

# Seal the Deal

*Fingers and toes are charged with divine power, which, when intelligently accessed and properly applied, can intensify the transformative power of the practice.*

*By Richard Rosen*



We usually don't think much about our fingers and toes during practice, unless we remember to spread the former in Downward-Facing Dog, or happen to stub the latter on a wooden block we've left lying around. But our fingers and toes (as well as our hands and feet) are charged with divine power, which, when intelligently accessed and properly applied, can intensify the transformative power of the practice.

You may have seen drawings or photos of yogis with their fingers pretzeled into odd configurations and wondered what they were doing. Each of these gestures, called a mudra (seal), is an archetypal or ritualized hand-pantomime, a visual "message" akin to a hieroglyph or ideogram. There are countless numbers of mudras, some made with one hand, others with two, some fairly simple, others considerably more complex. Although mudras can also be made with the tongue or eyes, we'll focus on hand mudras.

Symbolically, a mudra seals or "stamps" the mark of the god or goddess on the practitioner much like a signet ring stamps an impression on soft wax, signaling her complete devotion and self-surrender.

When linked etymologically with the verb mud, "to delight," the word mudra also suggests that by performing these gestures, we bring delight to our chosen deity. And it's said that during pranayama and meditation, a mudra helps seal prana in and recycle it throughout the body, preventing it from leaking out through the fingers. Moreover, the fixed hand position helps quiet restless fingers and in turn calms the brain. As an added bonus, some texts claim, mudras confer magical powers on the practitioner, such as healing others' illnesses (and maybe even exacting revenge on enemies) and assisting in the awakening of kundalini.

Traditionally mudras aren't performed with the feet. But still, the print your bare pada (foot) leaves on the ground is called a pada mudra, a "foot seal." Such a seal, when made by a deity like Vishnu or a sage, is worshipped with offerings of flowers and prayers.

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