



Mudras

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Mudras constitute the third step in the science of Hatha Yoga and evolve from the first two steps, asana-kriya and pranayama.

The required bodily shapes (asanas and karanas), combined with different modes of pranayama are adapted to create the mudras. The mudras form the bridge to the internal states of consciousness, Pratyahara (sense withdrawal), Dharana (concentration) and Dhyana (meditation – a sustained, unbroken flow to the point of concentration). Dhyana leads into the state of Samadhi, the mental state of equanimity which has two levels – Samani (with the support of the mind) and Unmani (beyond the mind). Unmani Samadhi is where the mind accepts the guidance of the soul and the soul awakens from its slumber. All these final stages of the path of yoga arise from and depend upon the mudras.

Before describing the mudras themselves it is helpful to consider the meaning of the term 'mudra'. The first part, 'mu' denotes the fulfilment of a joyous experience'; while the second part 'dra' refers to a sealed ring shape. The full meaning is therefore 'a sealed bodily gesture giving rise to a feeling of joy.'

From the cryptic terminology suggesting a ring shaped seal one can infer the role of the 'cricoid' cartilage that is shaped like a signet ring. The cricoid supports and protects the larynx and marks the transition to the trachea. The larynx and pharynx are channels of the spleen and stomach, through which the vital wind (pranavayu) moves up and down. The tension of the vocal cords is controlled by flexion or relaxation of the muscles attached to the cricoid. This modifies the tone of the voice. The cords can also spread or contract to permit or block the flow of respiration. The cricoid thus holds the secret of Jalandhara Bandha.



The second such 'ring' within the body is the navel. The area of the navel controls absorption and the eyes and ears are connected to it. The navel also controls space within the bodily structures. Below the navel and above the point where the urethra enters the bladder is the location of uddiyana and it is through the navel that one gains control of Uddiyana Bandha. The third ring is the anal sphincter which is controlled from the centre of the perineal floor and which gives rise to the state of Mula Bandha.

These three bandhas are the heart and soul of all the mudras. When they are held together at the same time this constitutes Maha Bandha. Once this is mastered one can begin the application of Mahamudra (the great seal). This is utilised after the completion of mantra nyasa and leads to Viparita Karani Mudra. This in turn leads into Pashini Mudra with its three stages of Vayu Bandha, Vajroli Mudra and Laya Mudra. These mudras prepare the field for the cultivation of Nabho Mudra, better known as Khechari Mudra 'the queen of the mudra kings'. Khechari Mudra is Kundalini in her full bloom.

Sixteen asanas are used as supplementary aids to prepare the body-mind complex for the adaptation of the mudras. Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath only gave these mudras. Later texts list many more and this is an indication of the decline of yogic culture, long before the advent of the glorified exercise systems that now misappropriate the term 'yoga'.

I will give a broader explanation of the science of mudra in my forthcoming book however the practical adaptation of the art of mudras must be learnt from a guide in whom they live. Otherwise one will face set backs through injury that, in turn, will lead to various types of disease.