie at the origin of yogic or ‘subtle’ body physiology”.<sup>6</sup> This description clearly depicts how within the body, the vibrancy of energy travels through the *nāḍīs*, by way of the breath. This is the gateway to union with the Absolute.

In dualistic schools of Hinduism, such as the theistic *Dvaita Vedānta*, *Brahman* is different from *Ātman*, and therein it shares a conceptual framework of transcendence found in major world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>7</sup> In non-dual schools of

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<sup>4</sup> McDonnell, Kilian. *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as The Universal Touch and Goal*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 177.

<sup>5</sup> Easwaran, Eknath. *The Upanishads*. (Canada: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 299.

<sup>6</sup> White, David Gordon. *Yoga in Practice*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy, and Practice*. (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2013), 453.

Hinduism such as the monist *Ādvaita* Vedānta, Brahman is identical to the Ātman.<sup>8</sup> Brahman is everywhere and inside each living being. A connected spiritual oneness can be found in all existence.

Another perennial theme found in all of the world's major religions and philosophies is the inward search for knowledge. In Sanskrit, two words for knowledge and wisdom are *jñāna* and *vidyā*.<sup>9</sup> *Vidyā* refers to the valid knowledge which cannot be contradicted and the true knowledge of the Self intuitively gained.<sup>10</sup> As one who believes in the potential of yoga to change life for the better, my first instinct is to address the need for connection with the Self by going inward and reconnecting with the source, Ātman. This seeking of Self-knowledge brings the focus back to the interior landscape of the subtle body. One can feel what is being experienced and listen to the inner voice, the guru that resides in all of us. In this way, there is yoga. With the attention harnessed, the *prāṇa* flowing, there is a remarkable, indwelling path to transcendence that is available everyday, in the most common of activities, even and perhaps especially those done by the hands.<sup>11</sup>

The ancient philosophies and practices of India offer a discourse to understand yoga in daily life, and this experience flavors our interaction with the world at large. The practice of yoga has a greater application than solely as an exercise for the body, done on a

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<sup>8</sup> Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition*, 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition*, 460.

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, Robert P., and Sutherland Goldman Sally J. *Devavāṇīpraveśikā: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Language*. (Berkeley: Center for South Asia Studies, U of California, 2004), 482-483.

<sup>11</sup> Feuerstein, Georg. *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice*. (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 4.



specialized mat, isolated from everyday existence. It is instead a way of acknowledging one's inherent nature, becoming present within, observing, feeling, breathing, and transforming habitual behaviors into opportunities for tranquillity and peace in daily life. Increasing numbers of people have begun experimenting with healing modalities of all types originating from Eastern philosophies and religions. All these have one feature in common: They enliven consciousness and move it away from anesthesia-producing life-styles such as shopping, watching Youtube videos, and playing computer games.

Through this research, I have attempted to explore how the use of our hands supported by the practice of Mudrā offers a portal to an integrated, replenished, heart-filled existence brimming with meaning and purpose.<sup>12</sup> This study examines the historical roots of mudrā through authoritative texts that elaborate rich understanding of the importance of hands. Additionally, from a Western perspective, most notably in art, there are many examples that also reveal how transcendence through our hands can occur. These two avenues reveal mudrās as a practice of connecting to the divine.

### I. The Advantage of the Hand

During the course of my early life not much thought went into how my hands have served me. But with age comes a better appreciation of the seemingly simple things that bring joy. This is not to say hands are simple. The hand distinguishes humans from all other animals. The *Rgveda* (ca. 1500 B.C.E.) describes the hand through the instruction of the god

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<sup>12</sup> Siddhartha, Osho and Romesh Puri. *Mudra Healing*. (Distt-Sonepath (HR): Limass Foundation, 2015), 9.

Indra to the scholar Kashyapa; “Get up lucky fellow! Look at yourself, you are born in the most enviable species of humans, on top of that you have attained rare erudition in the Vedas! Above all—you have got a pair of hands—no other achievement is greater than having hands. Just as you are craving the wealth of that merchant, we the other beasts are craving your hands... Those who have hands, with their god-given ten fingers, can build homes to protect themselves from rain, snow, and the sun, weave fine clothing, cook food, make a bed, and can enjoy life in so many artful ways”.<sup>13</sup> Even well-learned people can fail to see their own good fortune. Indra reminds Kashyapa to be grateful for the human advantage of the hand, a lesson for every human.

Arindam Chakrabarti’s important work on the subject of hands entitled, *Towards A Moral Ontology of the Hand: From Torture to the Healing Touch*, includes reflections from many scholars on the “centrality” of hands as a symbol of the human soul: “Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary (on Aristotle’s *De Anima*), elaborates; The hand is the most perfect of organs, for it takes the place in man of all the instruments given to other animals for the purposes of defense or attack or covering. Man can provide all these needs for himself with his hands. In the same way the soul in man takes the place of all the forms of being, so that his intellect can assimilate intelligible forms and his senses sensible forms.”<sup>14</sup> Professor Chakrabarti goes on to cite a passage from Immanuel Kant’s *Anthropology* to highlight the

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<sup>13</sup> Chakrabarti, Arindam. *Towards A Moral Ontology of the Hand: From Torture to the Healing Touch*. (Shared via email on February 2, 2017), Essay.

<sup>14</sup> Chakrabarti, *Essay*.

wonder and promise of the hand: “The characterization of a man as a rational animal is already present in the form and organization of the human *hand*, partly by the structure and partly by the sensitive feeling of the *fingers* and finger-tips. By this, nature made him fit for manipulating things not in one particular way but in any way whatsoever, and so for using reason and indicted the technical predisposition or predisposition for skill.”<sup>15</sup> In this quote we see the hand as vital, having a twofold capacity, not only as a tool but a transmitter of emotional response.

Each day we are presented with occasions to serve others and ourselves with the use of our hands, and the sensation of touch. Simple examples include preparing a meal, holding a baby, caressing your lover, working to improve the circumstances for yourself and others around you. In these moments we can look beyond what is visible, the obvious in front of us, and acknowledge the potential to connect to our higher Self.

A simple act has the ability to transform the way we see ourselves and the world, not merely as good or bad but as significant. David Linden so aptly points out in his book *Touch*, the “main point is not merely to argue that touch is important. Rather, it’s to explain that this particular organization of our body’s touch circuits (hands), is a weird, complex, and often counterintuitive system, and the specifics of its organization powerfully influence our lives.”<sup>16</sup> It is this “influence” that can guide us to a deeper connection with ourselves and the start to a mindful way of existence.

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<sup>15</sup> Chakrabarti, *Essay*.

<sup>16</sup> Linden, David J. *Touch: The Science of Hand, Heart, and Mind*. (New York: Viking, 2015), 5.

## II. Mudrās in India



(Figure 1)

If you have flown to India and arrived at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, Terminal 3, you will have undoubtedly noticed the giant, metallic hand gestures mounted on the walls of the terminal (Figure 1).<sup>17</sup> They are beautiful. Their enormous size is impressive and their presence infuses a sense of peace that the culture you are about to enter is distinct, influenced by a different set of rules, and norms. The art installation welcomes you into the grand history of India while simultaneously reminding you India is the birthplace of yoga.<sup>18</sup> Those metallic hand gestures, mudrās, are a gentle reminder and also a deep promise, in a coded language, which has the potential of offering significant meaning to life.<sup>19</sup>

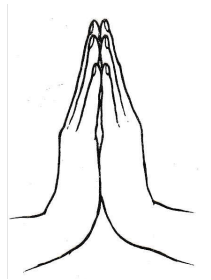
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<sup>17</sup> Kasliwal, Ayush. *Mudra Sculptures*. 2010. Clay, Resin, Aluminum, Copper. New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, Terminal, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimensions*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Rao, S. K. Ramachandra. *Mudrās in Pūjā*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2005), 1.

The mudrā makes significant contributions to Indian culture. Often thought of as “stylized hand-gestures and finger-manipulation [used] to communicate complex ideas”, they are employed in a variety of ways.<sup>20</sup> In India, the most common way to greet others is by bringing the palms of the hands together in front of the heart cakra, with the extended fingers pointing up in *Añjali Mudrā*.<sup>21</sup> There are also eye-positions, body postures, and breathing techniques called mudrā. Mudrās constitute an entire sign-language, marked by variety and symbolism. By the very act of bending, crossing, extending, or touching the fingers, we can engage and influence the mind. Simple acts such as playing an instrument, or holding a baby, actions we take with our hands and fingers can provide access to healing benefits.



Añjali Mudrā

Hands have long elicited a strong connection to the divine as seen in the concept of mudrā. The worship-ritual would be incomplete without them; contemplation, symbolism, and absorption are said to be facilitated by mudrās. They are not the sole property of anyone particular tradition. <sup>22</sup>“From the mundane to the esoteric, from the sacred to the profane, from

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<sup>20</sup> Hirschi, Gertrud. *Mudras Yoga in Your Hands*. (Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publ., 2000), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimensions*, 315.

<sup>22</sup> Rao, 8.

the religious to secular”, hand gestures have been part of the human repertoire since time in memoriam.<sup>23</sup> One meaning of the word *mudrā*, to secure the delight of the Gods and drive away sins making any undertaking a fruitful one, is in itself a concept worth considering.<sup>24</sup> A two syllable word, the first syllable ‘*mu*’ taking in the sense of delight from the word *mud*. The second syllable derives from ‘*dru*’, “to run” or “to melt” related to the word from *dravana*, “thing of value, wealth”.<sup>25</sup> The etymological meaning of the word is uncertain but it is usually traced to the root ‘*mud*’ and is explained as, “to rejoice” as in the rice that comes forth from the mud brings delight<sup>26</sup>. Other theories suggest a different background relating to royal or official “seal” providing authenticity of documentation. Early Buddhist and Jain works suggest, this meaning, as does one literal translation of the word *mudrā* in Sanskrit.<sup>27</sup>

There are many different types of *mudrā*. *Mudrās* roughly fall into four categories — i.e., 1) those which are generally held or depicted in the representation of a deity, 2) those which are associated with particular *Tantric* worship, 3) those associated with *yogic* meditational practices, and 4) those which are associated with dramatic practices, including dance; within these four categories the *mudrā* may be further be delineated into *asamyuta* (non-combined) with a single-hand, or *samyuta* (combined) with two-hands, which include

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<sup>23</sup> Bunce, Fredrick W. *Mudrās in Buddhist and Hindu Practices: An Iconographic Consideration*. (New Delhi: D.K. Print World, 2005), xxv.

<sup>24</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 315.

<sup>25</sup> Goldman, 458.

<sup>26</sup> Deshpande, 442.

<sup>27</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 49.

wrist positions.”<sup>28</sup> According to the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* (ca. 1000 –1055 B.C.E.), an encyclopedic work on classical Indian architecture written by Rāja Bhoja of Dhār from the Paramāra Dynasty, there are a twenty-four asaṃyuta (non-combined) mudrās in the sculptural arts.<sup>29</sup> An identical list is found in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (ca. 200-500 B.C.E.), an ancient Sanskrit text on the performing arts.<sup>30</sup> The *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* lists twelve saṃyuta (combined) mudrās, and the *Nāṭya Śāstra* lists the same twelve plus one, for a total of thirteen saṃyuta (combined) mudrās.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of mudrā, whether it is done with one hand or two, is to effectively communicate an idea or emotion, even if done privately as a reminder of Self.

#### Tattva Mudrās

The eight basic *tattva* mudrās are asaṃyuta mudrās.<sup>32</sup> Tattva mudrās are done as needed for greater mindfulness with the intention of bringing the thought and meaning of the mudrā with its corresponding cakra into manifestation. The tattva mudrās incorporate the elements of the universe with a corresponding cakra. The word tattva means “thatness” it refers to the Real that is seen in the elements of nature.<sup>33</sup> The Eight Great Tattva Mudrās (Figure 2) are; 1. *Gyān* (knowledge), 2. *Ākāśa* (sky), 3. *Pṛthvī* (earth), 4. *Indra* (Vedic god of

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<sup>28</sup> Bunce, xxvi.

<sup>29</sup> Nardi, Isabella. *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting: A Critical Re-Evaluation of Their Uses and Interpretations*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 83.

<sup>30</sup> Rao, 3.

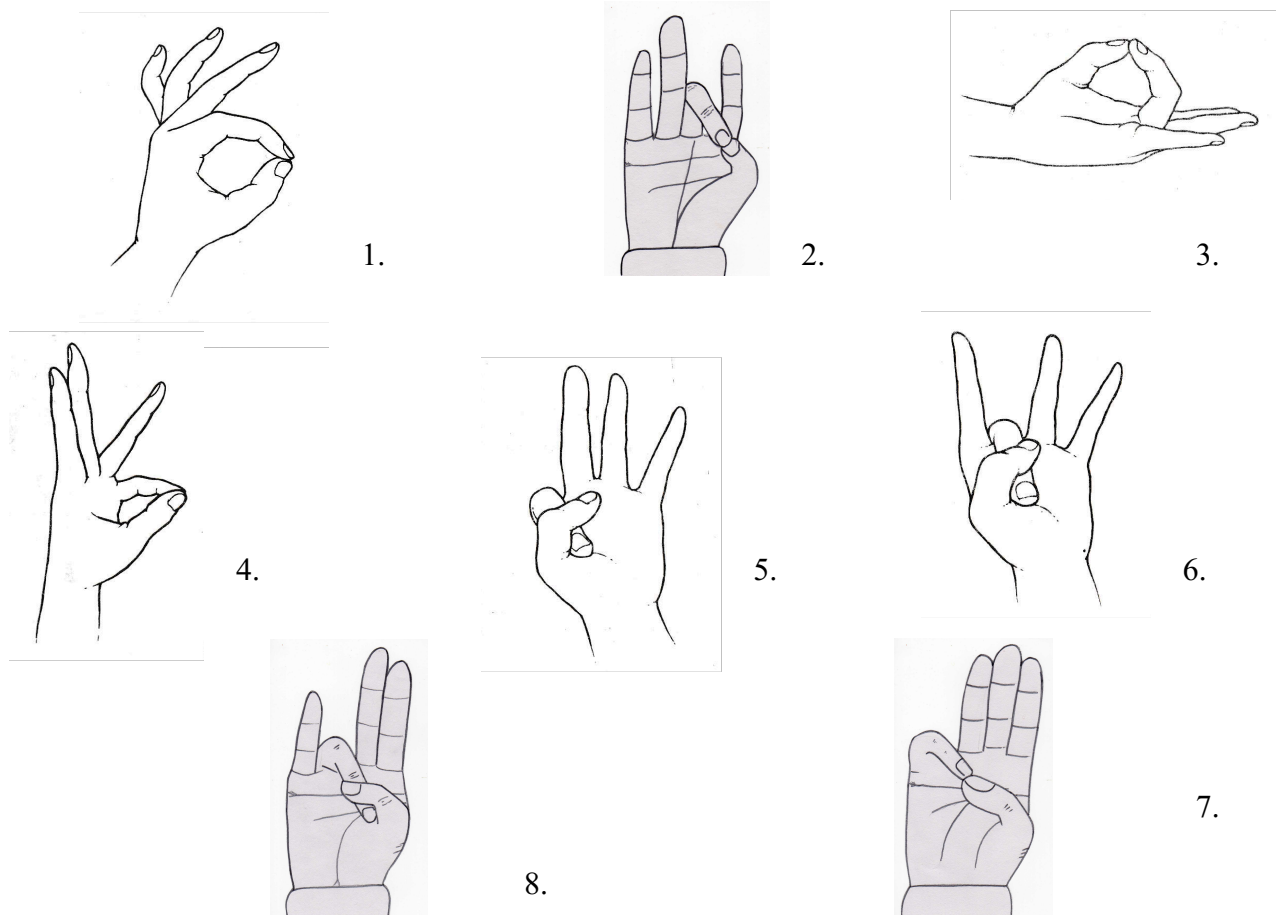
<sup>31</sup> Nardi, 84.

<sup>32</sup> Siddhartha, 27-57.

<sup>33</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 289.

water), 5. *Vāyu* (wind), 6. *Śūnya* (emptiness), 7. *Sūrya* (sun), and 8. *Varuṇa* (Vedic god of water).<sup>34</sup> The eight tattva mudrās can be classified into two categories; the first four remove the deficiency of a particular element, and the last four remove the excessiveness of a particular element.<sup>35</sup> Both categories restore balance of the five elements in the body. The tattva mudrās are illustrated below, and are further described in relation to the corresponding cakra in section III of this thesis;

The Eight Basic Tattva Mudrās (Figure 2)



<sup>34</sup> Deshpande, 422, 438, 445, 448, 450.

<sup>35</sup> Siddhartha, 26.



## Bābā Hari Dāss

In the summer of 2000, a girlfriend who was between jobs invited me to join her for a four-week “teacher” training (this was before Yoga Alliance was dictating industry standards) in Watsonville, California at the Mount Madonna Center. At that point in my life, the only thing I really knew about yoga was that I liked it. I had taken classes and workshops from some of the top yoga instructors in the country; Sharon Gannon, David Life, Bryan Kest, John Friend, Erich Schiffmann, Shiva Rea, and Jasmine Tarkeshi. So, there was no doubt I was more than fit for the āsana part, and thought this would be similar to the many workshops I had previously attended, just longer. What I didn’t understand, was those four-weeks would be different from anything I had yet experienced; living and studying at the institute, it introduced me into a rich culture, seeped in an ancient tradition. It was a way of life. Each morning before sunrise we would “sit” for two, forty-five minute meditation sessions, we would eat, study, practice, and work communally, and take part in morning and evening *ārati*, at the Hanumān Temple that surrounded a beautiful *mūrti* that Bābā Hari Dāss had brought back with him from India. My experiences at Mount Madonna marks a point of divide in my yoga evolution, in which sheer āsana classes were no longer satisfying in the way as they once were, my thoughts about yoga from then on were forever changed.

The spiritual leader of Mount Madonna is Beloved Guru, and Master Yogi Śri Bābā Hari Dāss, affectionately know as Bābāji. Each afternoon, Bābāji would offer teachings to those who gathered together in the center building after lunch and before afternoon tea.

Bābāji has not spoken since 1952.<sup>36</sup> He taught by writing answers to formal questions on a small, hand-held chalkboard, meeting with us informally, demonstrating practices, and most profoundly by his example of a still mind, his energy, spiritual discipline, and peace. What was most impressive to me was the complete and utter lack of ego. Bābāji’s teachings were very different from any other “yoga teacher” I had met thus far. A few times, he stared at me for seconds longer than a mere glance, it felt as if he recognized me, mystically, from another place and time.

Bābā Hari Dāss’s own spiritual path is not recorded exactly in written works but transmitted orally from one seeker to another. It is very much in keeping with his life and work as a humble, silent monk whose very being is a testament to discipline, yoga, and love. A commentator of Indian Scriptural Traditions of *Sāṃkhya* and *Vedānta*, he is classically trained in *Aṣṭāṅga* Yoga, Rāja Yoga, Sanskrit, as well as *Kriyā* Yoga, *Āyurveda*, and esoteric traditions of Tantra. He was born near Almora, India in 1923, into a 13th generation Kumaoni, Brahmin Family.<sup>37</sup> He grew up in the the Indian State of Uttarakhand, which includes Dunagiri known as the birthplace of modern-day Kriyā Yoga, and The Temple of *Śakti*, The Great Divine Mother. Rich in ancient lore, already known during times of the *Mahābhārata*’s, epic narrative of the Kurukṣetra War.<sup>38</sup> The region encompasses the Kumaon

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<sup>36</sup> Dāss, Bābā Hari. *Hariakhan Baba, Known, Unknown*. (Davis, CA: Sri Rama Foundation, 1975), 23.

<sup>37</sup> Dāss, Bābā Hari. *Fire Without Fuel: The Aphorisms of Baba Hari Dass*. (Santa Cruz, CA: Sri Rama Publications, 1986), 72.

<sup>38</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 62-63.

Foothills of the outer Himalayas.

In 1929, on the way to Haldwani, during the winter time, he received his first *darśana* with the sage Sombari Bābā Mahārāja, also known as Pārāmānandji Mahārāja, in the village Kakarighat by the Kośī River, where Sombari Bābā Mahārāja lived under a huge Banyan Tree in a tiny hut built into its roots.<sup>39</sup> It awakened a latent potential for spiritual growth, and an intellectual understanding in him. The American Poet, Gary Snyder, who is immersed in the Buddhist Tradition, explains *darśana* as “a gift... a moment in which the thing is ready to let you see it.”<sup>40</sup>

Bābāji left home shortly there after, at the age of eight, to begin his study and practice. He joined an ashram for young yoga renunciates, in the Jungles of Kumaon, where he was initiated into *Brahmacharya*. He became skilled in *Śaṭkarman* as outlined in the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* (ca.1401–500 B.C.E.), *Mudrās*, and Sanskrit.<sup>41</sup> As a teenager, he visited different villages in The Himalayan Mountains surrounding the ashram, and in that experience he encountered several Westerners who were learning yogic practices and remembered them as true seekers. This shaped his attitude towards an inclusive way of teaching yoga.

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<sup>39</sup> Dāss, *Fire Without Fuel*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> MacIver, Roderick. *Art as a Way of Life*. (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic, 2009), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 40.

He was initiated into *Samnyāsa Dīkṣā* at the age of 19 years in 1942, into *Vairagī-Tyāga*, in the order of Rāmānandī Sampradāya.<sup>42</sup> Its followers mainly emphasize the worship of *Rāma*, as well as *Viṣṇu* directly. It is the largest ascetic group that celebrates the Śivarātri Festival, dedicated to *Śiva*. Rāmānandī ascetics rely upon meditation and strict ascetic practices, but also believe that the grace of god is required for them to achieve *Mokṣa*.<sup>43</sup> For that reason, the Tyāga Section of the Rāmānandī Ascetics, unlike some Śaiva Ascetics, do not cut the sacred thread (worn as a symbol that exhorts the wearer to remember the purpose of his existence) but do use ash for their initiations.<sup>44</sup> Their reasoning for this is that only Viṣṇu or Rāma can grant liberation. Philosophically, they are in the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Tradition, and are by far the largest monastic order in all of India.<sup>45</sup> His guru, Raghubar Dāssji Mahārāja, a reclusive *sādhu*, a highly regarded renunciate and Sanskrit scholar, was known for minimal verbal communication and did not have a large disciple following.<sup>46</sup> He met with his disciples only once, every two or three years, to convey yoga *sādhana* instructions to his advanced followers.

In 1952, while staying in a cave in the cold of winter, Bābā Hari Dāss described a spiritual experience with the legendary Kumoan Yogi, Śri Haidakhan Bābāji. While sitting by

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<sup>42</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 457.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, Raymond Brady. *A Sacred Thread: Modern Transmission of Hindu Traditions in India and Abroad*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>45</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Tigunait, Rajmani. *At The Eleventh Hour: The Biography of Swami Rama*. (Honesdale, PA: Himalayan Institute, 2001), 93.

the side of the fire he fainted and his left arm fell into the flames. Bābā Hari Dāss writes; "I saw Hariakhan Mahārāja come into the room and bend over me..., I saw him clearly, removing my left arm from the fire pit... By some unknown power I was related to Hariakhan Mahārāja."<sup>47</sup> It is this event that led him to take a 12 year vow of silence. He subsequently decided to continue this austerity because it brought him peace and inner silence. In addition, he possessed only 3 pieces of clothing, ate just one meal a day for 12 years, and after that just goat milk for an additional 2 years, he stopped cutting his hair, and never asked for anything but at the same time, could not say no to any request.<sup>48</sup> Often asked why he practiced such an intense austerity, he said that it kept him from saying any bad thing, kept him from fighting, and quieted his mind. He then began to teach.

In 1967, Richard Alpert's quest to expand his consciousness lead him to Bābā Hari Dāss. On the recommendation of his own guru, Neem Károli Bābā, he received teachings from Bābāji in Rāja Yoga.<sup>49</sup> Bābā Hari Dāss taught the ex-Harvard professor who took the name Ram Dāss, in the late 60s. He was his sādhana tutor while Ram Dass lived in Kainchi. Each morning Bābā Hari Dāss would come from Hanumangarh, 10 miles away, to give Ram Dāss lessons.<sup>50</sup> The aim of training and practices of yoga sādhana for Ram Dāss was for him

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<sup>47</sup> Dāss, *Hariakhan*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Dāss, *Hariakhan*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Syman, Stefanie. *The Subtle Body the Story of Yoga in America*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 226.

<sup>50</sup> Dāss, Ram. *Be Here Now, Remember*. (San Cristobal, New Mexico: Lama Foundation, 1987), xix.

to become an adept practitioner and teacher of classical Aṣṭāṅga Yoga in the United States, in the yoga philosophy tradition of *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras*, and to increase interest in yoga and spirituality in general.

In Bābā Hari Dāss's teachings to him, he offered Alpert an explanation for the drugs he was ingesting to bring him closer to the divine, "Americans wanted a material for approaching God, and they got it in the form of LSD".<sup>51</sup> This wasn't all bad, according to Bābāji, for if you didn't believe in God, then how or why would you ever bother to seek the divine?<sup>52</sup> Ram Dāss is quoted as saying, "Hari Dāss is the real thing, a cave yogi." The letters between them were later included in Ram Dāss's 1971 book on spirituality, yoga and meditation, *Be Here Now*.<sup>53</sup>

Before Ram Dāss published his legendary book, Ruth Johnson-Horsting (who was later named Ma Reṇu by Bābāji), a Professor of Arts at The University of California, Davis in 1970, was contacted by her students Barbara Hurley, Mark Jungerman, and Paul C. Adams, who were traveling through India at the time in search of an advanced yoga teacher, when they came across Bābā Hari Dāss in Haridwar.<sup>54</sup> (Sometime later, the three were given the names Bondāna, Mahendra, and Prem Das, respectively, by Bābāji.) The prospect of inviting Bābā Hari Dāss to the United States was raised. On the recommendation of her

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<sup>51</sup> Syman, 227.

<sup>52</sup> Syman, 227.

<sup>53</sup> Dāss, Ram, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Dāss, Bābā Hari and Steven N. Thomas. *Ashtanga Yoga Primer*. (Santa Cruz, CA: Sri Rama Publishing, 1981), 10.

students, Bābā Hari Dāss was invited to the US by Ma Reṇu. She would be his sponsor, done for the purpose of teaching yoga. Ma Reṇu later wrote, "I felt there was no time to lose. I had already given my permission to sponsor his stay in America, but what had been intended as a short visit, turned into a 29 year darśana and blessing."<sup>55</sup>

The association of Bābā Hari Dāss and Ma Reṇu became a fruitful fulfillment of selfless service ideals over the years. Several projects and service missions have been formed in the US, Canada and India.<sup>56</sup> None of these works include Bābā Hari Dāss's name directly but instead always reference him as the inspiration behind the program's effort, including the Mount Madonna Center.

### Gāyatrī Mudrās

Bābāji teaches a cycle of twenty-four movements in preparation for meditation, done before *Gāyatrī Japa* of the thirty-two total Gāyatrī Mudrās, eight of which are done after meditation.<sup>57</sup> Devotion is the essence of all hand mudrās. Gāyatrī Japa is a form of *prāyaścitta* (atonement) and an instrument of Tantric practice done to bestow wisdom and enlightenment through the vehicle of the Sun, *Savitṛ*, first extolled in the *R̥gVeda*.<sup>58</sup> Practiced since Vedic times, every day millions of Hindus recite the Gāyatrī Japa as part of their

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<sup>55</sup> Dāss, *Fire Without Fuel*, 56.

<sup>56</sup> "Mount Madonna Institute." *Mount Madonna Institute*. Web. August 5, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Bunce, 278.

<sup>58</sup> De Nicolás, Antonio T. *Meditations through the R̥g Veda: Four-Dimensional Man*. (New York: Authors Choice Press, 2003), 61.

morning ablutions.<sup>59</sup>A triple recitation of the Gāyatrī Mantra done with a single breath is defined as *prāṇāyāma*, and is described as a measure. This mantra also includes the sacred syllable *OM*. “The regulation of the breath [as such] causes a switch in consciousness whereby attention becomes more focused, enabling the yogin to contemplate the transcendental Self.”<sup>60</sup> According to the Vedic hymn, the Gāyatrī Mantra:

*om āpo jyotī raso ’mritam brahma*  
*om bhūr bhavah subah*  
*tat savitur varenyam*  
*bhargo deasy dhīmahi*  
*chico yo nah pracodayāt*

*Om*. Water. Light. Essence. Immortality. The Absolute.  
*Om*. Earth. Mid-Heaven.  
Let us contemplate the most excellent splendor of God  
Savitri, so that He may inspire our contemplations.<sup>61</sup>

The Gāyatrī Mudrās are similar to the Eight Great Tattva Mudrās in that both at the core, are a form of reverence for the universal elements of which everything in the universe is composed. Both include the five life principal elements; pṛthvī (earth), āpa (water), vāyu (air), agni (fire), ākāśa (sky). In addition, Gāyatrī Mudrās have “five faces” which are also archetypal of the five life principals, “life forces” known as the five vāyus (winds); *prāṇa*, *apāṇa*, *vyāṇa*, *udāṇa*, *samāṇa*.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 300.

<sup>60</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 313.

<sup>61</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 301.

<sup>62</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 404.



The Gāyatrī Mudrās are saṃyuta or two-handed mudrās, thirty-two in total. There are twenty-four pre-meditation and eight post-meditation mudrās. The Gāyatrī Mudrās are to be done gracefully, and with a slow, steady breath flowing rhythmically. It is believed a good effect in chanting Gāyatrī Mantra can only be gotten when Gāyatrī Mudrās are performed, and done so properly. Gāyatrī Mudrās are “windows to spirituality”<sup>63</sup> The Gāyatrī Mudrās are a testament to the power and authority of hand mudrās. All mudrās are a mechanism of guiding the flow of energies in our body for the purpose of ultimately aligning with Self but hand mudrās in particular, are a powerful and potent instrument given to humans by the sheer advantage of birth.<sup>64</sup> The following is the esoteric name and meaning of each Gāyatrī Mudrā in the pre-meditation series;<sup>65</sup>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1.) <i>Samukhām</i> : Faces            | 13.) <i>Yāmpashām</i> : Chain of Death                  |
| 2.) <i>Samputām</i> : Bud              | 14.) <i>Granthitām</i> : Knot of <i>Māyā</i> (Illusion) |
| 3.) <i>Vititām</i> : Bloom             | 15.) <i>Unmukhonmukhām</i> : Up and Down Face           |
| 4.) <i>Vistrītām</i> : Expansion       | 16.) <i>Pralambām</i> : Spread Offerings                |
| 5.) <i>Dvimukhām</i> : Two-Face        | 17.) <i>Mustikām</i> : Joined Fist Offering             |
| 6.) <i>Trimukhām</i> : Three-Face      | 18.) <i>Matsyāh</i> : Fish                              |
| 7.) <i>Chaturmukhām</i> : Four-Face    | 19.) <i>Kurmāh</i> : Tortoise                           |
| 8.) <i>Panchmukhām</i> : Five-Face     | 20.) <i>Varahkām</i> : Boar                             |
| 9.) <i>Ṣaṇmukhām</i> : Six-Face        | 21.) <i>Simhakrantām</i> : Lion Nature                  |
| 10.) <i>Adhomukhām</i> : Down-Face     | 22.) <i>Mahakrantām</i> : Supreme Power                 |
| 11.) <i>Vyāpakāñjalikām</i> : Offering | 23.) <i>Mudgarām</i> : Club of Hanumān                  |
| 12.) <i>Śakatām</i> : Cart             | 24.) <i>Pallavām</i> : Leaf Swaying in the Wind         |

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<sup>63</sup> Siddhartha, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Chakrabarti, *Essay*.

<sup>65</sup> Dāss, *Ashtanga Yoga*, 61-65.

Gāyatrī Mudrā Before Meditation Series<sup>66</sup> (Figure 3)



<sup>66</sup> Dāss, *Chart Drawing* by Ragnath Rodney Polden.

After Gāyatrī Japa there are eight remaining hand mudrās to be performed “like salutations to God” in gratitude, done as a transition from meditation to outer awareness.<sup>67</sup>

The following is the esoteric name and meaning of each Gāyatrī Mudrā in the post-meditation series;<sup>68</sup>

- |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.) <i>Surabhī</i> : Cow           | 5.) <i>Śaṅkha</i> : Conch        |
| 2.) <i>Jñānam</i> : Knowledge      | 6.) <i>Pankajam</i> : Lotus      |
| 3.) <i>Vairāgyam</i> : Dispassion  | 7.) <i>Līṅgam</i> : Phallus      |
| 4.) <i>Yoni</i> : Female Sex Organ | 8.) <i>Nirvāṇam</i> : Liberation |

#### Gāyatrī Mudrā After Meditation Series<sup>69</sup> (Figure 4)



<sup>67</sup> Dāss, *Ashtanga Yoga*, 61-65.

<sup>68</sup> Dāss, *Ashtanga Yoga*, 65-66.

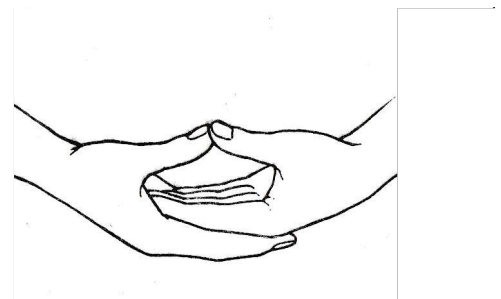
<sup>69</sup> Dāss, *Chart Drawing* by Ragnath Rodney Polden.

## Often Seen Mudrās

One of the most common two-handed saṃyuta mudrās is *Dhyāna* Mudrā, a ritual hand pose common in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In this position, the palms rest in the middle of the body, close to the abdomen. The wrists are placed gently on the thighs with fingers of palms lying on top of each other, thumb tips gently touching. The purpose is to allow rapid progression of the mind into deeper states of profound, abstract, non-conceptual meditation. It is traditionally held by a variety of figures; *bodhisattvas*, *arhats*, *bhaktas* (one who practices *bhakti*), etc.<sup>70</sup> In this image (Figure 5), the Buddha sits in *Dhyāna* Mudrā, flanked by two bodhisattvas.<sup>71</sup>



(Figure 5)



*Dhyāna* Mudrā

<sup>70</sup> Beer, Robert. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 154.

<sup>71</sup> Unknown. *Meditating Buddha Attended by Two Bodhisattvas*. 600–700. Marble. Asian Art Collection/ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Swat Valley, Pakistan.

An often seen asaṃyuta or one-handed mudrā occurring in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions is *abhaya-mudrā*. It is a Tantric Mudrā common to both Japanese and Chinese Buddhist (*Vajrayāna, Mantrayāna*).<sup>72</sup> In this monumental sculpture (Figure 6), Viṣṇu sits on a lion throne, relaxed, in *rājalīlāsana* known in Sanskrit as, “posture of royal ease”, “formed with the right knee bent vertically and the left knee bent horizontally with the heels lightly touching the seat, with the right hand raised in *abhaya-mudrā*.”<sup>73</sup> Abhaya means “lack of fear”.<sup>74</sup> In *abhaya-mudrā*, the hand offers the gift of fearlessness in the form of a greeting.<sup>75</sup>



(Figure 6)



Abhaya-Mudrā

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<sup>72</sup> Bunce, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Unknown. *Enthroned Vishnu*. 750–825. Granulite. Asian Art Collection/ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, India. Period: Pandyan.

<sup>74</sup> Deshpande, 421.

<sup>75</sup> Chakrabarti, *Essay*.



(Figure 7)

In one of the earliest iconic representations of *Shakyamuni* (Figure 7), the statue sits with its right hand in abhaya-mudrā with what appears to be an etched wheel in the palm of the hand.<sup>76</sup> The etching in the palm of the right hand is not unlike what in Jainism symbolizes an *ahiṃsā*, “non-harming”.<sup>77</sup> In this image, the wheel represents the dharma; in Sanskrit the noun *dharmah* is a derivation from the root ‘*dhā*’, which has a meaning of “to put, or place”, and takes on the thrust of “what is established or in place”, and hence “law, duty, right.”<sup>78</sup> It is also said to be derived from the Vedic Sanskrit ‘*n*’-stem ‘*dhṛ*’-with the meaning “hold” in the historical Vedic Religion conceived of as an aspect of *Ṛta*, the principle of natural order,

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<sup>76</sup> Unknown. *Seated Buddha*. 0–150. Bronze with Traces of Gold Leaf. Asian Art Collection/ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gandhāra (Pakistan).

<sup>77</sup> Babb, Lawrence A. *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 217.

<sup>78</sup> Goldman, 458.

“rightly formed” which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and every thing within it.<sup>79</sup> The dharma wheel in the palmar center of the hand helps guide students in the process of awakening to the unconfined nature of the mind.

### III. Mudrās and the Elements and Cakras

There are seven major cakras in all, which are arranged vertically along the axial channel of the body.<sup>80</sup> These are pools of vital energy which are constantly vibrating at different rates. Each cakra is associated with a distinct universal element, and governing psychosomatic functions. Five of the seven cakras have a corresponding mudrā, and finger of the hand it represents (discussed later in this section).<sup>81</sup> Each cakra is thought to stimulate the nerve plexuses of the physical body correlated to it. From the base of the spine up, the sequence of seven cakras are as follows; 1) *Mūlādhāra Cakra* (‘root support’) —situated at perineum, associated with the earth element, and depicted as a deep red four-petaled lotus. 2) *Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra* (‘own base’) —located at the genitals, associated with the water element, and depicted as a crimson six-petaled lotus. 3) *Maṇipūra Cakra* (‘jewel city’) — situated at the navel, associated with the fire element, and depicted as a bright yellow lotus of ten petals. 4) *Anāhata Cakra* (‘heart lotus’) —located at the heart, associated with the air element, and depicted as a blue lotus of twelve petals. 5) *Viśuddha Cakra* (‘pure’) —situated

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<sup>79</sup> De Nicolás, 160.

<sup>80</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 353.

<sup>81</sup> Siddhartha, 18.

at the throat, associated with the ether element, and depicted as a smoky violet sixteen-petaled lotus. 6) *Ājnā Cakra* (‘command’) —located between the eyes, associated with *manas*, or that aspect of the mind which is concerned with processing of sensory input, and is depicted as a pale grey or white two-petaled lotus. 7) *Sahasrāra Cakra* (‘thousand’) — situated at the crown of the head, associated with consciousness, and depicted as a “myriad of luminous filaments that compose it.”<sup>82</sup>

But it is the Anāhata Cakra also known as the *hrit-padma* (heart lotus), that is of most importance to the practice of finding joy in everyday life through the work we do with our hands.<sup>83</sup> It is the cakra responsible for the deep bonds we share with other beings, of caring and compassion, feelings of self-love, altruism, generosity, joy, kindness, and respect. It is the source of deep and profound truths that cannot be expressed in words. The Anāhata Cakra is a bridge between the lower and upper cakras integrating the manifest with the spiritual.<sup>84</sup>

Love experienced through touch can heal the heart in profound ways. This can be attributed in the palms of hands acting as a threshold for the subtle body, awakening the bioenergy of the heart cakra.<sup>85</sup> The Anāhata Cakra allows us to recognize that we are part of something larger, that we are interconnected within an intricate web of relationships extending through life and the universe. Truth in love is clearly felt in the anāhata cakra, and

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<sup>82</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 353-355.

<sup>83</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 384.

<sup>84</sup> Judith, Anodea. *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self*. (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1996), 236.

<sup>85</sup> Little, 39.



is supported by the subtle body or *sūkṣma śarīra*, which has “several related but distinct meanings”.<sup>86</sup>

In the chapter entitled, *Die While You Live and Last-Hour Yoga*, Georg Feuerstein describes *sūkṣma śarīra* as such: “At death the mind disentangles itself from the physical body, and the center of identity is shifted to the subtle vehicle —the so-called astral or ‘subtle body’ (*sūkṣma śarīra*)”.<sup>87</sup> This dropping away of self-identity is described as *śūnyatā* in Buddhist teachings, it allows the journey into the wisdom of the subtle body, into depth of the heart to take place.<sup>88</sup> *Sūkṣma Śarīra* is a place that transcends linguistic reference. The astral body is primordial, it is an empty awareness that allows one to connect with the true Self intuitively. In the subtle body, the spine along the spinal cord acts as a river with the palms of the hands acting like cakras, creating thresholds to the *sūkṣma śarīra* via *prāṇa*.<sup>89</sup>

*The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* mention the subtle body in the *Vibhūti-Pāda*, where there is a faint reference to the *svādhiṣṭhāna* cakra and to “the tortoise *nādī*, stability”.<sup>90</sup> Some scholars affirm the subtle body, “in which energy rising through the central channel makes

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<sup>86</sup> Syman, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Feuerstein, *Deeper Dimension*, 173.

<sup>88</sup> Little, 194.

<sup>89</sup> Little, 39-40.

<sup>90</sup> Patañjali. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: An Analysis of the Sanskrit with Accompanying English Translation by Christopher Chapple and Yogi Anand Viraj*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications a Division of Indian Centre, 1990), 93.

the lotuses bloom”, to be on the margin of Hinduism, and not significant to the heart of yoga<sup>91</sup>.

In my personal absorption of yoga, the subtle body is the key to delight, love, understanding and good relationships. It allows one to experience things on a level where labels and referential ideas fall away and, “the fullness of the interconnected world shines forth.”<sup>92</sup> It is the place that William James described as “inner union of the individual with the divine”, and where the genesis for hand mudrās as a practice of connecting to the divine springs forth.<sup>93</sup> In actions taken daily by hand, a subtle form of mudrā pervades our being (an elemental microcosm of the Universe) directly to the heart cakra, reconnecting us with Self.

The anāhata heart cakra heralds devotion. The Sanskrit word for feeling is *bhāva*, “condition, uplifted emotion state”, where empathy and kindness flourish.<sup>94</sup> The hands function to awaken currents of prāṇa or life, breath, and hence stimulate consciousness. Hands act as portals of awakening for the mind, “peripheral points” that function like cakras releasing energy and “mobilizing flow through the nādīs of the extremities.”<sup>95</sup>

Through recognizing the importance of using our hands purposefully, we can stimulate the subtle body via the elements that each finger symbolizes. “The five fingers of

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<sup>91</sup> Syman, 75.

<sup>92</sup> Little, vii-viii.

<sup>93</sup> James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh 1901-1902*. (London, 1903). 315.

<sup>94</sup> Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition*, 454.

<sup>95</sup> Krieger, Dolores. *Foundations for Holistic Health Nursing Practices: The Renaissance Nurse*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Lippincott, 1981), 52.

our hands are the depositories of the *Pran Śakti*—Vital Force.”<sup>96</sup> Significant energy emanates from the tips of our fingers, each finger symbolizes a different component of the Universe, including human beings. The energy in the hands can be adjusted to create equilibrium. Balance can be up set by a variety of factors. It is important to understand, and learn the mudrā practices that can once again bring back equilibrium.

According to Perlmutter and Cortez, the five elements and corresponding cakras are represented by each digit as follows; 1) the thumb represents the element of fire (agni) and connects to the Mañipūra Cakra, 2) the index finger is representative of the element air (vāyu) and is closely connected to the Anāhata Cakra, 3) the middle finger is representative of Viśuddha Cakra and the element of ether (ākāśa), 4) the ring finger is characteristic of the element earth (pṛthvī) and Mūlādhāra Cakra, and 5) Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra, is representative of the little finger and the element of water (āpa).<sup>97</sup>

Each cakra connects to and reflects our spiritual well-being, cakras can be enhanced and purified through the work we do with our hands. It is the anāhata cakra that makes the strongest connection between the world and the work of the hands, each finger representing a particular element as listed above.

Air or vāyu, the most essential of the five elements, not only rules the human body but the whole movement of the universe. Vāyu is associated with Indra’s weapon, the

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<sup>96</sup> Siddhartha, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Perlmutter, Leonard T., and Jenness Cortez. *The Heart and Science of Yoga: A Blueprint for Peace, Happiness and Freedom from Fear*. (Averill Park, NY: AMI Publishers, 2005), 318.

thunderbolt. It signals an awareness of the relationship of touch, memory, and communication. Indra is the presiding divinity of the hands.<sup>98</sup> Touch is used by Indra to bring about those who have lost contact with the direction of original power.<sup>99</sup>

The air element is closely associated with the fourth cakra, the anāhata cakra. The heart cakra influences such factors as “forming peer and family relationships, developing persona”.<sup>100</sup> This is why the connection between the heart and the hands is so strong; the love we feel for others is not only a sentiment but a way of responding to those closest to us. The expression of love is carried out in the work of the hands. The Anāhata Cakra gets to the heart of the matter, quite literally. In many ways it may be the most important cakra.

The traumas and abuses that can debilitate the heart cakra are rejection, abandonment, loss, unacknowledged grief, death of a loved one, betrayal, and abuses to any other cakra, especially the lower cakras. The heart governs its “social orientations and self-acceptance.”<sup>101</sup> Two mudrās correspond to the anāhata cakra most resoundingly. The first is the Gyān Mudrā (Figure 2; 1), done for discernment by connecting the thumb and the forefinger with the other fingers remaining straight but relaxed. The pressure between the thumb and forefinger is light. The second, Vāyu Mudrā (Figure 2; 5), is practiced for calmness by connecting the index finger to the base of the thumb, pressing down on the index finger lightly with thumb,

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<sup>98</sup> White, 239.

<sup>99</sup> De Nicolás, 129.

<sup>100</sup> Judith, 228.

<sup>101</sup> Judith, 228.

and with the other fingers straight but relaxed.<sup>102</sup>The balanced manifestation of the anāhata cakra is compassion, empathy, altruism, good immune system, peace. A healthy heart is encouraged by the deeds done by hand. The work organ of the anāhata cakra are the hands, hence the connection between heart and the hands is all the more remarkable.<sup>103</sup>

The element ākāśa or space, is mostly considered inactive due to its subtleness. Space governs the collective consciousness, or the set of shared beliefs, and moral attitudes which unifies society. Ākāśa enables ideas to resonate with the cosmos. The associated cakra with the element space is the fifth cakra —Viśuddha Cakra. The fundamental aspects of the fifth cakra are creative expression, communicative skills, and symbolic thinking. The corresponding mudrās are the Ākāśa Mudrā (Figure 2; 2) and the Śūnya Mudrā. The first is practiced for lightness of spirit, performed by connecting the middle finger and the thumb with the other fingers straight but relaxed. Pressure between the middle finger and the thumb is light.<sup>104</sup> The Śūnya Mudrā (Figure 2; 6) for relief from stress is activated by connecting the middle finger to the base of the thumb, then pressing the thumb gently down upon middle finger at the first phalangeal joint, with the other fingers straight but relaxed.<sup>105</sup>

The earth element, pṛthvī, governs the body's physical constitution including bones and tissues, with special effect on the sense of smell. The associated cakra for pṛthvī is the

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<sup>102</sup> Bunce, 272.

<sup>103</sup>Johari, Harish. *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation*. (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Book, 2000), 113.

<sup>104</sup> Siddhartha, 37.

<sup>105</sup> Hirschi, 82.

first cakra, the Mūlādhāra Cakra, the purpose of which is foundational. The corresponding mudrā for the Mūlādhāra Cakra, is the Pṛthvī Mudrā (Figure 2; 3). This mudrā, performed for strength; connects the tip of the ring finger and the thumb, then add light pressure between the tip of ring finger and the thumb, while the other fingers are straight but relaxed.<sup>106</sup>

Simultaneously, the agni element is grouped in the same mudrā category as pṛthvī because it removes the deficiencies associated with the element.<sup>107</sup> This is despite the fact, pṛthvī and agni produce quite opposite effects on the body and have separate cakras. The agni element controls the growth, glands, metabolism, and temperature aspects of the body. The corresponding cakra for agni is the third cakra, the Maṇipūra Cakra, the aim of which is transformational.<sup>108</sup> The corresponding mudrā for the Maṇipūra Cakra is the Sūrya Mudrā (Figure 2; 7) done for digestion by connecting the tip of ring finger at the base of the thumb, and the thumb upon the middle finger at the first phalangeal joint. Pressure is gentle. The other fingers are straight but relaxed.<sup>109</sup>

The fifth and final element constituting the human body is āpa, water. Water constitutes more than 70% of the human body<sup>110</sup>. Water influences tissues, joints, skin, tongue, and taste. The corresponding cakra is the second cakra, Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra, which

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<sup>106</sup> Siddhartha, 43.

<sup>107</sup> Siddhartha, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Judith, 170.

<sup>109</sup> Siddhartha, 46.

<sup>110</sup> Johari, 97.

offers the basic right to feel and have pleasure, and purpose of movement and connection.<sup>111</sup>

The corresponding mudrās are the Indra Mudrā and Varuṇ Mudra. The Indra Mudrā (Figure 2; 4) enhances lubrication by connecting the tip of little finger and the thumb, with light pressure between the tip of the little finger and the thumb.<sup>112</sup> The other fingers are straight but relaxed. The Varuṇ Mudrā (Figure 2; 8) creates stability and is activated by connecting the tip of the little finger at the base of the thumb and thumb upon the little finger, at the first phalangeal joint. Pressure is gentle. The other fingers are straight but relaxed.<sup>113</sup>

All cakras are important for human function and purpose. However, the fourth cakra, the anāhata cakra, is recognized by most of the world's spiritual traditions as the unifying force. It is with the use of our hands which closely coupled to the heart energy of love that is the most fundamental to the universe, offering “the right to love and be loved”.<sup>114</sup> The

*Taittirīya Upanishad* states the all important function of the heart cakra:

They have attained the goal who realize  
Brahman as the supreme reality,  
the source of truth, wisdom, and boundless joy.  
They see the Lord in the cave of the heart  
and are granted all the blessings of life.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Judith, 106.

<sup>112</sup> Siddhartha, 49.

<sup>113</sup> Siddhartha, 53.

<sup>114</sup> Judith, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Easwaran, 251.

The *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* embedded in the *Yajurveda*, links the hand and the heart when it proclaims: “The Self, small as the thumb, dwelling in the heart”.<sup>116</sup> In elevating the opposable thumb to the level of the innermost essence, the eternal Self, actions taken with the hand are not simply consequential but explicit to mokṣa (ultimate freedom) and one of the aims of life.<sup>117</sup> It can be argued the hand is essential to all four human goals known as the *puruṣā-arthas*. The other three aspirations are dharma (virtue, proper, morality), *artha* (material prosperity, income security, means of life), and *kāma* (pleasure, sensuality, emotional fulfillment).<sup>118</sup> The hand reveals what the heart desires where the Self resides.

#### IV. Mudrās and Healing Touch

There is an important question asked in the book cited earlier, *The Other Hand of God*. The question asks, “Is love one thing, and the feeling of love another?”<sup>119</sup> Author goes on to say “the capacity to love is a natural endowment” and “the feeling of love is a manifestation grace”.<sup>120</sup> Both of these ideas come into play when we consider the role of touch in love and nurturing as expressed in mudrās and healing.

It is been known for some time that skin-to-skin contact with babies is important for their general well-being. Touch helps calm babies, they cry less, and sleep better. There are

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<sup>116</sup> Easwaran, 174.

<sup>117</sup> White, 104.

<sup>118</sup> Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 207.

<sup>119</sup> McDonnell, 179.

<sup>120</sup> McDonnell, 180.



some studies that show a baby's brain development is facilitated by touch. One such study from The Massachusetts Institute of Technology reveals that:

1. The hands are dynamic energy generating system.
2. Energy from the hands may regulate organs and cells in the body interactively.
3. The hands generate patterns of energy. The hand energy patterns include electrical, magnetic, sound, pressure, temperature (infrared), and electrical energies.
4. Hand energy patterns may have interactive effects interpersonally and environmentally, as well as interpersonally.
5. Levels of consciousness may modulate hand energy patterns in health and illness, and conversely, hand energy patterns may modulate levels of consciousness.<sup>121</sup>

But touch is even more vital than this. Babies who are not held and nuzzled and hugged enough will literally stop growing and if the no-touch situation lasts long enough, even if they are receiving proper nutrition, the untouched baby will die. Mothers too benefit from touching their infants. Mother-baby touch reduces mother's stress level—they report lower levels of depression, they seem to be able to be more sensitive to their baby's cues, and babies are more responsive to the mother.<sup>122</sup>

Important studies confirm that among mothers who have just given birth, the skin area on their chest, the anāhata region, is a degree or two higher than the rest of their body, creating a natural warming area for the newborn. Mothers have the innate ability to thermoregulate for the baby—if the baby's temperature drops, the mother's temperature rises,

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<sup>121</sup> Bruce, Debra Fulghum, and Dolores Krieger. *Miracle Touch: A Complete Guide to Hands-On Therapies That Have the Amazing Ability to Heal*. (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2003), xv-xvi.

<sup>122</sup> Harmon, Katherine. "How important is physical contact with your infant?" Magazine Article. *Scientific American* 6 (2010).

and if the baby's temperature rises, the mother's drops. This takes place in the heart cakra region of the body, which is directly associated with love and kindness.<sup>123</sup>

The major avenue of human touch still is through the hands, with current neurological thinking being that the hand and brain evolved together.<sup>124</sup> Touch is probably one of the most primitive sensations. Many of us who have children have seen images on sonographs of tiny fetuses with thumbs already in their primitive, little mouths actively sucking. In this and in many other developmental markers, in and outside the womb, the touch experiences we have early on in life lay the framework for later psychological expression and inhibition.<sup>125</sup> In the “Touch” chapter of *A Natural History of the Senses*, the author asks, “What is a sense of one’s self?” To a large extent, it has to do with touch, with how we feel. Our “*proprioceptors* (from Latin for ‘one’s own’ receptors) keep us informed”.<sup>126</sup> The importance of touch cannot be underestimated in understanding our place in the world.

The hands and finger tips are filled with a dynamic power, generating patterns of vibrancy that we can learn to regulate. Hands are “perhaps the most significant diagnostic instrument in the world”.<sup>127</sup> This sentiment was described by Hippocrates in the fifth century as “the force that flows from many people’s hands”.<sup>128</sup> What Hippocrates could not have

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<sup>123</sup> Bigelow, Ann. “*What is so special about basic behaviors that come without thinking to most parents?*” Interview. *Scientific America* 6 (2010).

<sup>124</sup> Krieger, forward xiii (qtd. in Bruce).

<sup>125</sup> Krieger, forward xiv (qtd. in Bruce).

<sup>126</sup> Ackerman, Diane. *A Natural History of the Senses*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1990), 95.

<sup>127</sup> Bruce, 20.

<sup>128</sup> Bruce, 21.

know factually, was “the human hand contains 2,500 nerve receptors per square centimeter”, although he indeed sensed it intuitively.<sup>129</sup> The quote from the father of medicine and findings of modern, scientific research on the hand makes it abundantly clear that we need not worry a stylized, specific positioning of the hands, as in traditional mudrā is the only way to create a desired quality of being. In fact, cultivating the right intention, with the understanding of the dynamism of the hand, can make the action taken with the hand, even the most mundane, a possibility for transcendence.

How can one cultivate the power in the hands with deliberateness, and use the sense of touch for healing? Dolores Krieger, Professor Emerita of Nursing Science at New York University, and the founder of a teaching known as Therapeutic Touch states, there are “two intervening variables... critical to the process: The intentions to help heal another and... an overflow of prāṇa”. She goes on to say, “the healer... must have some belief system that underlies his action, if one is to attribute rationality to his behavior.”<sup>130</sup>

It’s important to acknowledge that even though therapeutic healing may seem incredibly simple, a dynamic process occurs. It is not unlike a yoga practice. There is an initial centering, where the prāṇa becomes more deliberate. Then there is an assessment of the current condition, followed by an action of intervention to clear away stagnate energy. In the next phase, there is a rebalancing to give what is needed, ending with a reevaluation of

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<sup>129</sup> Weintraub, Amy. *Yoga Skills for Therapists: Effective Practices for Mood Management*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 113.

<sup>130</sup> Krieger, Dolores. “*Therapeutic Touch: The Imprimatur of Nursing*.” *The American Journal of Nursing* Vol. 7, No.5 (May, 1975) Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

the current state, and closure. Each step can take several seconds, happening almost simultaneously, or it can last hours. Ideally, therapeutic healing should happen continuously through-out the day.

One way to regard mudrā healing as communicated and felt by others is through vibration. Vibration is a component of touch. A vibration is released when there is touch given or received. Mudrā healing is similar to *Nāda* Yoga, which focuses on omnipresent “music” or vibration.<sup>131</sup> *Nāda* is a Sanskrit word meaning “sound, noise”.<sup>132</sup> All things have a sound or vibration. In *Nāda* Yoga, the central component is *OM*, which is either sounded or experienced in silence. *OM* is a mixture of the sound of three letters, “*a-u-m*”, representing all of what has been, that which is and is to be.<sup>133</sup> It is analyzed in the *Maṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* as the three stages of consciousness made up of three letters and three worlds; the letter “*a*” is the spirit of waking souls in the waking world; “*u*” is the spirit of dreaming souls in the world of dreams; and “*m*” is the spirit of sleeping and un-dreaming souls.<sup>134</sup> The whole *OM* is said to be the primordial sound.<sup>135</sup> *OM* is absorbed by the Anāhata Cakra. *OM* is also used as a transcendental name for the *Trimūrti*, representing the union of the three gods

“*a*” (*Viṣṇu*), “*u*” (*Śiva*), and “*m*” (*Brahmā*).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Brahmananda, Sarasvati, Shri. *Nāda Yoga: The Science, Psychology, and Philosophy of Anāhata Nāda Yoga*. Second ed. (Monroe, New York: George Leone Publication Center: Ananda Ashram Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Deshpande, 435.

<sup>133</sup> Brahmananda, 6.

<sup>134</sup> Eknath, 200.

<sup>135</sup> Eknath, 121.

<sup>136</sup> Brahmananda, 30.

Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati equates the sound “*a-u-m*” in three terms; “*a*” for manifestation, “*u*” for growth, and “*m*” for completion. Sarasvati states: “Each phenomenon of the universe is passing through these (*a-u-m*) three phases... Nothing in the subjective or objective world is exempt from this law... The body, mind, senses, and even our thoughts are no exceptions to this rule.”<sup>137</sup>

“In therapeutic healing ‘listening’ refers to the state of intent and internal awareness.”<sup>138</sup> Hand mudrās create vibrations, and are a physical show of an inner awareness with a specific purpose. When we give attention to the entire being and listen alertly, vibrations take on a greater significance. When attuned to vibrations of all kinds, one can be in accord with what Sarasvati calls “inner nāda”.<sup>139</sup> Inner nāda is also referred to as the anāhata nāda, where vibration is spontaneous, self-existent and uncaused.<sup>140</sup> It is the unstuck sound, the sound of the void which transforms the world, *OM*. Mudrā is an apparition of an inner existence. Man can live without outer sounds, but he cannot survive without the inner vibration of Self, the ultimate Reality. The hands, an instrument of the heart, stimulate the human energy field of the anāhata cakra region creating vibrations known as anāhata nāda.<sup>141</sup>

Healing touch is based on scientific findings that support the intuitive wisdom of the body. Infants are immediately affected by the power of touch, and depend on touch for their

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<sup>137</sup> Brahmananda, 6.

<sup>138</sup> Krieger, Dolores. *Therapeutic Touch as Transpersonal Healing*. (New York: Lantern, 2002), 20.

<sup>139</sup> Brahmananda, 7.

<sup>140</sup> Brahmananda, 7.

<sup>141</sup> Krieger, *Transpersonal Healing*, 61.

very survival. The hands have the capacity to create both inner and outer vibrations, directly influencing emotional well-being and health. Vibrations from the actions taken by the hands resonates in the anāhata cakra region. The primordial sound *OM*, and results of hand mudrā are absorbed by the heart cakra.

## V. Western Comparison



(Figure 8)

An image akin to a mudrā can be seen in the most famous section of the Sistine Chapel ceiling in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Figure 8).<sup>142</sup> In this iconic fresco, the finger of God is outstretched toward Adam. Adam response seemingly to the imminent touch of God's index finger. This touch not only represents giving life to Adam, but to all humankind. The outstretched index finger in the mudrā method represents the anāhata cakra,

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<sup>142</sup> Michelangelo. *The Creation of Adam*. 1512. Fresco. Sistine Chapel - Vatican Museums, Vatican City, Rome.

and vāyu (air) which can be translated to symbolize breath, “vital breath”, prāṇa.<sup>143</sup>

Understanding the symbolism gives context to *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo, depicting the near-touching hand of God, His index finger, coming closest to Adam.



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)

The stretched out index finger is part of many Indian mudrās, including the most powerful and preeminent of mudrās, The Gyān Mudrā (Figure 9).<sup>144</sup> It is done by connecting the thumb and the index finger, tip to tip, with the other fingers straight but relaxed and light pressure placed between the thumb and index finger. Artistic depictions of great spiritual masters such as Gurū Nānak, Jesus Christ (Figure 10), Siddhārtha Gautama and Mahāvīra are

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<sup>143</sup> White, 105.

<sup>144</sup> Unknown. *Buddha Preaching the Dharma*. 1480–1815. Ivory. Asian Art Collection/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Sri Lanka, Kandy District. Period: Kandyan.

all shown regularly with this hand position.<sup>145</sup> Lord Kṛṣṇa gave his sermon in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to Pandava prince Arjuna in this mudrā. This mudrā signifies union of the *Buddhi* or the awakened intelligence with the mind, *Manas*.<sup>146</sup> It relates to the air element *vāyu*, and in this respect it can be interpreted as God giving breath to humans.<sup>147</sup> In addition to its many spiritual qualities, Gyan Mudrā has wide and varied health benefits. It also evokes the Goddess of Learning and Wisdom, Sarasvatī. This mudrā is excellent for teachers and students engaged in intellectual activities.<sup>148</sup>

Although the sensation of touch has been studied extensively in the West, the concept of mudrā has yet to be discovered fully. Art comes closest to depicting mudrā in Western culture. Art renderings of historical figures throughout the ages (as previously discussed in this section) are often depicted with hands prominently stylized. Comparisons can be made between mudrā and dramatic hand positioning. However, to describe the image of the hand as mudrā, solely on appearance would not be accurate and an assumption on artistic intent.

## VI. East Asian Comparison

The Chinese have taken a slightly different approach to wellness, and have developed an alternative view on human function based on concepts of rhythms and synchronicity. In

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<sup>145</sup> Unknown. *Plaque with the Baptism of Jesus*. 1150–75. Champlevé Enamel, Copper Alloy, Gilt. Enamels-Champlevé/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Meuse Valley, Netherlands.

<sup>146</sup> White, 386.

<sup>147</sup> Hirschi, 38.

<sup>148</sup> Siddhartha, 28.



her book, *Foundations for Holistic Health Nursing Practices: The Renaissance Nurse*, Dolores Krieger describes the Chinese way as “applied theories on orbisiconography (functional relationships within the body)” and “sinarteriology (the natural channeling of *ch'i* energy through conduits in the individual)”.<sup>149</sup> Both theories are based on the concept of *yin-yang*.



(Figure 11)<sup>150</sup>

The well-know *taiji* symbol (Figure 11) illustrates the belief of yin-yang by delineating life as having a seed of “bad” in the “good”, and a seed of “good” in the “bad”.<sup>151</sup> The forces of the universe are held in balance with equality at the root of all manifestation. There is an interconnectedness between yin-yang according to the Chinese system, five

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<sup>149</sup> Krieger, *Foundations* , 36.

<sup>150</sup> Shuifa, He. *Plate A*. 2014. Ink. *A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature's Deep Design* by Frank Wilczek. (London: Penguin Books , 2015.)Print. Painting especially prepared for front page of book.

<sup>151</sup> McGoey, Kathleen. *Harmonizing Heavens and Earth: A Daostic Shamanic Approach to Peace Work*. (Zürich: Lit, 2013), 85.

evolutive phases correlate to four out of the five material elements. The Chinese system retains the elements wood, fire, earth, water, with the exception of space in Mahābhūta theory being replaced by metal in Tsou Yen's system.<sup>152</sup> Air is not one of the traditional five Chinese classical elements.

Good health requires balance. There are serious consequences for living life in states of prolonged disequilibrium. "If the two forces [of yin and yang] are working in perfect balance, a unity is achieved which becomes a power in itself and has a controlled force behind it. On the other hand, imbalance and disharmony have no power, but disintegrate into total ineffectiveness. Anything out of harmony... is to be regarded as a failure in, or disturbance of, the balance of the yin-yang forces. This applies not only to humans beings but to all life in the maintenance of its health and wellbeing."<sup>153</sup>

The balance of yin-yang applies to the entire person. However, within the hand itself, lies a microcosm of nearly all functionality present in body. Viewing in interpreting the significance of each finger using the five evolutive phases and yin-yang, we see a complex system within the hand representing the energy of specific elements, planets in the solar system, and physical organs;<sup>154</sup> The thumb presents the earth element and the planet Saturn. The thumb corresponds to the organs, stomach, spleen and mouth. The thumb is connected to the *Yi* (意), or the intellect, and its energy influences our clarity. The index finger represents

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<sup>152</sup> Krieger, *Foundations*, 30.

<sup>153</sup> Copper, 1972: 39 (qtd. in McGoey, 85).

<sup>154</sup> Krieger, *Foundations*, 38.



the wood element and the planet Jupiter. The index finger corresponds to the organs liver, gall bladder and eyes. It connected to the *Hun* (魂), or the ethereal soul, and its energy influences our sensitivity. The middle finger represents the fire element and the planet Mars. The middle finger corresponds to the organs heart, small intestine and the tongue. It connected to the *Shen* (神), or the aggregate soul and its energy influences our creativity. The ring finger represents the metal element and the planet Venus. The ring finger corresponds to the organs lung, large intestine and nose. It connected to the *Po* (魄), or the corporeal soul and its energy influences our intuition. The little finger is represented by the water element

and the planet Mercury, the little finger corresponds to the organs kidney, bladder and ears. It connected to the *Zhi* (志), or the will and its energy influences our spontaneity.<sup>155</sup>

There are contrasting theories of universal order in varying traditions in relation to the hand.<sup>156</sup> Different fingers correlate to different elements and planets. This can yield dissimilar interpretations of the hand. When there appears to be conflicts, it is important use your own judgement and apply correlations that intuitively make the most sense. A personal understanding of the differing, vibrational frequencies found in the hand is necessary in order to effectively use these principles to heal and balance the body and emotions.

(Figure 12)

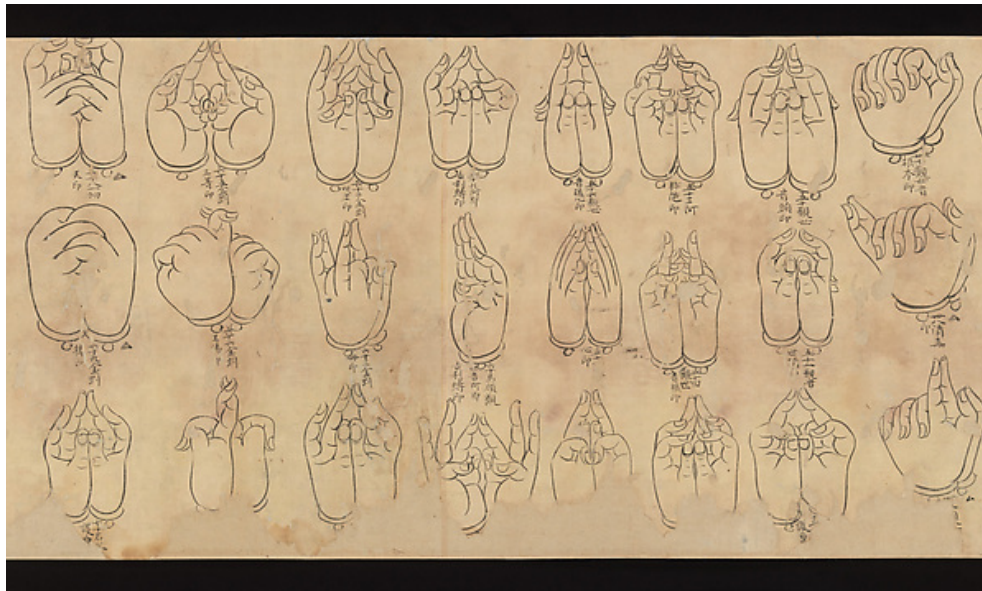
The above image, Immovable One (Figure 12), shows the posture of teaching with one finger of the right hand extended to call the earth to witness and the left hand in the *abhaya-mudrā*. A removable panel in the back reveals a cavity that contains a group of silks symbolizing the five vital organs: Liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidney are connected to the hand by representing each digit of the hand.<sup>157</sup> This wood sculpture highlights the principle

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<sup>155</sup> Kohn, Livia, and Harold David. Roth. *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 39.

<sup>156</sup> Krieger, *Foundations*, 1-278.

<sup>157</sup> Unknown. Akṣobhya. 1411. Wood (Linden) with Lacquer and Gilding. Asian Art Collection/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, China. Period: Ming Dynasty.



of interconnectedness between the five major organs and the different physical aspects of the body, encapsulating the energy of the hand itself.

(Figure 13)

The hand-scroll (Figure 13) depicts hand gestures in Japan.<sup>158</sup> The gestures are called *Insō*, the Japanese term for a Chinese word that combines the characters for "stamp" and "form."<sup>159</sup> In Mahāyāna Buddhism, mudrās are physical enactments of ultimate truths revealed through the *bodhisattvayāna* and other deities.<sup>160</sup> Practitioners of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan form mudrās during meditation and rituals and use them to interpret the

<sup>158</sup> Unknown. 白描印相図卷. 794–1185. *Hand-scroll*; Ink on Paper. Asian Art Collection/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Japan. Period: Heian.

<sup>159</sup> McGoey, 148.

<sup>160</sup> Beer, 150.

meaning of painted and sculpted Buddhist images.<sup>161</sup> This scroll was passed down in the Kyoto temple, Shōren-in, a Tendai-shū school temple traditionally administrated by imperial princes who had taken religious vows.

## VII. Conclusion

In this thesis, different types of mudrās have been explored. The mudrā has been examined by way of parallel aspects in the use of Hindu philosophy in Indian thought. Mudrās correlate with the elements and cakras. Mudrās can be used as a method of therapeutic healing. Both hand mudrā practices and therapeutic touch regard the hand as holding an intelligence that reflects the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimension of the whole person.

This view of awareness of the hand challenges the notion that the body is disconnected from experience. Mudrā techniques focus on developing internal awareness through the hand. The practice of mudrās adds a richer sense of the experience during occurrences in daily life. The hands provide a wide range of opportunities for the practitioner to transform habitual patterns. New ways of doing everyday tasks with awareness of the hands can be therapeutic and healing. Gradually, the awareness of the hands, by the application of mudrā, can reeducate habitual patterns of inertness, and incorporate opportunities to find transcendence and peace.

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<sup>161</sup> Beer, 152.

In the process, emotional disconnectedness, eventually a disease causing agent, can be disabled when applying mudrās within daily life. The practice of mudrās views the work of the hands as a critical component to development of a conscious life that is foundational for well-being, personal growth, and the future of mankind.<sup>162</sup>

### VIII. Appendix

Many years ago, a woman from Sydney, Australia opened a yoga studio in Las Vegas. I took my first yoga class there. Looking back now, I was lucky to have been introduced to yoga in that studio because it was a *mélange* of many different lineages, taught by people who were new to yoga themselves. The studio facilitated an environment of exploration, an experimental approach free of predetermined ideas, strict guidelines or judgements. It was in that studio, where pieced together from classes I had taken from Sara Liberatore (a young woman wise beyond her years) specific sequences began to emerge aimed at the subtle body, focusing on the *nāḍī* channels via the heart and hands, while using the *prāṇa* to move it all long.

Since those days, I have taken many workshops, trainings, and gone on to a graduate level of education in Yoga Studies, but the concepts I was introduced to in that first yoga studio have never left me. The following two suggested practices originate from my early days in yoga, when experience in accordance with the body was new and nothing short of miraculous. The methods have continued to evolve with the added benefit of authoritative

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<sup>162</sup> Chakrabarti, *Essay*.

texts, and have been practiced in a variety of settings, with a wide-range of individuals who possessed varied levels of ability. In today's world, the struggle to find respite from stress-filled existence is extraordinary. There is necessity for accessible practices that can be done anywhere at anytime.

*Pratyaham Practice:*<sup>163</sup>

This practice is intended to be a slow-motion movement practice, a subtle meditation done purposefully to slow the mind. It can also be used a few minutes before engaging in a longer meditative sit.

1. Start with you arms your sides. Lifting your arms overhead. Hold them there. Open and close your hands a few times. Be aware of each finger as you go. Stop and be aware of any tingling sensation that may occur in your fingers. Slowly release your arms back to your sides, concentrating on the micro-movements you are making as they flow through space.
2. Paying attention to slowing down helps you be mindful during the day. We can take the role of the observer while we are brushing our teeth or washing dishes, moving more slowly and seeing how it brings our mind into the present. Slowing down helps draw one into a dynamic flow of sensation, breath, mindfulness and awareness. A fascinating paradox emerges when you allow ourself to become absorbed in the small details of any physical action; embracing movement, you are inexorably drawn to the stillness within.

*Prabodhati Practice:*<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Deshpande, 439. Meaning; everyday.

<sup>164</sup> Deshpande, 440. Meaning; to awaken, wake up, recognize.



This practice is a moving meditation focused on the sensations in the body that often go unnoticed, stimulating the anāhata cakra and the flow of energy through the nāḍīs, as assessed through the hands:

1. Stand with your feet hip distance apart. Shake out your hands, as if you were flinging water off your fingertips. Deepen your breath slightly. When your hands feel energized, extend your arms out by your sides, palms facing up. Take a few moments to focus on the sensations in your hands. Feel, if you can, the pulse in your fingertips.
2. As you continue breathing deeply, take your right hand, with thumb folded inside palm, fingers together, to your outstretched left arm, palm up. Start gently tapping from wrist to slightly below shoulder, up and down, about the width of two fingers apart for each tap, several times. Stop, feel the flow of energy moving through the nāḍīs of the left arm. Continue, this time on the right arm, for a similar duration. Stop, feel the flow of energy moving through the nāḍīs of the right arm. Finish with both arms extended out, by your sides, palms facing up.
3. Bring both hands to your upper chest, fingers together, thumbs folded inside palms. Begin gently tapping, from side to side, up and down, on chest. Deepen your breath slightly.
4. With each breath, imagine energy filling your chest and upper body. Feel it flow down your arms and into your palms. Notice light and warmth filling your chest cavity, your rib cage, your arms, your hands.
5. Curl your fingers into palms, making small fists. Continue to gently tap your chest as before, increase the speed of the tapping as you go up and down, side to side like Tarzan. Stop, extend your arms and fingers directly out in front of you, palms facing inward. Rest your awareness in and around your hands. Feel the air touching your palms, fingers, and thumbs. Feel the outline of your hands, the space between your fingers and the space between your two hands. You may feel as if you're holding a ball of pulsing energy, or as if your hands were opposite poles of a magnet. Play with it, like an invisible ball. When you're ready, gently bring your arms along side to your face, palms facing out, elbows bent at an angle, with fingers and thumbs together. Deepen your breath slightly. Relax your shoulders.

6. Turn your hand palms to face out, in opposite directions. As slowly as possible, almost imperceptibly, feeling the smallest movement in your awareness, extend your arms out completely, very slowly continuing to keep your fingers together, pointing up. Feel the life in your hands and arms as you move. See how much you can slow down. Imagine the molecules of air rolling past your fingers. See if you can slow the motion down so much that your hands feel as if they're moving by themselves.
7. When it feels right, and your hands are completely extended, palms still turned out in opposite directions, bend your wrist, turn your palms down toward your body. Enjoy the stretch in your hands and wrists. Repeat a few more times, fingers up, fingers down.
8. Take a deep breath, and come into an easy sitting position. Bring your palms together, rub them ever so slowly at first. Imagine, if you can, the energy in your hands. Your mind is relaxed but also aware, witnessing the flow of sensation into your hands. Increase the speed of the rubbing, creating a little heat, faster, faster. Stop. Close your eyes, and gently bring your hands to your face. Placing the ball of yours palm in your eye sockets, take a deep breath. Inhale and exhale slowly. When you are ready, lower your hands, naturally to your body.
9. For the next few minutes, let your hands move naturally and your mind observe the smallest details of sensation. At some point, bring your hands to a place on your body that needs healing or attention.
10. In your own time, let your hands come to rest in your lap and sit for a few more minutes in silence, then let them be perfectly still.

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