



Mudra Yoga

by Jennifer Reis



KYTA
Conference
Presenter

The practice of Mudra Yoga opens your highest potential to feel and heal, inviting your deepest self to surface. An empowering and meditative practice, it is a doorway to exploring the potential of posture and meditation in a whole new light. You will come into a state of clarity to know and experience your innate wholeness, while gaining tools to transform and deepen both your own and your students' yoga practice.

Mudras are a bridge for awakening the body as a sacred temple of the divine. Hands are keys that can unlock the door to this temple.

History of mudras

Mudras are gestures or postures that are performed with the hands, face, or other key areas of the body. In Sanskrit, mudra means *gesture* or *seal*, referring to locking or sealing in a specific feeling, state, or energy for a particular effect. For example, Anjali

Mudra, commonly known as "prayer pose," awakens

and locks in feelings of reverence, peace, and connection to our own and all others' hearts.

Hand gestures have been practiced in most religious and spiritual traditions throughout history. For example, saints and spiritual beings like Jesus or the Buddha are depicted with their hands in specific postures. Religious practices of prayer and reverence use specific hand gestures. Think of Sufis dancing, or Muslims bowing with hands on the earth or facing the sky, or the Christian gesture for the Trinity.

Although present in other cultures, mudras were most highly developed in India. In the period of Tantra, from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, mudras were practiced, refined, and named, and their specific effects acknowledged.

Practicing Mudra Yoga

Mudras are a bridge for awakening the body as a sacred temple of the divine. Hands are keys that can unlock the door to this temple. As teachers, we can use mudras as a potent tool to bring our students into deeper and more refined experiences within the practices we are guiding.

Mudras can be incorporated into all aspects of practice, including intention, pranayama, mantra, meditation, and asana, to create powerful energetic themes and experiences in our classes. Mudras can be practiced with any level of student, health, or ability, and with any intensity level, from restorative to vigorous and vinyasa yoga.

How mudras work

- Each finger is related to one of the five elements according to yoga and Ayurveda. The various combinations of finger positions allow us to access and affect the five elements directly.
- Fingers have an extensive network of sensory and motor nerve endings as well as energy channels; thus mudras are a powerful vehicle for communicating and transferring information to the brain and energy centers.
- The fingers act as antennae for attuning to channels of universal energy such as abundance, love, and peace. We can connect to these frequencies with mudras and thus harmonize them within ourselves.
- Mudras are powerful vehicles for awakening every level of being (the five koshas).
- Mudras have been passed down through tradition and reflect the experiences of great spiritual masters, revealed in deep states of practice.

My knowledge of mudras originally came from training as an Integrative Yoga Therapist with Joseph and Lilian LePage, authors of the forthcoming *Mudras for Healing and Transformation*. They will teach [Integrative Mudra, Pranayama, and Bandha Teacher Training](#) September 16–23 at Kripalu.

Mudra Yoga practice: The five elements

This flow takes you through the five elements with their corresponding chakras. It is best to experience and integrate the practice of mudras before leading them for others. Come into the Mudra Yoga postures comfortably, and state the intention three times out loud, then silently.



"My roots run deep into the core of the living Earth."

Bhu Mudra (becoming, arising)—Malasana (Squat)

Earth element.

First Chakra: Root center.

- Grounding and calming.
- Awakens qualities of calmness, stability, safety, and support.
- Opens the pelvic floor with breath and vital energy.
- Nourishes legs, feet, and elimination system.
- Brings a sense of weight into frenetic energy.
- Good for travelers.
- Contraindicated for pregnancy.

➔ continued on page 5



"I flow with the rhythms of the rivers of life."

**Jala Mudra (water, liquid, flowing)
—Setu Bandhasana (Bridge)**

Water element.

Second Chakra: Navel center.

- Uplifting and energizing.
- Brings a sense of liquid aliveness to your entire being.

- Awakens qualities of soothing, nurturing, and expansion.
- Balances all fluid systems of the body: circulatory, urinary, lymphatic, and menses.
- Aids overall digestion.
- Massages and releases tension in low back.
- No known contraindications.



"I embrace and unfold my true life purpose."

Shivalingam Mudra (sacred creative force)—Parivritta Parsvakonasana (Rotated Lateral Angle)

Fire element.

Third Chakra: Solar center.

- Energizes and centers entire being.
- Gives a sense of trust, confidence, and personal power.
- Good for lethargy, lack of enthusiasm, and focusing attention.
- Activates digestive system.
- Brings expansion to rib cage, kidneys, and adrenal glands.
- No known contraindications.

Note: left hand is the base hand.



"My heart blossoms open in the warmth of living."

**Padma Mudra (lotus flower)
—Ustrasana (Camel) warm-up**

Air element. Fourth Chakra: Heart center.

- Opens the flower of the heart, revealing our wholeness.
- Heals emotional wounds of the heart.
- Awakens qualities of acceptance, compassion, self-love, and universal love.
- Relaxes muscles of chest and heart area.
- Can reduce feelings of stress and lower blood pressure.
- Increases breath capacity in lungs and circulation to thymus gland, assisting immune system.
- No known contraindications.



"Freedom is my true nature."

**Garuda Mudra (king of birds)
—Garudasana (Eagle)**

Space element.

Fifth Chakra: Throat center.

- Fills one with a sense of freedom: good for easing feelings of constriction in life.
- Softens tension in neck and shoulders, improving circulation to throat and thyroid gland.
- Lengthens neck and corrects cervical alignment.
- Balances right and left sides of body and organs.
- Opens back of the heart.
- Those with high blood pressure should practice with caution or visualize the mudra instead of performing it. ■

Jennifer Reis, E-RYT 500, studied mudras while training as an Integrative Yoga Therapist with Joseph and Lillian LePage. Jennifer is a senior Kripalu Yoga teacher who has been leading retreats and professional trainings since 1996. Her teaching is informed by her skill and knowledge as a shiatsu, Ayurveda, and licensed massage therapist. Jennifer will offer a workshop on Mudra Yoga at KYTA Conference 2011, October 4-7. ➔ www.jenniferreisyoga.com