

## Mudras & Hand Symbolism: Hand Symbolism & Beliefs Part 2

[Note: This paper contains images which may be seen as originally published at our website]

According to its votaries, the hand of the crucified Jesus is believed to possess occult virtues. When worn as an amulet it is said to be an all-round good-luck charm. Prayers are said in conjunction with its presence on one's person. One prayer associated with this particular amulet is as follows:

"I carry a likeness of your pierced hand as a fervent symbol of your infinite kindness. Thou who has known such suffering, reach out your hand with a blessing. Thy pierced hand inspires this humble prayer that I may call on Thee to grant me peace and happiness. Amen."

Generally, charms in the form of hands, and in any pose--whether made of metal, stone, or inscribed--were often carried to ward off the "Evil Eye," or the *ietattura* as it is called in Southern Italy, or *ain al-hasad*, the "Eye of Envy," by the Arabs. The ancient Sumerians referred to it as *IG-HUL*, "Eye Evil." The Evil Eye is an ancient belief and not without any metaphysical substantiation. From the metaphysical point of view, eyes radiates energy and the quality of this force is tainted by the will and character of its emanator. Like all forces, the power flowing from the eyes may bless or curse others. There are many examples of amulets with a single eye on the palm of the hand. It is believed that this attracts the Evil Eye in accord with the Law of Attraction and absorbs its malevolent influences.

In order to counteract the malignant rays emanating from the eyes of negative individuals, the *Hamsa Hand*, or the *Hand of Fatima* charm was invented by the Arabs to re-direct these individuals' willful attention and malefic glances. Fatima was the daughter of the Prophet Muhammed and Khadijah. She was said to be a very virtuous woman, and it is believed that the charms representing her embody all of her solid virtues and would protect and bring good fortune to its bearer. The fingers of the *Hand of Fatima* symbolically represent the five pillars of Islam: 1) observance of the Ramadhan fast; 2) pilgrimage to Mecca; 3) alms-giving; 4) observance of the daily prayers; 5) profession of faith. The right hand is used to symbolize the *Hand of Fatima*, for it is the hand of honor, in contradistinction to the left, which is the "unclean hand." In most Eastern cultures it is considered rude and inappropriate to give things with the left hand.

Like the Arabs, the ancient Egyptians used a symbol called "the Great Hand" for various protective purposes, one of which is to ward off evil magnetism. Most hand amulets appear with a single eye on the palm. There are instances of this in various cultures.

Amulets were not of value only to the living, but to the "dead" as well. In ancient Egypt, an amulet called *dejebau*, or "two-fingers" were often placed among a mummy's swathings to help the deceased one to ascend and ride on the boat of Ra to the afterlife. This amulet depicted the index and middle fingers and was usually made out of black basalt, green stone, or obsidian.

During the enunciation of a pledge the right hand is often raised in the air. This originated in ancient customs where the raising of the hands were used to invoke the presence of the gods. Raising the right hand while making a pledge is therefore, tantamount to saying, "In the name of God . . ." Another version is to place the right hand on a holy book while uttering an oath. The significance is similar to the above.

In the West, many hand-signs have been made popular with its constant use throughout the centuries. For instance we have the V-sign with the index and middle finger raised while the others flexed and clasped by the thumb. This signified victory and triumph. Similar to this is the *Mano Cornuto*, where only the index and little finger are raised, and the rest folded onto the palms. This represents horns, the devil, and the powers of evil. In the Orient, though, this sign is said to have the power to ward off demons. *Kuan Yin* is often depicted with this mudra. The *Hung Society* of China uses it as a sign of membership and also to signify "Man," who embodies both Heaven and Earth. In Italian witchcraft, the *Mano Cornuto* represents the crescent moon of the goddess *Diana*.

Another prominent hand sign is the *Mano Fica*, or *figa*, the sign of coitus where the thumb protrudes between the first and second fingers of the closed hand. It is of ancient origin The Romans and Etruscans were well familiar with this sign having made images of it. Like *Mano Cornuto*, the latter sign is a popular amulet against negative forces. Crossing the index finger with the middle finger also has a sexual significance. It symbolizes the generation of life and by association a good outcome in one's hopeful expectations, in one's enterprise possessing an ambiguous upshot. Another sexual gesture much more explicit is the repeated insertion and withdrawal of the forefinger of the right hand (the phallus) into a circle formed by the thumb and index finger of the left hand (the vulva). The pose of the left hand in the above gesture is also an "O.K." sign.

One of the old superstitions states that the sexual act brings good luck, good fortune, and prosperity. Perhaps because of its connection to fertility rites where the energy aroused and released during sexual ceremonies in open fields is believed to empower crops to grow abundantly. This belief is also one of the reasons why phallic and coital amulets were carried on one's person. Such charms were thought to bring about fortunate circumstances to the wearer. Sexual amulets made out of metal, bone, and wood were very popular in the classical worlds of Greece and the Roman Empire.

A hand sign that is mainly used by the sacerdotal priesthood of the Christian Churches, is the Mano Pantea. This is the sign of benediction posed by extending the thumb and first two fingers. The ring and little fingers are folded onto the palms. This mudra can be seen in the various paintings and murals of Jesus, the Saints, and priests. In Latin countries, the Mano Pantea is also often used as an amulet against the "Evil Eye," when thus employed it is normally covered with other protective symbols as reinforcements.

An upraised thumb represents the erect phallus and is a sign for life, success, prosperity, and acceptability. In contrast, the downward pointing thumb denotes defeat and is the veto sign of condemnation or the death sentence. The middle finger solitarily extended is one of the obscene gestures vulgarly referred to as, "up yours." It signifies the command to perform an unnatural or perverse sexual act.

The famed Buddhist temple, Borobudur in the island of Java was constructed in the form of a mandala--a symbolic diagram of the cosmos. It is built in tiers, and at every level, there are numerous statues of Buddhas sitting in silent meditation. At each point of the compass the contemplative Buddhas assume a certain mudra. Those facing North bear the Abhaya (fearlessness) mudra, while those in the East show the Bhumisparsha (earth-touching) gesture. The Dana (giving) mudra is the hand pose of the Buddhas facing South, and the Dhyana (meditation) mudra of those facing West. Other mudras in the precincts of the temple are also to be found such as the Vitarka (debate) and Dharmachakraprayatana (teaching) gestures. This careful orientation of mudra bearers to compass points is symbolic. It is related to the quaternary principles to be found in the micro- and macrocosm. Comprehensive teachings concerning these may be found in the esoteric aspects of Buddhism and esotericism in general.

Symbolic marks or imprints are often found on the palms of statues and icons of Buddhas and Avatars. These marks indicate the power, virtue, or attribute of these God-incarnates. In Hinduism, Shiva appears the most with these hand drawings. Many kinds of marks exist. Several are to be found on just the palms of Gautama (Shakyamuni) Buddha alone. These palmar designs probably originated from the special marks that do physically appear on the palms. Cheiromancy identifies several of these as the square, the grille, the island, the cross or star, etc.

Hands were revered by the Hindus for centuries. One of the Shivaic tantrik rituals of India gives the following liturgical adoration to the fingers of the hands:

"Om Sham I bow to the thumbs Namah. Om Shim I bow the index fingers Svaha. Om Shum I bow to the middle fingers Vashat. Om Shaim I bow to the ring fingers Hum. Om Shaum I bow to the little fingers Vaushat. Om Shah I bow to the front and back of hands Phat."

This chant is accompanied by specific mudras that purifies the subtle channels of the upper limbs. Not only is this ritual practiced in India but variations of it may be found in Bali as well.

In the marriage ceremonies and sexual rites of Oriental cultures such as in Tantrism, Yoginis or Shaktis often paint Yantras and other symbolical diagrams on the palms of their hands with henna or red dye. These diagrams normally have intricate floral patterns and are magical and hypnotic. They are used to attract, to mesmerize, and to empower themselves and their sexual partners.

In Islamic mysticism, specific gestures are often employed to help produce an altered state of awareness. Dervishes, for instance, pose their hands in specific mudras and hand signs while dancing and whirling around on a single spot. Some Sufi sects would trace the 99 names of God on their bodies with their right hand while engaging in zikir, or recollecting and focusing upon God through constant chanting.

In ancient times there were the Mystery Schools that taught to the selected few the laws and secrets of Nature and the Universe. History has recorded numerous of these schools and temples of esoteric knowledge among which were the mysteries of Isis, Sabazius, Cybele, Eleusis, Orpheus, Mithra, Asar-Hapi, and Odin. To state the mission and purpose of these metaphysical institutions we can do no better than to quote the eminent Freemason, Robert Macoy:

"It appears that all the perfection of civilization, and all the advancement made in philosophy, sciences, and art among the ancients are due to those institutions which, under the veil of mystery, sought to illuminate the sublimest truths of religion, morality, and virtue, and impress them on the heart of the disciples. Their chief object was to teach the doctrine of one God, the resurrection of man to the eternal life, the dignity of the human soul, and to lead the people to see the shadow of the deity, in the beauty, magnificence, and splendor of the universe."

Within some of these Mystery schools, when the candidate is first initiated and accepted as a neophyte, he or she is often given an effigy of a human hand filled with symbolic images to contemplate. This hand is referred to as the Hand of the Philosopher, or the Hand of the Mysteries. When these symbols are understood, they provide the neophyte the keys to facilitate the transformation of their lower nature into divinity--from man to god. Regeneration, transmutation, and empowerment are the consequence of the application of the laws and principles that these ancient symbols

represent. Among the many secrets that they portray, they teach how one may commune with one's Holy Guardian Angel, or one's Higher Self. The practitioner of the secrets of the Mysteries undergo a rebirth as a result of the growing influence and expression of the Higher Self in everyday consciousness.

The Philosopher's Hand may be regarded as an alchemical manual taking the conscientious student step by step through the alchemical process. In Freemasonry, the Hand of the Mysteries is known as the hand of the Master Mason. In some Masonic groups, this is the title for the highest of the three degrees to be found in the hoary and august fraternity. In this article we have included three examples of these symbolical hands. The first illustration shown is a bronze hand to be found in the British Museum. This specimen in the Mano Pantea gesture, is covered with several important symbols among which are : a ram's head, serpent, frog, vase, crocodile, turtle, cornucopia, scales, woman with child, table with loaves of bread, and a cane. It is supposed to be Egyptian in origin.

The second hand is a painting redrawn by J. Augustus Knapp from an 18th century water color, and is taken from Manly Hall's "Secret Teachings of All Ages"; it was executed with the alchemical process in mind. In this illustration there is a figure of a fish which symbolizes mercury--the principle of the Spirit within the microcosm. This aquatic creature is surrounded by the element of fire that represents the psychological aspect of man, or the human soul. The rest of the fingers individually refer to the various steps of the spiritual path of transmutation of the base nature of man into the resplendent gold of divinity. Kabalistically, the hand shows the mastership of the crowned thumb (the Will) over the four worlds represented by the fingers. These four worlds are referred to as Atziluth, Briah, Yetzirah, and Assiah, or the World of Archetypes, the World of Creation, the World of Formation, and the World of Manifestation. Atop of the fingertips in Knapp's illustration are symbols representing the various components of the microcosm: the lantern, the Concrete Mind; the Sun, the Abstract Mind; the Star, Buddhi; the Crown, Atma. The little finger holds aloft a philosophical key, which reveals the secrets of the Mysteries. It also symbolizes the etheric body, which is considered by Western Initiates as the key to occult development. The wings surrounding the hand is a sign for transcendentalism--the things of the Spirit as opposed to matter. The eyes, on the other hand, indicate the divine aspect of omniscience unfolded in the Master Mason after having discovered and applied the "Lost Word."

Hindu versions of the Hand of the Mysteries are diagrams known as Hastakara Yantra. Like their Western counterpart, these hands have various symbolic images depicted on them. Among other things they illustrate the relationship between man and the cosmic forces.

Like Hindu yoga, in Feng Shui, or Chinese geomancy, there are 5 elements: Water, Wood, Earth, Fire, and Metal. In Chinese palmistry the little finger is associated with air, the ring finger with fire, the middle finger with earth, the forefinger with water, and the thumb with chi or metal as mentioned before. This system differs from the Hindu yogic mudra tradition. First of all, in yoga philosophy the fifth element is akasha or space, which although correspond to chi, does not relate to metal at all. According to mudra teachings, Angutha or the thumb corresponds to fire, Tarjani or the forefinger to air, Madhyam or the middle finger to akasha, Anamika or the ring finger to earth and Kanishthika, or the little finger to water. In this work on mudras, we will stress more on the Hindu yogic assignment of the elements to the fingers and thumb. The application of elemental mudras in conjunction with the elemental tattvic tides is a great tool in elemental magick.

#### Hand Signs in Religious Art

Hand signs are an essential part of life. They are used to convey silently but powerfully the intention and thoughts of their user. Humanity has for ages utilized sign languages. It originated at a period of Man's evolution when he was incapable of communicating his abstract and concrete thoughts with words and phrases lingually. He was solely dependent upon gesticulations as a media for expressing his feelings and passions. This primitive form of communication is still being used by modern man in certain situations and expediency. Not surprisingly, the intelligent classes of anthropoids also make use of hand-sign movements such as the beating of the chest in expressing anger or authority. The fictitious Tarzan could not resist aping this gesture from his Darwinian guardians.

Certain specific hand signs are to be found all over the world. Many cultures preceding and succeeding the Christian era share common gestures that express particular concepts. It has been suggested that these gestures all have comparable basic ideas or significance because of their appearances in similar contexts. This is known through their repeated portrayal in the many paintings, sculptures, and drawings of the past available for our scrutiny and study. Mediaeval Christian art of saints, prophets, and the Holy Trinity, and the gods and devas of Egypt, India and the South American Indians are often depicted with similar hand positions.

Contemporarily, we find school children perpetuating certain traditional signs that have their origin in religion and pagan practices. For instance, crossing the fingers as a sort of prayer so that they may be free from chastisement when interrogated of their wrong behavior--this may be a corrupted form of the ecclesiastical use of the Sign of Benediction.

There are many professions that make use of signs only known to their members or affiliates. For instance, merchants, masons, tramps, gamblers, prostitutes--all have signs known only to themselves with which they signal one another.

Because of the profuse use of signs and gestures by the Italians in their everyday life, anthropologists believe that these descendents of Romulus and Remus are not able to carry out a satisfactory conversation if they were prevented the use of gesticulation.

Occultists believe that most gestures or hand signs that are found in religion and in society have a common origin in the prevalent Mystery Schools of the past where they were used in a ceremonial setting. Modern Freemasonry as one of the many descendents of these Occult Temples of Wisdom and Knowledge still perpetuates this custom of hand signs in their initiatory rites.

Like the Freemasons, secret societies in the Orient also have ceremonies where esoteric signs are employed. One of the secret associations of China, the Hung Society, have certain signs and gestures with which communication is carried-out among the affiliated members--not only in the ceremonies but in everyday life as well. The aforementioned society, likewise, have plentiful mudras or signs representing the principles of their philosophy. In its doctrines, the five elements of Taoist esotericism are signified by poses that are also to be found elsewhere around the globe.

The mystical Dervishes, established by the Sufi Rumi, apply hand signs for occult purposes. They invoke the Divine Presence by utilizing these signs that corresponds with the 99 names of God in their dance rituals, as already alluded to previously.

Artists of all ages have secret codes and teachings with which they unveil in their artwork. In archaic times it was a dangerous matter to openly publicize occult and spiritual teachings that religions steeped in fundamentalism were dramatically opposed to for these teachings threatened their political structure and lessen their value in the eyes of an evolving humanity. It is for this reason that the Mystery and metaphysical schools established by the ancient sages went underground and operated clandestinely. They promulgated their teachings through signs and symbols that acted on one level as their calling card.

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