

Mudras: Images of the Buddha were produced from the fifth century onwards. The sacred nature of the representation is reflected in the artistic goal of creating an aura of equanimity, perfection, and holiness. The large number of rules governing the execution of a portrayal or a statue require an erudite understanding of Buddhist symbolism. Any Buddha figure made by a skilled artist exhibits a multitude of characteristics that communicate subtle meanings and intentions to the viewer. The most important of these characteristics are perhaps the mudras, or hand gestures, of the Buddha. These well-defined gestures have a fixed meaning throughout all styles and periods of Buddha images.



Bhumisparsha Mudra
Touching the earth as Gautama did, to invoke the earth as witness to the truth of his words.



Varada Mudra
Fulfillment of all wishes; the gesture of charity.



Dhyana Mudra
The gesture of absolute balance, of meditation. The hands are relaxed in the lap, and the tips of the thumbs and fingers touch each other. When depicted with a begging bowl this is a sign of the head of an order.



Abhaya Mudra
Gesture of reassurance, blessing, and protection. "Do not fear."



Dharmachakra Mudra
The gesture of teaching usually interpreted as turning the Wheel of Law. The hands are held level with the heart, the thumbs and index fingers form circles.



Vitarka Mudra
Intellectual argument, discussion. The circle formed by the thumb and index finger is the sign of the Wheel of Law.



Tarjani Mudra
Threat, warning. The extended index finger is pointed at the opponent.



Namaskara Mudra
Gesture of greeting, prayer, and adoration. Buddhas no longer make this gesture because they do not have to show devotion to anything.



Jnana Mudra
Teaching. The hand is held at chest level and the thumb and index finger



Karana Mudra
Gesture with which demons are expelled.



Ksepama Mudra
Two hands together in the gesture of 'sprinkling' the nectar of immortality.



Uttarabodhi Mudra
Two hands placed together above the head with the index fingers

again form the Wheel of
Law.

together and the other
fingers intertwined. The
gesture of supreme
enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths

1. Life means suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is attachment.
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. The path to the cessation of suffering.

1. Life means suffering. To live means to suffer, because the human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in. During our lifetime, we inevitably have to endure physical suffering such as pain, sickness, injury, tiredness, old age, and eventually death; and we have to endure psychological suffering like sadness, fear, frustration, disappointment, and depression. Although there are different degrees of suffering and there are also positive experiences in life that we perceive as the opposite of suffering, such as ease, comfort and happiness, life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete, because our world is subject to impermanence. This means we are never able to keep permanently what we strive for, and just as happy moments pass by, we ourselves and our loved ones will pass away one day, too.

2. The origin of suffering is attachment. The origin of suffering is attachment to transient things and the ignorance thereof. Transient things do not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas, and -in a greater sense- all objects of our perception. Ignorance is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things. The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, ardor, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in short: *craving* and *clinging*. Because the objects of our attachment are transient, their loss is inevitable, thus suffering will necessarily follow. Objects of attachment also include the idea of a "self" which is a delusion, because there is no abiding self. What we call "self" is just an imagined entity, and we are merely a part of the ceaseless becoming of the universe.

3. The cessation of suffering is attainable. The cessation of suffering can be attained through *nirodha*. Nirodha means the unmaking of sensual craving and conceptual attachment. The third noble truth expresses the idea that suffering can be ended by attaining dispassion. Nirodha extinguishes all forms of clinging and attachment. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Attaining and perfecting dispassion is a process of many levels that ultimately results in the state of *Nirvana*. Nirvana means freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, fabrications and ideas. Nirvana is not comprehensible for those who have not attained it.

4. The path to the cessation of suffering. There is a path to the end of suffering - a gradual path of self-improvement, which is described more detailed in the Eightfold Path. It is the middle way between the two extremes of excessive self-indulgence (hedonism) and excessive self-mortification (asceticism); and it leads to the end of the cycle of rebirth. The latter quality discerns it from other paths which are merely "wandering on the wheel of becoming", because these do not have a final object. The path to the end of suffering can extend over many lifetimes, throughout which every individual rebirth is subject to karmic conditioning. Craving, ignorance, delusions, and its effects will disappear gradually, as progress is made on the path.