
Illustrating Iconography of Buddhism



Illustrating Iconography of Buddhism

Project 3 | Report

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Sr. Communication Design

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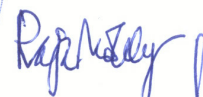
IDC, and all the faculty, for cultivating a holistic design sensibility within me and encouraging me to explore new avenues of Communication Design;

My Parents and friends, for being an unconditional pillar of strength and support.

Thank you.

Approval Sheet

This Communication Design project report entitled “Illustrating Iconography of Buddhism” by Palash T. Bawankar is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Design degree in Communication Design.

Project Guide: 
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Place: Mumbai

Declaration

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Name: Palash T. Bawankar

Signature: 

Date: 17.04.2017

Place: Mumbai

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Abstract

Buddhism has made very larger impact on the Art history of India. It is the fourth largest religion followed in the world. Buddhism has 3 vehicles to enlightenment; Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Vajrayana includes embodiment of Sunya called Adi Buddha or Vajradhara. Dhyani Buddhas were emanated from Adi Buddha and Dhyani Bodhisattvas with Saktis were emanated from Dhyani Buddhas which were responsible for Creation. Due to major incarnations in Vajrayana, Buddhism has wider scope for Iconography which can be classified into Idols, Mandalas, and Mudras (Hand postures).

In this project, I will be concentrating on Mudras. Mudras are a non-verbal modes of communication and self-expression, consisting of hand gestures and finger-postures. It is an external expression of 'inner resolve', suggesting that such non-verbal communications are more powerful than the spoken word. Mudras are thus gestures which symbolize divine manifestation. They are also used by monks in their spiritual exercises of ritual meditation and concentration, and are believed to generate forces that invoke the deity. Another interesting meaning is given to the idea of the mudra. It reveals the secret imbued in the five fingers. In such an interpretation, each of the fingers, starting with the thumb, is identified with one of the five elements, namely the sky, wind, fire, water, and the earth. Their contact with each other symbolizes the synthesis

of these elements, significant because every form in this universe is said to be composed of a unique combination of these elements. This contact between the various elements creates conditions favorable for the presence of the deity at rites performed for securing some desired object or benefit. That is, mudras induce the deity to be near the worshiper.

This project give an emphasize on illustrating this deeper meaning imbibed in Mudras through the series of posters. It will also include the exploration of the delicate forms of Mudras through illustrations. It will not only be relevant for the Buddhist followers but also the students of Design and Art who wants to study and wants to know the meaning behind Iconography in Buddhism.

Introduction

With the reign of the Buddhist Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, Indian Art is majorly influenced by Buddhism. The Hinayana school, which influenced the construction of the stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut, was as vigorous as the Mahayana school. The sculpture of Sanchi and Bharhut is spirited and full of life. The jataka stories, the Yakshas and Yakshinis, are portrayed with great force. The figure of the Buddha is however absent. He is represented symbolically by the Wheel (Dharmachakra) and other symbols. In the Hinayana form, the Buddha image had no place as the Buddha himself was against image worship. With the rise and spread of Mahayanism in North-West India the image of Buddha was introduced into Buddhist art. The new school which sprang up in Gandhara and Mathura at the same time in the first century A. D. defied the Hinayana school and gradually the image of the Buddha began to adorn all subsequent Buddhist sites, in India and outside.

Buddhism has three vehicles to enlightenment; Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The Buddhist conceive of the world as being composed of five cosmic elements which have no beginning and no end. These five elements are form (Rupa), sensation (Vedana), name (Samjna). conformation (samskara) and consciousness (Vijnana). In Vajrayana mythology, the cosmic elements are given an anthropomorphic form and made divinities, who, like the Hindu Hiranyagarbha

(Golden Germ), and the first Duality, create the entire world of form. As the Hindu Reality is non-manifest, undivided, without form, attributes, and timeless, the Vajrayana Reality is Sunya, One and Indivisible. The Vajrayana Sunya gave birth to a polytheistic system. Vajrayanists called their primordial god as Adi-Buddha or Vajradhara, considered as the embodiment of Sunya. The Buddhas of Meditation owe their origin to this first manifestation of Sunyata. When Adi-Buddha is represented in an anthropomorphic form, he is called Vajradhara. It is said that, Dhyani Bodhisattvas were emanated from Dhyani Buddhas and the Dhyani Buddhas owe their origin towards Adi Buddha or Vajradhara.

Due to major incarnations in Vajrayana, Buddhism has wider scope for Iconography. The word “iconography” is derived from the Greek words “eikon” meaning “image” and “graphos” meaning “to write.” The icon image is a visual symbol of the invisible. Icons express images in the spiritual realities that are inexpressible in words and inaccessible to our rational mind.

In Buddhism, it can be classified as-

- 1) Idols
- 2) Mandala and
- 3) Mudras.

1) Idols: Idols of deity and icons have been a part of

the historic practice, and Buddhist texts such as the 11th-century Sadanamala, wherein a devotee visualizes and identifies himself or herself with the imagined deity as part of meditation.

2) Mandala: Mandala are mystical maps for the visualization process with cosmic symbolism. There are numerous deities, each with a mandala, and they are used during initiation ceremonies and meditation. The mandalas are concentric geometric shapes symbolizing layers of external world, gates and sacred space. The meditation deity is in the centre, sometimes surrounded by protective gods and goddesses. Visualizations with deities and mandalas in Buddhism is a tradition traceable to ancient times, and likely well established by the time the 5th-century text Visuddhimagga was composed.

3) Mudras/Hand Posture: Mudras are a non-verbal modes of communication and self-expression, consisting of hand gestures and finger-postures. They are symbolic signs based finger patterns taking the place, but retaining the efficacy of the spoken word, and are used to evoke in the mind ideas symbolizing divine powers or the deities themselves. The composition of a mudra is based on certain movements of the fingers. They constitute a highly stylized form of body or hand language.

Mudra is an external expression of ‘inner resolve’, suggesting that such non-verbal communications are

more powerful than the spoken word.

Many such hand positions were used in the Buddhist sculpture and painting of India, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. They indicate to the faithful in a simple way the nature and the function of the deities represented. Mudras are thus gestures which symbolize divine manifestation. They are also used by monks in their spiritual exercises of ritual meditation and concentration, and are believed to generate forces that invoke the deity.

A mudra is used not only to illustrate and emphasize the meaning of an esoteric ritual but also it gives significance to a sculptural image, a dance movement, or a meditative pose, intensifying their potency.

Our hands are a source of tremendous power. With such profound dexterity, sensitivity, and utility, the human hands may be one of our most defining features as a species. Playing guitar, delivering a baby, knitting a sweater, building a house, wielding a sword, painting intricate figures: through the use of our hands we create and shape the world we live in. Hands can heal, hands can harm. One touch can convey a wide array of thoughts, feelings, or intentions. Hands tell the story of our mood or state of mind. When we feel angry, a clenched fist; when anxious, fidgeting fingers. Even plants and animals

respond to the subtle nuances of our touch.

With the hands playing such a central role in our experience of being human, it comes as no surprise that many of the world's great spiritual and artistic traditions have considered the hands as sacred. With five digits, twenty-seven bones, and fifteen joints—plus numerous carpal joints affording articulation of the wrist—the human hand is a masterpiece of nature. Perhaps, this is why many cultures throughout history viewed the human hand as a perfect microcosm of the universe. For example, the shaman kings (Wu) of ancient China viewed all things in the animated world as emanations of the changing relationship between five fundamental principles (commonly referred to as the Five Elements): Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal. They viewed the human hand as one of the most poignant examples of these five principles, with each of the fingers representing one the Five Elements (Earth/thumb, Metal/index, Water/little, Wood/ring, and Fire/middle). These relationships, and the character of each finger based on the theory of Five Elements, are woven into the philosophy and practice of all the traditional Chinese arts: calligraphy, Traditional Chinese Medicine, astrology, martial arts, cha dao (tea culture), classical music, dance, and theater.

In many of these arts, specific hand positions and gestures are used in relationship to the precise effect desired by the practitioner. For example, a Chinese shaman might instruct a patient suffering from anxiety to tuck her thumbs into her palms and hold them firmly. Since the thumb relates to Earth, closing the other fingers around it creates an energetic seal, a mudra, which imparts a sense of safety and stability, thus reducing anxiety. In Chinese calligraphy, the brush is held firmly with the thumb, index, middle, and ring finger while the little finger is tucked slightly in and not used. This is in an effort to conserve the energy of the kidneys (Water), giving the calligrapher a certain vitality that can be seen in the qi of their brush strokes. A similar tradition emerged in ancient India, where Vedic sages and Tantric yogis developed a highly nuanced cosmology with the Pancha Maha Bhuta (“Five Great Elements”) as the basic foundation. The Pancha Maha Bhuta of the Indian cosmological system is similar, but not identical to, the Five Element theory used throughout East Asia.

Indian rishis (seers) discovered a direct connection between the Pancha Maha Bhuta and the five fingers of the human hand. They emphasized that the relationship of the Pancha Maha Bhuta in the body should remain balanced and in harmony with the rest of the natural world. They taught that any

disorder in the body or mind indicates an excess or deficiency in one or more of the Elements. In such an interpretation, each of the fingers, starting with the thumb, is identified with one of the Pancha Maha Bhuta, namely the sky, wind, fire, water, and the earth. Their contact with each other symbolizes the synthesis of these elements, significant because every form in this universe is said to be composed of a unique combination of these elements. This contact between the various elements creates conditions favorable for the presence of the deity at rites performed for securing some desired object or benefit. That is, mudras induce the deity to be near the worshiper.

Through centuries of research and experimentation with techniques used to influence the bhutas—as well as influential exchanges with other Asian traditions—they developed an elaborate system called Yoga Tattva Mudra Vijnana. This unique branch of Vedic wisdom clearly describes the relationship between the five fingers and Five Elements, and sets forth an extensive system of mudras whose influence is seen in many of the classical disciplines of India: dance, theater, architecture, painting, medicine (Ayurveda), martial arts, and yoga. Since all the classical arts of India were evolving within the context of Vedic and Tantric spirituality, the cosmology of the Pancha Maha Bhuta and the presence of mudras are almost ubiquitous.



Mudras are divided into :

1. Asamyukta Mudra (Left hand or Right hand)
2. Samyukta Mudra (Both hands)

Right hand gestures



Protection (Abhaya)



Argument (Vitarka)



Witness
(Bhumisparsha)



Charity (Varada)



Ascetic
(Shramanamudrâ)



Understanding
(Cincihna)



Threatning (Tarjana)



Banishing (Karana)



Beyond Misery
(Buddhashramana)



The Performance of
Homage (Tarpana)



The Lion (Harina)



Knowledge (Jnana)



Discord (Kartari)

Left hand gestures



Leisure (Avakasha)



Flower-holding (Kataka)

Both-hand gestures



Meditation (Dhyana)



Meditation with bowl



Teaching
Dharmacakrapravartana)



The Embracing Gesture
(Vajrahûmkara)



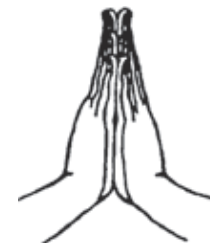
Knowledge Fist
(Vajramudra)



Perfection (Uttarabodhi)



Nectar Sprinkling
(Kshepana)



Praying (Namaskara or
Anjali)

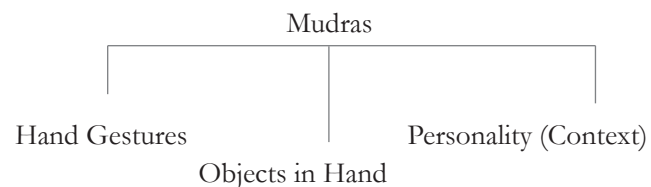


Holding the Jewel
(Manidhara)



Warding Off Evil
(Bhûtadâmarâ)

These hand gestures and objects in hand also gives recognition to the Idol or personality which defines context. On the basis of this, these Mudras are classified as:



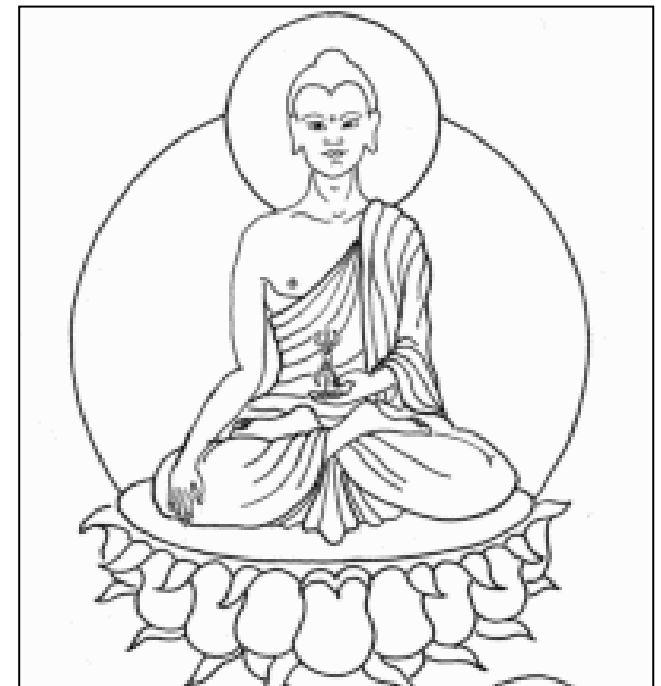
There are many deities in Buddhism, which are classified into Dhyani Buddhas and Major Bodhisattvas. The Dhyani Buddhas can be easily recognized. They sit on a lotus seat, in deep meditation, with their legs crossed in the adamantine pose with the soles of the feet turned upwards and the palms of the hands joined and facing upwards, with or without a bowl placed on the hands. The half-closed eyes point to the tip of the nose. The Buddhas may wear a tricivara, a close-fitting long robe extending from neck to ankles. The apparel is so arranged that the right hand and right shoulder are left free for the functions of meditation. Each Dhyani Buddhas has his cognizance symbol and colour. The recognition symbols are: Amitabha - lotus; Aksobhya - thunderbolt; Ratnasambhava - jewel; Amoghasiddhi - double thunderbolt, and Vairocana - discus. The consorts of the Dhyani Buddhas and their Dhyani Bodhisattvas have the same recognition symbols and colours as their Kulesas.

Amitabha



Amitabha is the oldest of the Buddhas in Meditation. He is presently in the Sukhavati heaven, engaged in deep meditation. He presides silently over the present Kalpa (Age) which is the Bhadra kalpa. He is the embodiment of the cosmic element Samjna (name). He symbolises the vital fluid and represents the summer season. (Red).

Aksobhya



The Nepal Buddhists regard him as the second Dhyani Buddha. He embodies the cosmic element Vijnana (consciousness), and represents the winter season, the faculty of hearing and the elements of Ether and Sound. (Blue).

Vairocana



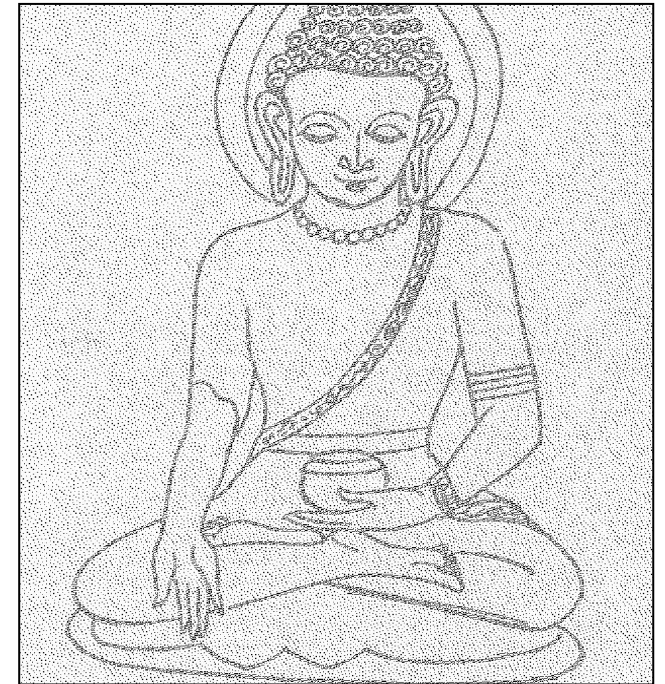
In Nepal, Vairocana is ranked first amongst the Dhyani Buddhas and is placed in the sanctum sanctorum of the stupa. He symbolizes the cosmic element of Rupa (form). He is also the embodiment of ideal knowledge. He represents the Hemanta season (Autumn). (White).

Amoghasiddhi



He is regarded as the fifth Dhyani Buddha. He embodies the cosmic element of Samskara (conformation) and represents the rainy season. (Green).

Ratnasambhava



Ratnasambhava, the third of the Dhyani Buddhas, is the originator of the Ratna (jewel) family. He embodies the cosmic element of Vedana (sensation). He presides over the spring season.

Chart explaining Buddhist Deities

BUDDHIST DEITIES (Pls. 156-191)							
DHYĀNI BUDDHAS AND MAJOR BODHISATTVAS							
	VAJRADHARA Ādi-Buddha (Fig. 1)	VAJRASATTVA (Fig. 9)	AMITABHA (Fig. 21)	AKSOBHYA	VAIROCANA	AMOGHASIDDHI (Fig. 28)	
<i>Symbols</i>	Thunderbolt and bell in two principal hands; two right hands carry sword and goad; two left hands carry skull-cup and noose	<i>R.h.</i> —thunderbolt <i>L.h.</i> —bell	Lotus symbol. Two hands in meditation pose	Thunderbolt. Touching the Earth attitude (Bhūsparśa)	Wheel. Attitude of preaching	Double thunderbolt Protection attitude	
<i>Vehicle</i>	—	—	Peacock	Elephant	Lion or Dragon	Eagle	
<i>Hands</i>	Six	Two	Two	Two or eight	Two or eight	Two	
<i>Āsana</i>	Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	Adamantine pose*	?	Meditation	
	RATNASAMBHAVA (Fig. 8)	MAITREYA (Fig. 10)	ĀVALOKITEŚVARA	MANJUSRI (Fig. 29)	VAJRAPĀNI	RATNAPĀNI (Fig. 15)	JNĀNAKETU (Fig. 26)
<i>Symbols</i>	Cintāmaṇi jewel	Preaching attitude <i>L.h.</i> —Nāgakeśara flower <i>R.h.</i> —boon-giving pose	Lotus <i>L.h.</i> —holds lotus <i>R.h.</i> —protection pose	Sword and book	<i>R.h.</i> —protection pose <i>L.h.</i> —thunderbolt	<i>R.h.</i> —jewel <i>L.h.</i> —disc of moon on lotus	<i>R.h.</i> —flag with jewel <i>L.h.</i> —boon-giving pose or resting on hip
<i>Vehicle</i>	Lion	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Hands</i>	Two	—	Two, four	Two, four or six	Two	Two	Two

Objective and Focus

The objective of this project is to illustrate the Iconography of Buddhism for better understanding of their meaning as well as for remembering the auspicious events connected to it.

In this project, I am focusing on Mudras (Hand gesture) in Buddhism.

Data Collection

A. Primary

B. Secondary

A. Primary Data Collection

1. Visit to Kanheri Cave

2. Conversation with Bhadant Sanghapriya

3. Visit to Global Vipassana Pagoda

1. Visit to Kanheri Cave



An evenly carved wall at Kanheri

The Kanheri Caves (Sanskrit: Kānherī-guhā) are a group of caves and rock-cut monuments formed from a massive basalt outcrop in the forests of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, on the western outskirts of Mumbai, India. They contain Buddhist sculptures and relief carvings, paintings and inscriptions, dating from the 1st century BCE to the 10th century CE. Kanheri comes from the Sanskrit Krishnagiri, which means black mountain.

Roland Barthes rightly remarked, “Narrative is a universal phenomenon which is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.” There are nearly 108 caves at Kanheri, depicting the life events of Buddha, carved beautifully and so evenly into the stone. I could observe how the ancient artists or sculptors used their art to narrate the stories and justify the life events of Buddha. I could also observe the style used for depiction, the anatomical structure of the body of Buddha, the Mudras (Hand



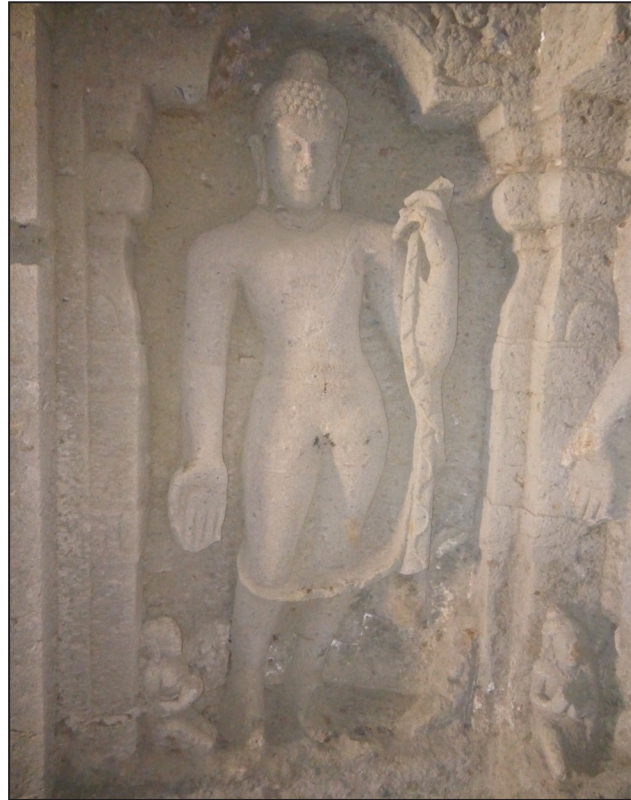
A story on Abhaya Mudra

gestures) used, way of sitting posture, the objects shown in hands and also the modes of visually narrating the stories.

I could see the three consecutive stories on Abhaya Mudra in which Buddha is protecting the mankind from various beasts like lion, elephant and snake, respectively.

Though most of the hand gestures were broken, I could see the repetition of Dharmachakra Mudra by most of the seating figures of Buddha in the caves. The standing figures of Buddha are in the gesture of Varada Mudra by right hand whereas ‘Padma’ (an object) in the left hand. There are few walls which have both sitting as well as standing figures of Buddha in separated compartments somewhere small and somewhere

larger in size in Varada and Dharmachakra Mudra respectively. I could see the existence of a lotus below Buddha's feet throughout the caves. The guard or the disciples standing near the figure of Buddha have hold the objects like 'Chauri' and also the 'Padma' in their hand. The figure of the Buddha was shown larger as compared to the guard or the disciples.



Buddha in Varada Mudra and Padma in hand



On the spot sketch - Dharmachakra Mudra

2. Conversation with Bhadant Sanghapriya

Bhadant Sanghapriya is Bhadant from Buddha vihar at Hiranandani, Mumbai. He has been following this path since last 15 years. When I met him, I had very few information related to Buddhism. I wanted to know everything about the Buddha and his teachings and also wanted to discuss the scope of my project in this area with him.

I could get all the introductory information from him, which helped me further study these things for my project.

These are some of the insights from this conversation:

1. Buddha's body show 32 signs externally which are considered as the reflections of his internal enlightened state.

2. Siddhartha's father King Suddhodhana had 2 wives Mahamaya and Mahaprajapathi Gautami. Mahamaya gave birth to Siddhartha and died soon after few days. Queen Mahaprajapathi Gautami looks after Buddha's

upbringing. Due to which Siddhartha was called Siddharth Gautama.

3. The cycle of birth and death ends after gaining the state of Buddha (Enlightenment).

4. Till the attainment of enlightenment in the life of Siddhartha, he took several number of births which were called Bodhisattvas, mentioned in the Jataka tales.

5. Meditation is the only way through which you can attend the state of enlightenment.

6. Buddha showed only one path to the enlightenment. But the people and monks later added or subtracted few things and divided Buddhas teachings into the cult of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. And started following them as per their understanding.

7. The elements which are associated with Buddha, are just the symbolic representation. For example, Buddha shown seated on the Lotus, is the symbol of detachment from the mundane world. Sometimes

Naga is shown at the backside of Buddha and heading upward to protect Buddha's head. It symbolizes the adaptation and protection of Buddha's teaching by Naga cult.

8. Buddha's teachings really help only when followed in action and not by blindly following.

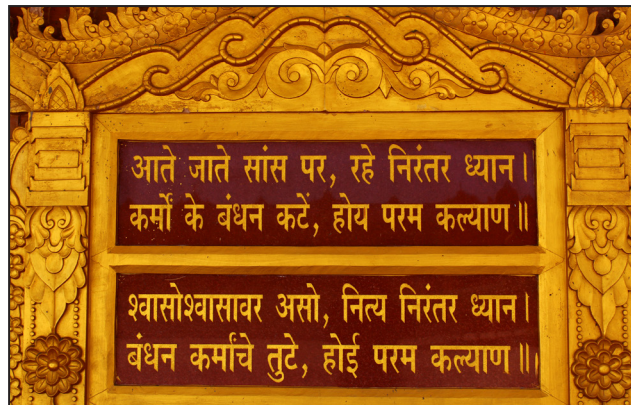
3. Visit to Global Vipassana Pagoda



Global Vipassana Temple, Pagoda

The Global Vipassana Pagoda is a Meditation Hall near Gorai, North-west of Mumbai, India. The Pagoda was inaugurated by Pratibha Patil, then President of India on 8 February 2009. It is built on donated land on a peninsula between Gorai creek and the Arabian Sea. The pagoda is to serve as a monument of peace and harmony. The Global Vipassana Pagoda has been built out of gratitude to the Buddha, his teaching and the community of monks practicing his teaching. Its traditional Burmese design is an expression of gratitude towards the country of Myanmar for preserving the practice of Vipassana.

Vipassana, which means to see things as they really are, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was taught in India more than 2500 years ago as a universal remedy for universal ills, i.e., an Art of Living. This teaching of meditation is preserved here in the voice of Mr. S. N. Goenka, who was a Burmese-Indian teacher of Vipassanā meditation. Here I could experience the meditation which is based on concentrating upon breathe inhalation and exhalation.



A quote around temple area on meditation.

B. Secondary Data Collection

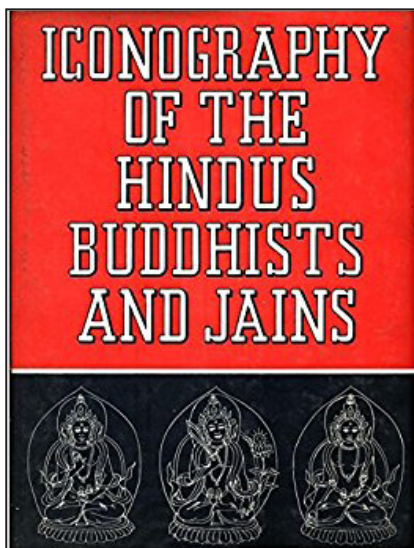
1. Books

2. Movies

3. Study of Mudras

1. Books

a. Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains

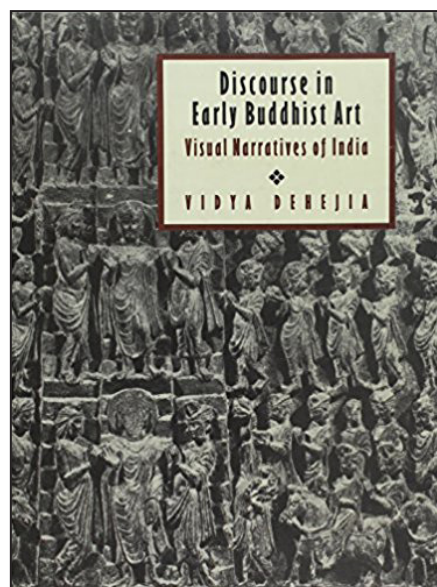


About the Book

This is the book by Prof. R. S. Gupte, a Professor and Head, Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture, Marathwada University. In this book a unique method has been followed by presenting all the information required for identification in the form of tables indicating the number of heads and hands, the symbols of the gods and goddesses, their vehicles, and other relevant information. As the ancient Indian texts differ in their descriptions of the deities, the variations have also been given in the tables whenever of sufficient importance. The tables follow general and

introductory information on all the major Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, their Shaktis and emanations, minor Buddhist images. And all this information is once again summarised in tabular form to simplify identification.

b. Discourse in Early Buddhist Art, Visual Narratives of India



About the Book

Vidya Dehejia, the author, is Barbara Stoler Miller Professor of Indian and South Asian Art at Columbia University. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Indian government.

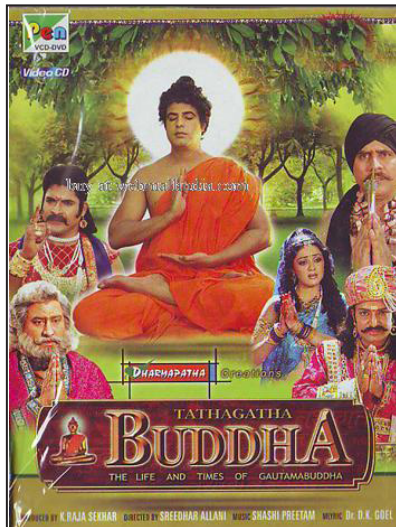
This book focuses on “discourse”, or the technique by which stories are communicated, with a secondary role given to “story” or subject matter. Part One titled “Discourse and Story” commences with a chapter that explores the presentation of narrative, and identifies seven different modes of visual narration utilized by ancient artists in order to communicate their stories, mostly to a knowing viewer. This first chapter, which sets the scene for the rest of the book, also considers the aspect of viewer-response.

Chapter two is devoted to an analysis of the “emblems” used in early Buddhist narrative art. This chapter emphasizes the multivalent nature of the sign as icon (sacred site), index (Buddha’s presence), and symbol (Buddhist truth). Part One concludes with a chapter on Buddhist sacred texts which examines their content and approximate dates, while indicating the problems inherent in the attempt to relate text and image, a problem compounded by the persistence of an oral tradition in India.

The eight chapters that constitute the body of the book (Part two) are devoted to the major sites of Buddhist narrative art, and the order of their presentation is largely chronological.

2. Movies

a. Tathagatha Buddha: The Life & Times of Gautama Buddha in Hindi

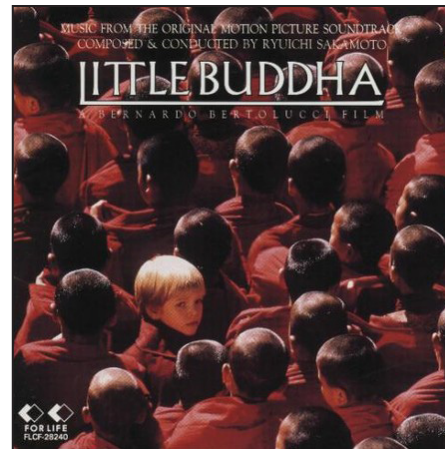


It is a multilingual feature film on the life and times of the Buddha directed by Allani Sridhar and is based upon the story by Sadguru Sivananda Murty. The film was released in Telugu in 2007 and in other languages in 2008.

This movie played a major role in enhancing my connection with the life of the Buddha. I could connect more with this film because of its theme. The theme was similar to the old Ramayana tv serial by Ramanand Sagar. The characters in this movie seems

known because of their traditional wearing. I could easily compare the characters to Indian mythology.

b. Little Buddha



Little Buddha is a 1993 Italian-French-British drama film directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and starring Chris Isaak, Bridget Fonda and Keanu Reeves as Prince Siddhartha (the Buddha before his enlightenment). Produced by Bertolucci's usual collaborator, Jeremy Thomas, it marked the team's return to the East after The Last Emperor.

This film has shown fantastic connection between past and the present with the story of prince Siddhartha and the 10 years old American little boy. Buddhist monks in this film has believe in incarnations of Buddha. They

find the little boy as an incarnation of their spiritual guru Lama Dorje. And the boy starts taking interest in knowing who the Buddha was, which connects the story in the film to the past; the life of the prince Siddhartha till enlightenment.

I found this movie best - as one could connect to the life of Buddha by himself due to the curiosity of a boy leading to questions and heading towards answers.

This movie has unique colourscheme; slightly yellowish which takes you into the mood of that period and the visualization used for showing mystical things is very well executed. Character of Buddha played by the actor Keanu Reeves is again unique. He looks not too delicate like as a woman but also not has appearance as masculine, which build the character of Buddha in the movie.

3. Study of Mudras

Abhaya Mudra



1. Meaning and origin of the Abhaya mudra

Abhaya in Sanskrit means fearlessness, and the abhaya mudra symbolizes protection, peace, reassurance and the dispelling of fear.

2. The gesture is made with the right hand raised to shoulder height, arm bent, and palm facing outward. When the right hand is in the abhaya mudra, the left hand usually hangs loosely at the side of the body or makes the varada mudra, or gift-giving gesture. In some SE Asian Buddha images, both hands are held in the abhaya mudra.

3. In Gandhara art, this mudra was sometimes used to indicate the action of preaching. This is also the case in China where it is very commonly found in images of the Buddha, mainly in the Wei and Sui eras (4th to 7th centuries).

4. Depending on region and era the gesture can also mean “stopping the sandalwood image” (right hand raised), “forbidding the relatives to fight” (left hand raised) or “calming the ocean” (both hands raised).

5. The gesture is an ancient one, demonstrating that the hand is empty of weapons and thus indicating friendship and peace. To western eyes, it looks like the gesture meaning “stop.” In both cases, the gesture implies fearlessness before a potential enemy.

In Buddhism, the gesture is a symbol of the fearlessness—and thus the spiritual power—of the Buddha or Bodhisattva who makes it.

According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha made this gesture immediately after gaining enlightenment. The gesture of fearlessness is only seen on Buddhas or Bodhisattvas and appears most commonly in standing images.

Purpose - To stop the flow of negative energy (fear)

Benefit - This Mudra gives the energy to stand strong.

Personality (Context) - The abhaya mudra is the gesture of the fifth Dhyani Buddha, Amoghasiddhi. By meditating on him, Amoghasiddhi helps in overcoming the delusion of jealousy and transforming it into the

wisdom of accomplishment. Since jealousy can be seen as a type of fear, the gesture of fearlessness is appropriate for this Buddha.

Events connected with Mudra

Event 1 - Forbidding the relatives to fight

The left hand raised in Abhaya mudra refers to an event when the Buddha’s relatives were fighting over water rights. Both the families of the Buddha’s mother and father depended on water from a river for irrigation of their land. When the river started to run dry conflict between the two families erupted. When the Buddha heard a battle was about to start between the two families he went back to the town of his parents to try to end the conflict. He organized a meeting with the leaders of both families and persuaded them to stop fighting, arguing human lives were more important than water.

Event 2 - Calming the ocean

Although both hands raised in Abhaya mudra is called “calming the ocean”, the gesture refers to an event when the Buddha stopped a flood caused by a river. During travel the Buddha arrived at the village of three hermits who were fire worshippers. He requested one of them named Kasyapa for a place to stay overnight. The hermit gave the Buddha a hut on the banks of the river. When the swelling river threatened

to submerge the hut, the Buddha stopped the waters from rising. Seeing this, the hermits and their followers of a thousand worshippers became followers of the Buddha.

Event 3 - The taming of the elephant Nalagiri

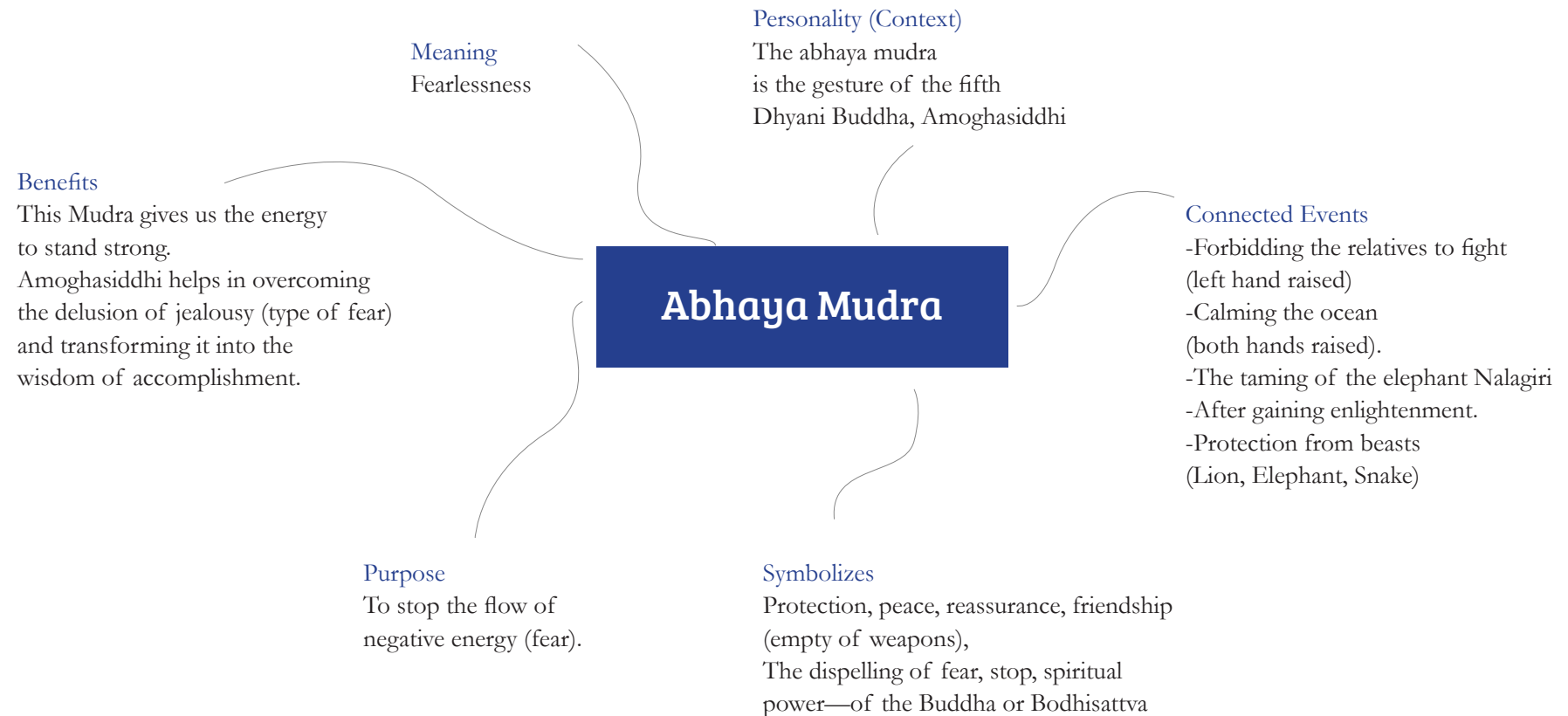
Sometimes a standing or walking Buddha is seen with the right hand raised towards an elephant. This posture refers to an event in the life of the Buddha known as “the taming of the elephant Nalagiri”.

Devadatta was a monk and a cousin of the Buddha, who became jealous of him. One day Devadatta asked the Buddha to make him the leader of the Sangha, the Buddhist community. The Buddha refused and Devadatta swore revenge.

One day the Buddha walked through a village.

Devadatta fed alcohol to a particularly furious elephant named Nalagiri and had him attack the Buddha. The raging bull stormed towards the Buddha, who reached out his hand to touch the animal’s trunk. The elephant sensed the metta, the loving kindness of the Buddha, which calmed him down immediately. The animal stopped in front of the Buddha and bowed on his knees in submission.

In Thailand and Laos, the abhaya mudra is also seen on the walking Buddha (also called ‘the Buddha placing his footprint’), a posture unique to that region.



Bhusparsi or Bhumisparsi Mudra



1. The attitude of ‘touching the earth’, calling her to witness the virtue of Gautama. In this hand-pose, the right hand is placed over the right knee. The hand, with palm inward, all fingers down, touches the lotus seat below.

2. This is one of the most common Mudras found in statues of Buddha in many countries.

Meaning: ‘Touching the Earth.’

Significance: It is also known as ‘Calling the Earth to Witness the Truth’ Mudra, and it represents the moment of Buddha’s attaining enlightenment.

3. Literally Bhumisparsha translates into ‘touching the earth’. It is more commonly known as the ‘earth

witness’ mudra. This mudra, formed with all five fingers of the right hand extended to touch the ground, symbolizes the Buddha’s enlightenment under the bodhi tree, when he summoned the earth goddess, Sthavara, to bear witness to his attainment of enlightenment.

The right hand, placed upon the right knee in earth-pressing mudra, and complemented by the left hand-which is held flat in the lap in the dhyana mudra of meditation, symbolizes the union of method and wisdom, samasara and nirvana, and also the realizations of the conventional and ultimate truths.

It is in this posture that Shakyamuni overcame the obstructions of Mara while meditating on Truth. The second Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya is depicted in this mudra. He is believed to transform the delusion of anger into mirror-like wisdom. It is this metamorphosis that the Bhumisparsha mudra helps in bringing about.

4. Jataka Story: The Buddha’s Victory over Mara

Mara in the Buddhist tradition can be best understood as Satan, who always tried to dissuade the Buddha or any one from the righteous path. He is also called ‘Namuchi’ as none can escape him (Namuci iti Maro); and ‘Vasavatti’ as he rules all (Maro nama Vassavati sabbesam upari vasam vattati).

When Gotama renounced the world and passed through the city gates on his horse Kanthaka, Mara appeared before him and tempted him by the offer to make him a universal monarch in seven days, if he was to change his mind. Siddhattha, however, did not pay any attention to him.

The origin of the legend of Mara is first noticeable in the Padhana Sutta (See Samyutta Nikaya vs.425-49). His ten-fold army is Lust; Aversion; Hunger; Thirst; Craving; Stoth and Torpor; Cowardice; Doubt; Hypocrisy and Stupidity; False Glory; and Conceit. He has three daughters, Tanha, Arati and Raga representing the three out of the ten forces of Mara’s army. These daughters were employed to tempt the Buddha after his Enlightenment; and they could assume numerous forms of varying age and charm.

The Buddhavamsa Commentary and Nidanakatha of the Jataka commentary, particularly in the Singhalese versions, unfold a very lively and detailed account of the Mara’s visit to the Buddha just before his Enlightenment, when he was sitting under the Bodhi tree. Seeing Gotama seated with a firm resolve to become a Buddha, he summoned all his forces to attack Sakyamuni. The forces extended twelve leagues in front and back; and nine leagues on right and left. Mara himself with thousand arms riding on his elephant Girimekhala, attacked Gotama. His followers armed

with deadly weapons and assuming various frightening forms joined him in his attack. The Devas, Nagas, and others who had gathered round Gotama to pay him homage and sing his praises then fled at the sight of the frightening army of Mara. The Bodhisatta then called the ten paramis, which he had perfected in various births, for his defense. Each of the ten divisions of Mara's army was then defeated and routed by one parami. Eventually, Mara's army had to flee. Vanquished Mara then hurled his last weapon – the chakkavudha (disc), which stood over the Bodhisatta's head like a canopy of flowers. Still Mara tried to dissuade Gotama from the path of the Buddhahood by falsely claiming the Gotama's seat as his own; and by asking him to prove his right to the seat on which he was sitting. All the Mara's followers then testified Mara's claim by shouting that the seat actually belonged to Mara. As the Bodhisatta had no other witness to bear testimony on his behalf he asked the Earth to speak for him by touching the ground with his middle finger. The Earth then roared in response and bore the testimony for the Bodhisatta by thundering, "I stand his witness". Thus, the Mara's defeat was final; and he and his followers had to flee. The Devas and other celestial beings then besieged him and celebrated his victory.

Connected Events

1. Mara's summon to all his forces to attack Sakyamuni; Mara with thousand arms riding on his elephant Girimekhala.
2. Flying away of Devas, Nagas, and others.
3. 10 parmis defeated 10 divisions of Mara's army.
4. Chakkavudha (disc) stood over the Bodhisatta's head like a canopy of flowers.
5. Mara falsely claim the Gotama's seat as his own.
6. Buddha calling the Earth as his vitness.
7. Roaring of the Earth - "I stand his witness".
8. Celebration of Buddha's Victory over Mara.

Benefits

Transform the delusion of anger into mirror-like wisdom.

Meaning

Touching the Earth.

Bhumisparsh Mudra

Personality (Context)

The second Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya is depicted in this Mudra.
He is believed to transform the delusion of anger into mirror-like wisdom.

Symbolizes

The Buddha's enlightenment under bodhi tree.

Purpose

To bear the witness to the earth goddess, Sthavara, to Buddha's attainment of enlightenment.

Dharmachakra mudra



1. The hand-pose of preaching the Law. It signifies the turning of the Wheel of Law. In this hand-pose, both the hands are held against the chest, the left hand covering the right. It is the mudra of Gautama, the Dhyani Buddha Vairocana, and The future Buddha Maitreya.

2. Meaning: ‘Turning the Wheel of the Dharma or Law.’

Hand position: This Mudra involves both hands. The right hand is held at chest level with the palm facing outwards. A mystic circle is formed by joining the tips of the index finger and the thumb. The left hand is turned inward and the index finger and thumb of this hand join to touch the right hand’s circle.

This circle represents the Wheel of Dharma, or in metaphysical terms, the union of method and wisdom.

The three remaining fingers of the two hands remain extended. These fingers are themselves rich in symbolic significance:

The three extended fingers of the right hand represent the three vehicles of the Buddha’s teachings, namely:

- The middle finger represents the ‘hearers’ of the teachings
- The ring finger represents the ‘solitary realizers’
- The Little finger represents the Mahayana or ‘Great Vehicle’.

The three extended fingers of the left hand symbolize the Three Jewels of Buddhism, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Significance: This gesture was exhibited by Lord Buddha while he preached the first sermon to a companion after his enlightenment in the Deer Park of Sarnath. It signifies setting into motion the wheel of Dharma. Since the fingers are positioned near the heart in this Mudra, the preaching is coming straight from the heart of Buddha. It is also spelled ‘Dharmacakra Mudra.’

3. Dharmachakra in Sanskrit means the ‘Wheel of Dharma’. This mudra symbolizes one of the most important moments in the life of Buddha, the occasion when he preached to his companions the first sermon after his Enlightenment in the Deer Park at Sarnath. It

thus denotes the setting into motion of the Wheel of the teaching of the Dharma.

This mudra is displayed by the first Dhyani Buddha Vairocana. Each of the five Dhyani Buddhas is associated with a specific human delusion, and it is believed that they help mortal beings in overcoming them. Thus, Vairocana is believed to transform the delusion of ignorance into the wisdom of reality. By displaying the Dharmachakra mudra, he thus helps adepts in bringing about this transition.

4. After the attainment of Enlightenment and becoming a Buddha, Gotama Buddha thought of delivering his first sermon to some receptive ascetics. So, he thought of revealing his doctrine first to Alara Kalama, who was his first guru; and who he had left because his doctrine could not satisfy him. So, he looked for Alara by his divine eye; and learnt of his death.

Buddha in the dhammacakka-pavattana mudra, to set the wheel of dhamma (righteousness) in motion

He then thought of teaching his other guru Uddaka Ramaputta, who he had deserted because he, too, was not convincing. So, he thought of delivering the first sermon to him. But he, too, was dead.

Now, he thought about his five companions with whom he had practised penances in Uruvela for six years before separating from them. (He had segregated from them after having realised that self-mortification, which was so ardently being practised by the five ascetics, was not the right path of Enlightenment). So, he looked for them by his divine eye and saw them wandering about the Isipatan Migdaya, popularly known as Deer Park, in Sarnath. Soon he reached there to deliver his first sermon. His first sermon in the history of Buddhism is often called the Dhamma-chakka-pavattana-katha, because that 'sets the wheel of the dhamma into motion' (Dhamma-chakka-pavattana) to take the people to the Final Destination of life, i.e., Nibbana.

When the five ascetics saw the Buddha approaching, they first decided to ignore him as he had deserted them. But having noticed his bright countenance they changed their mind and acknowledged his superiority by showing reverence to him. The Buddha then delivered his first sermon in the Isipatana Migadaya. He professed the doctrine of Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering is a reality;
2. Cause of the suffering (as nothing in the world is uncaused);
3. Cessation of suffering (as the removal of the cause is logical);
4. The path leading to the cessation of the suffering, which implies, right determination; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right

mindfulness; and right meditation. This is also called the eight-fold path.

The aforementioned path is also called the 'Middle-Path', as it avoids the two extreme paths to realise the Goal of Life. The first of the two extreme paths is the path of the extreme sensuality and mundane pleasures; and the other is the path of self-mortification, implying rigorous and austere penances to attain the summum bonum of life.

He also professed the doctrine of the Dependent Origination (Paticcha-Samuppada), which means, every worldly phenomenon is dependent on some other phenomenon. In light of the above - if there is suffering by way of old-age, disease and death and so on - it is due to the birth. If there is no birth, who would then suffer? (It may be noted that Death is only the end of one birth; the next birth may be much worse). The birth is dependent on becoming; becoming is due to grasping; grasping is due to craving; craving is due to feeling; feeling is due to contact; contact is due to the six sense organs; the six sense organs are due to mind-body complex; mind-body complex is due to sensation; sensation is due to mental confections (samskaras); and mental confections are due to ignorance. In other words, he professed that ignorance is the root-cause of suffering.

Soon after hearing this sermon Kondanna (popularly

called Annatta-Kondanna) became a Sotapanna; and others also became the followers of the Buddha.

5. Outside Japan, this mudra is known by various names:

- Vitarka (mudra of argumentation)
- Karana (mudra of religious action)
- Vyakhyana (mudra of exposition); known as the Seppō-in Mudra in Japan

6. There are several variants such as in the Ajanta Caves frescoes, where the two hands are separated and the fingers do not touch. In the Indo-Greek style of Gandhara, the clenched fist of the right hand seemingly overlies the fingers joined to the thumb on the left hand. In pictorials of Hōryū-ji in Japan the right hand is superimposed on the left. Certain figures of Amitābha, Japan are seen using this mudra before the 9th century.

Connected Events

1. After the attainment of Enlightenment and becoming a Buddha, Gautama Buddha thought of delivering his first sermon to some receptive ascetics.
2. Thought of revealing his doctrine first to Alara Kalama; first guru then to Uddaka Ramaputta; other guru. But both were died.
4. So, he looked for his five companions by his divine eye wandering at Deer Park, in Sarnath.
5. Soon he reached there to deliver his first sermon (called the Dhamma-chakka-pavattana-katha because that sets the wheel of the dhamma into motion).
6. Five ascetics noticed his bright countenance and acknowledged his superiority.
7. Buddha then delivered his first sermon in the Isipatana Migadaya.

Purpose

To preach his companions the first sermon after his Enlightenment in the Deer Park at Sarnath.

Benefits

Vairocana is believed to transform the delusion of ignorance into the wisdom of reality.

Meaning

- Turning the Wheel of the Dharma or Law.
- Circle formed by the Mudra represents Wheel of Dharma.

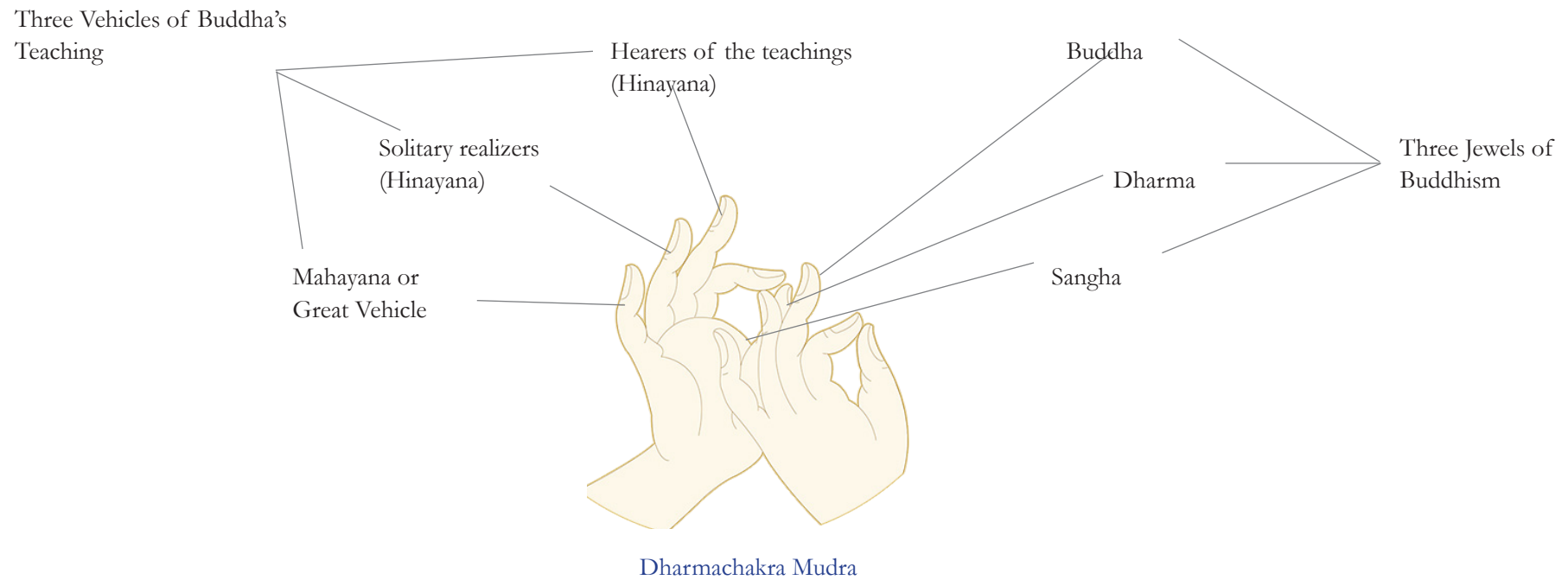
Personality (Context)

Mudra of Gautama, the Dhyanī Buddha Vairocana and the future Buddha Maitreya.

Dharmachakra Mudra

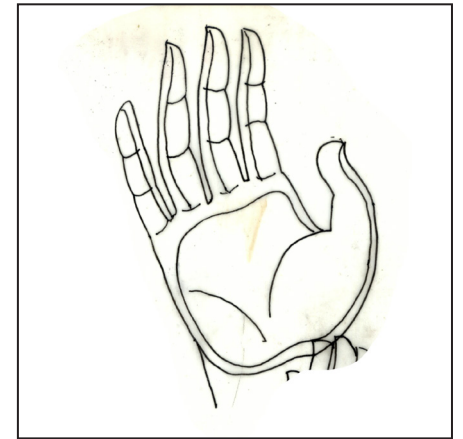
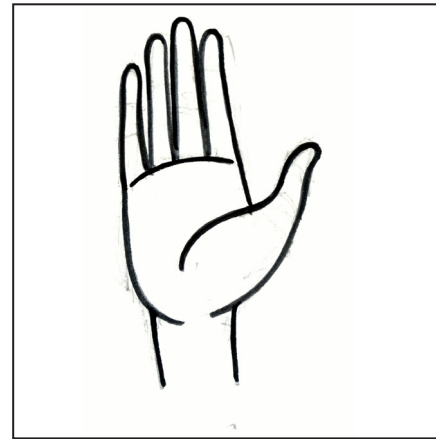
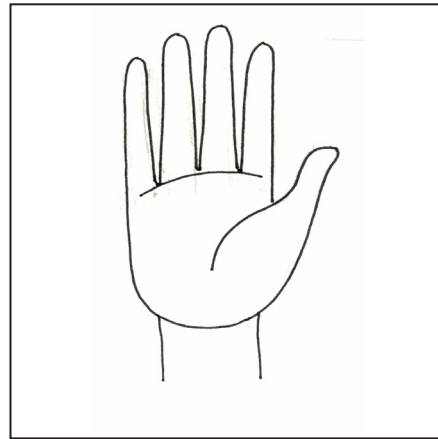
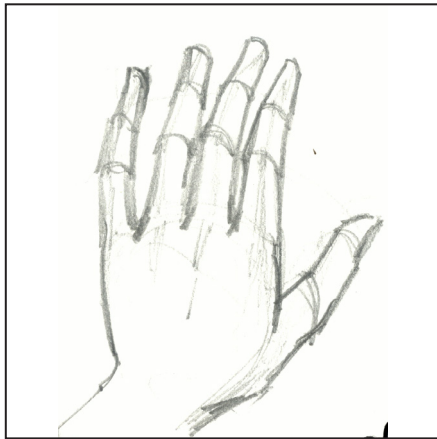
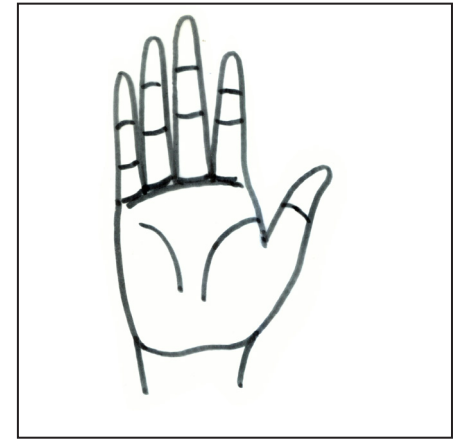
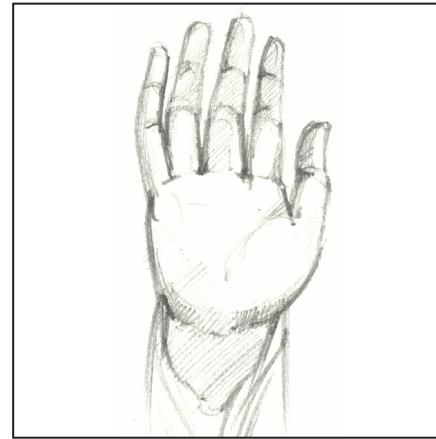
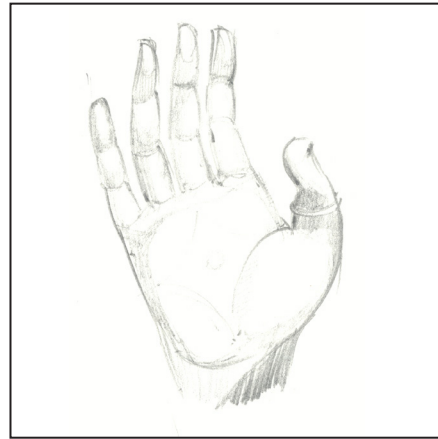
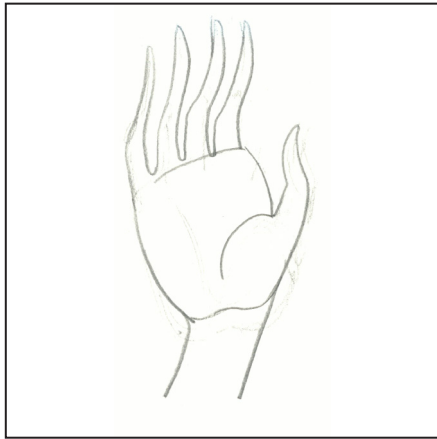
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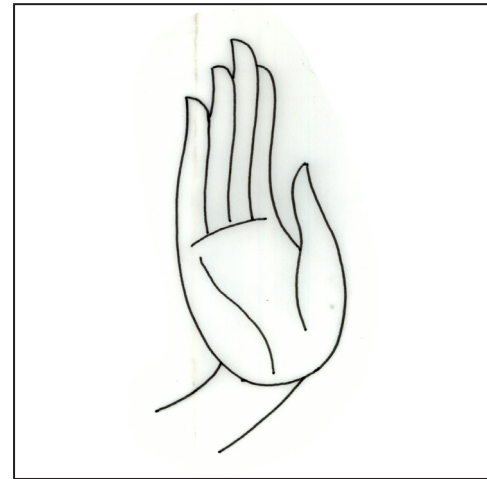
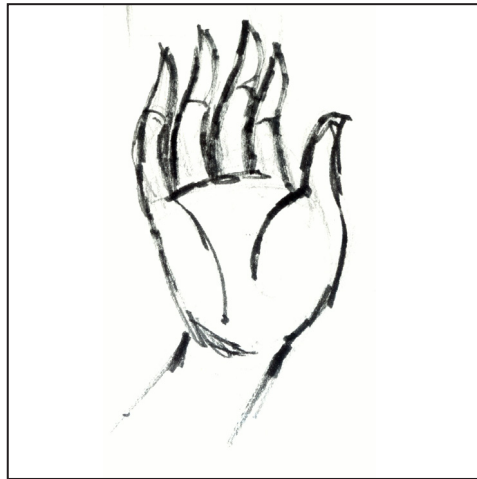
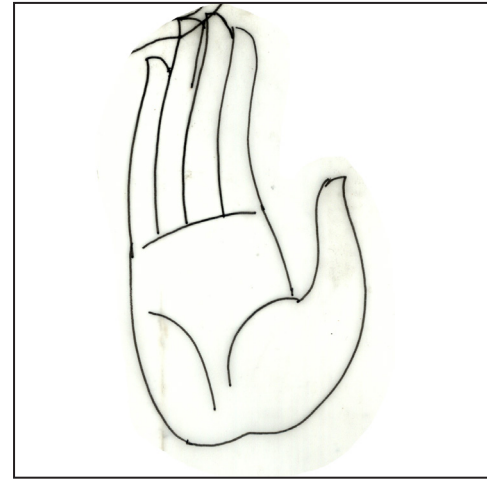
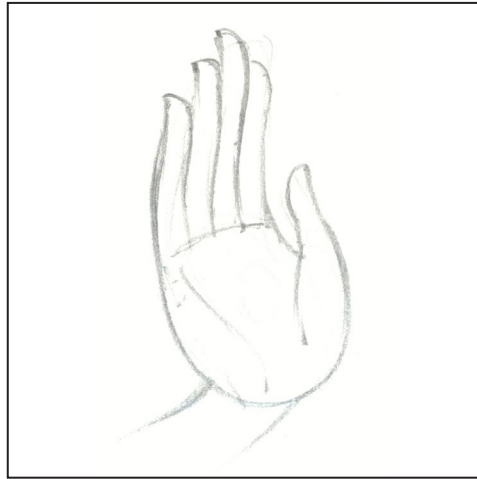
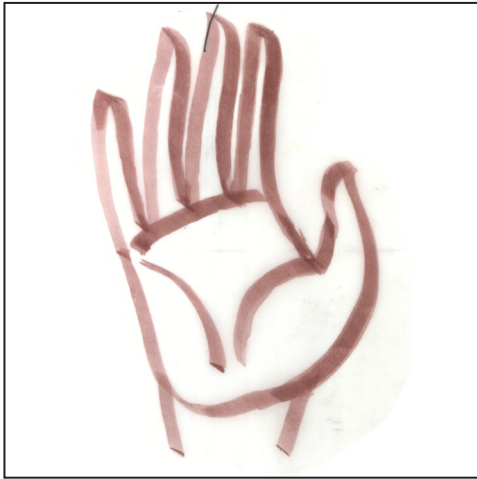
- The setting into motion of the Wheel of the teaching of the Dharma.
- As hands are held in front of the heart, symbolizes teachings are straight from the Buddha's heart.

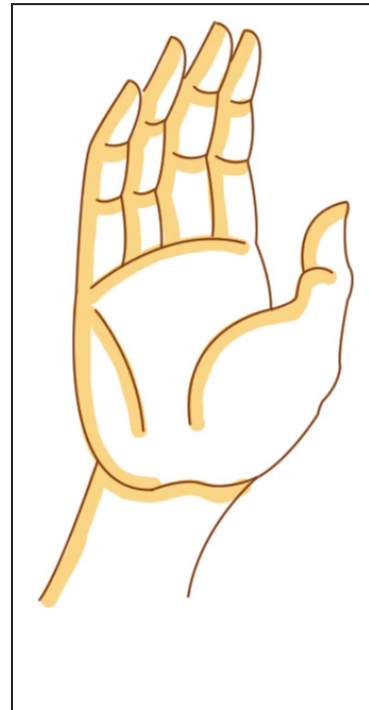
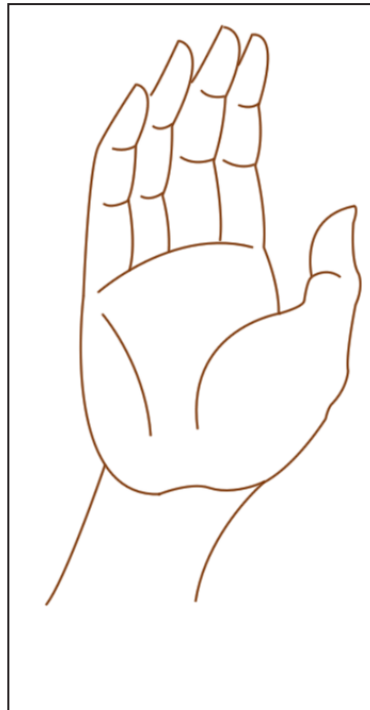
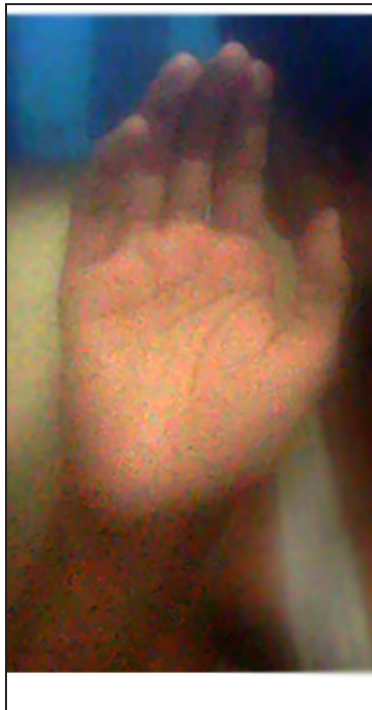


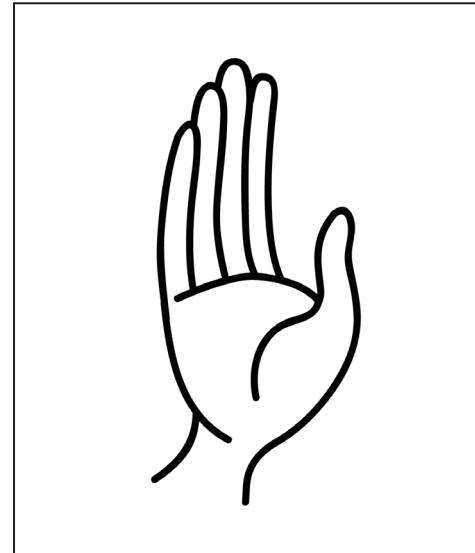
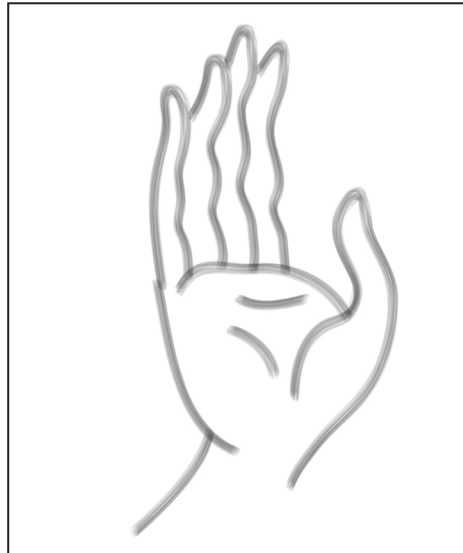
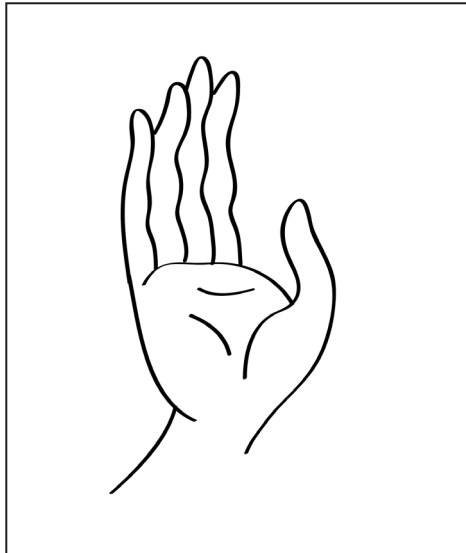
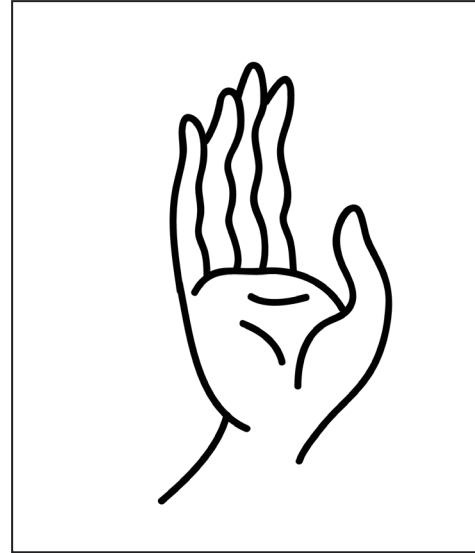
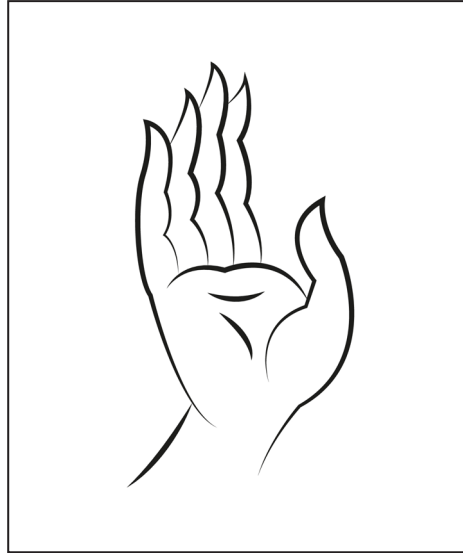
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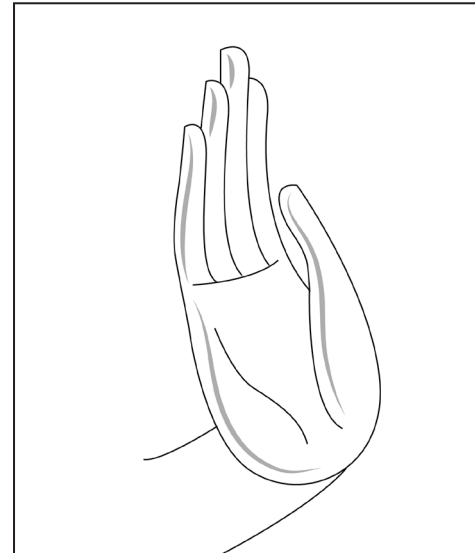
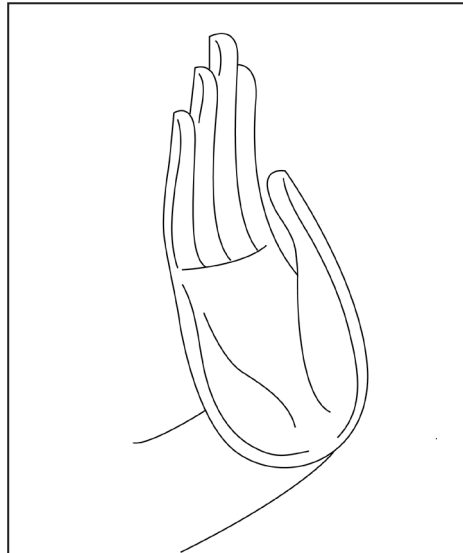
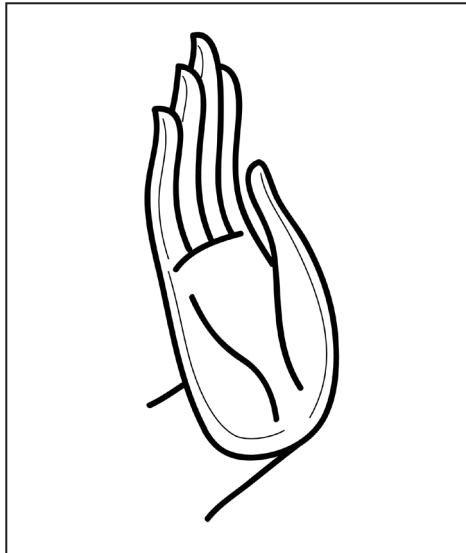
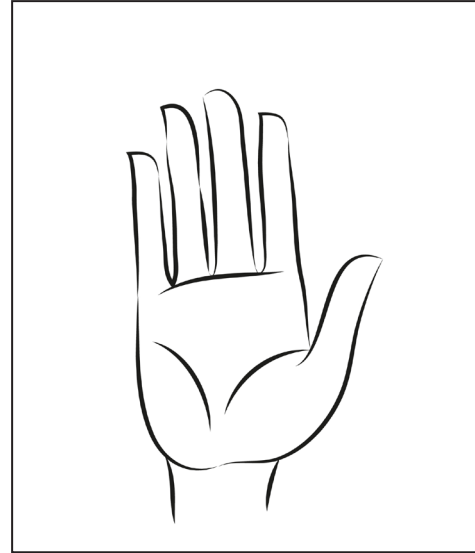
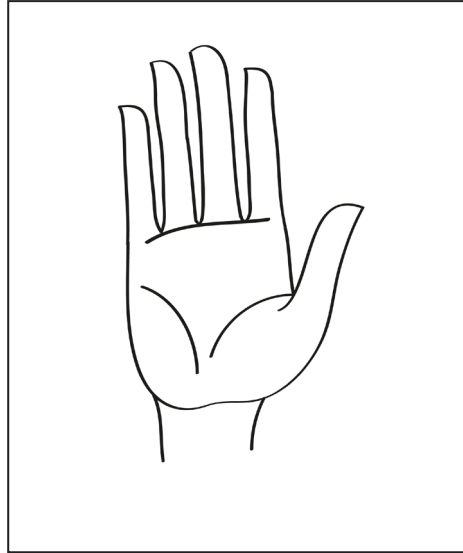
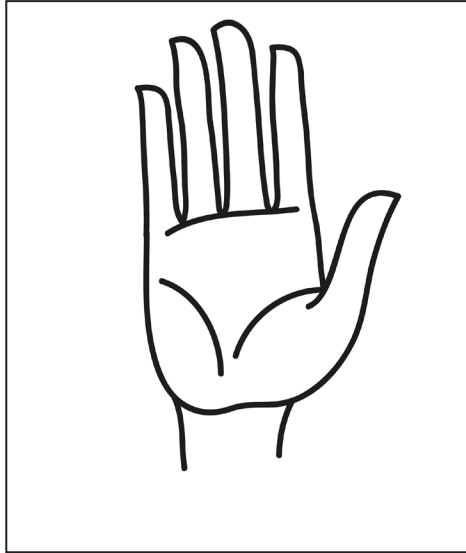
Abhaya Mudra | Explorations

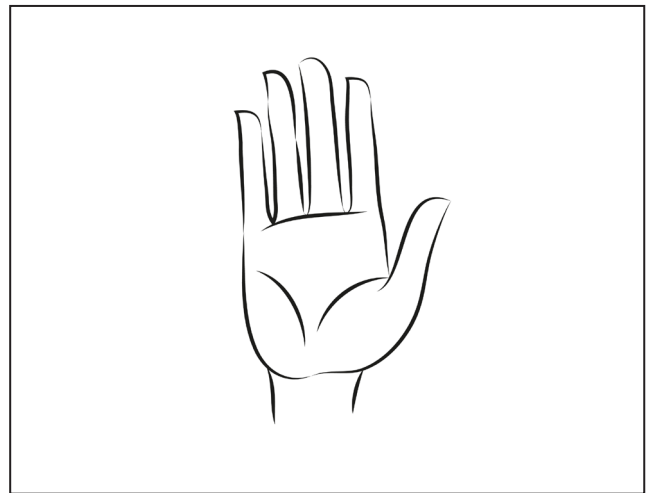
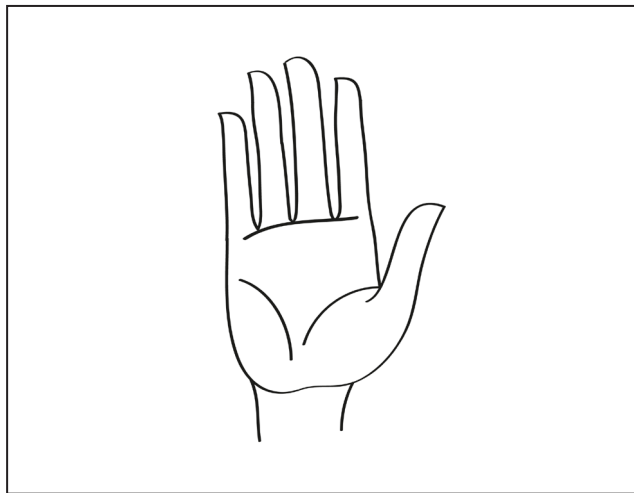
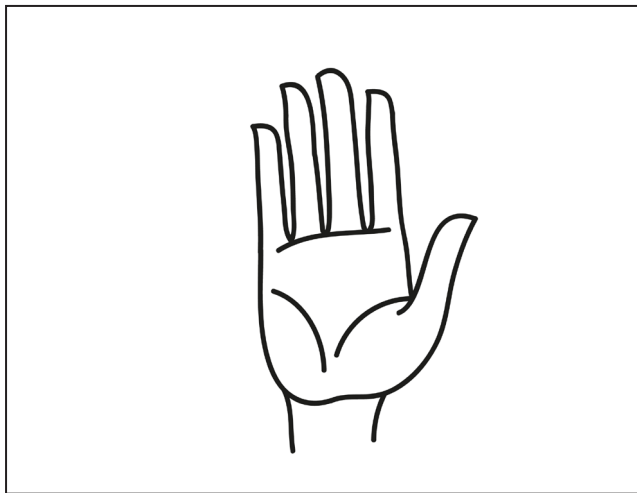
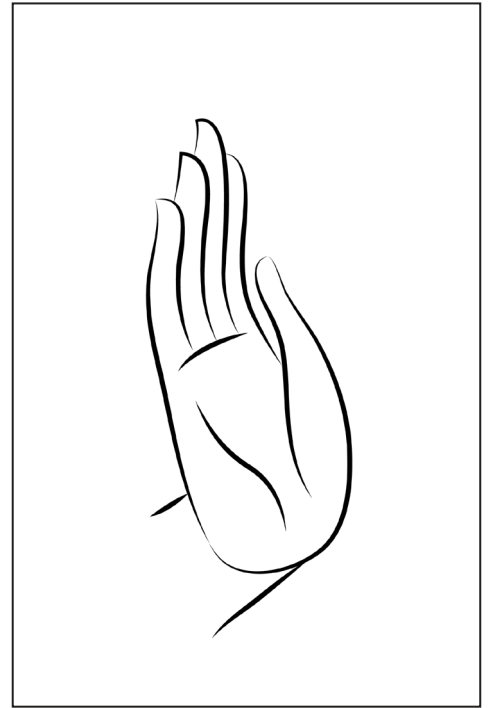
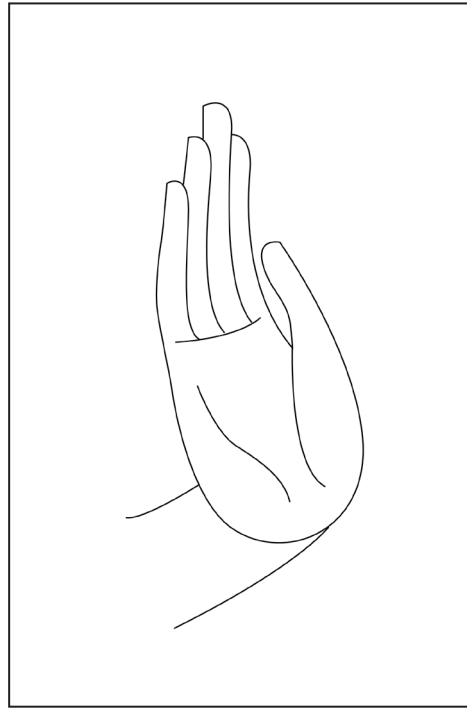
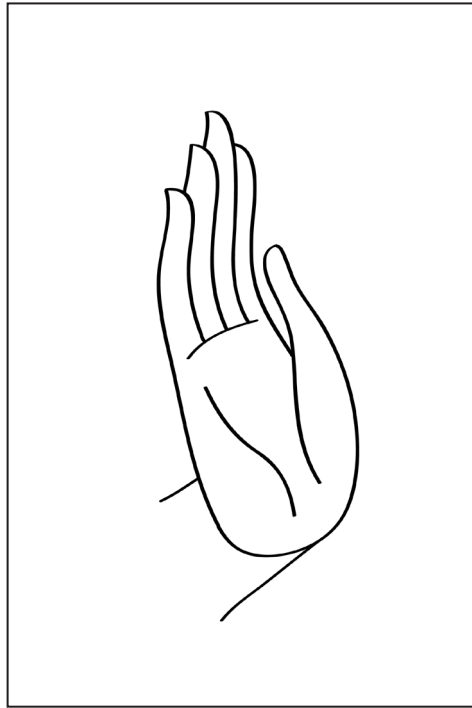
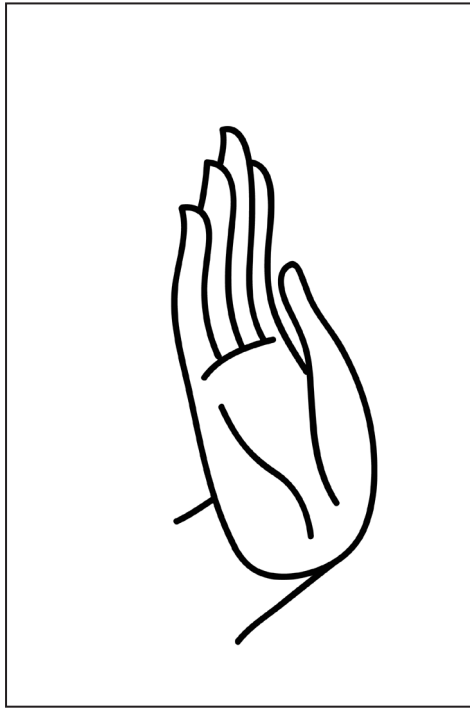




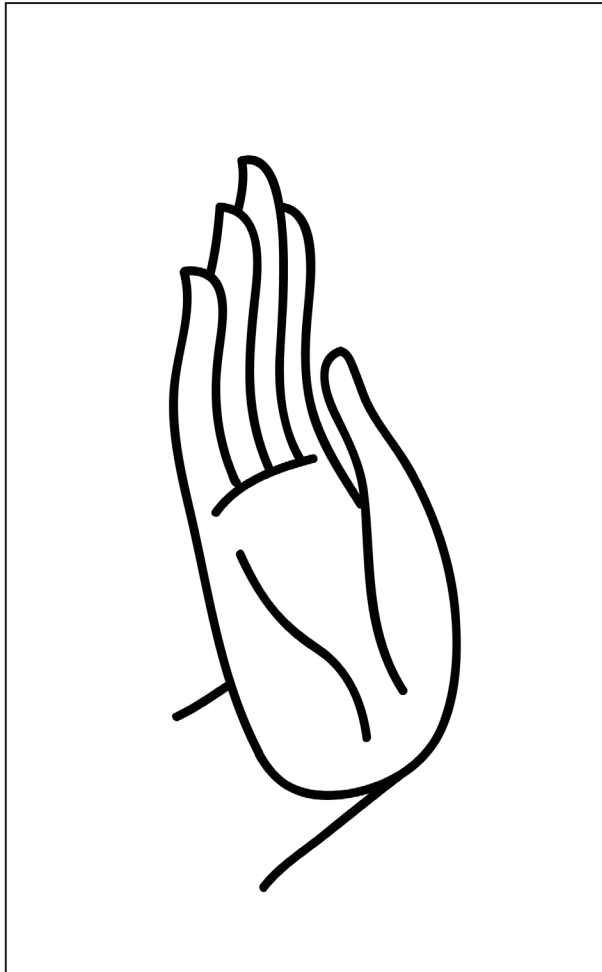






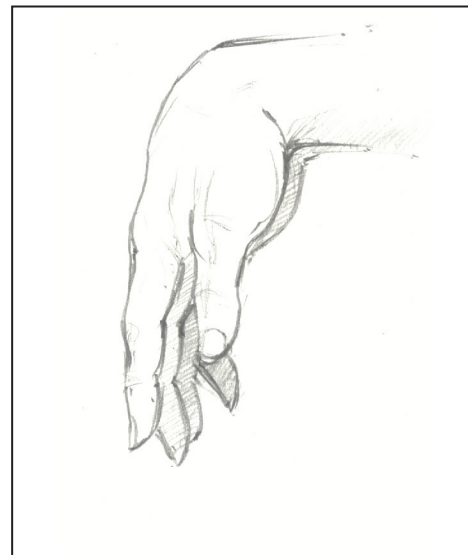
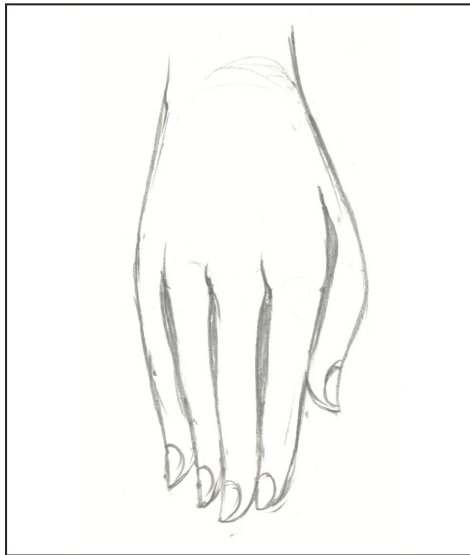


Abhaya Mudra | Final



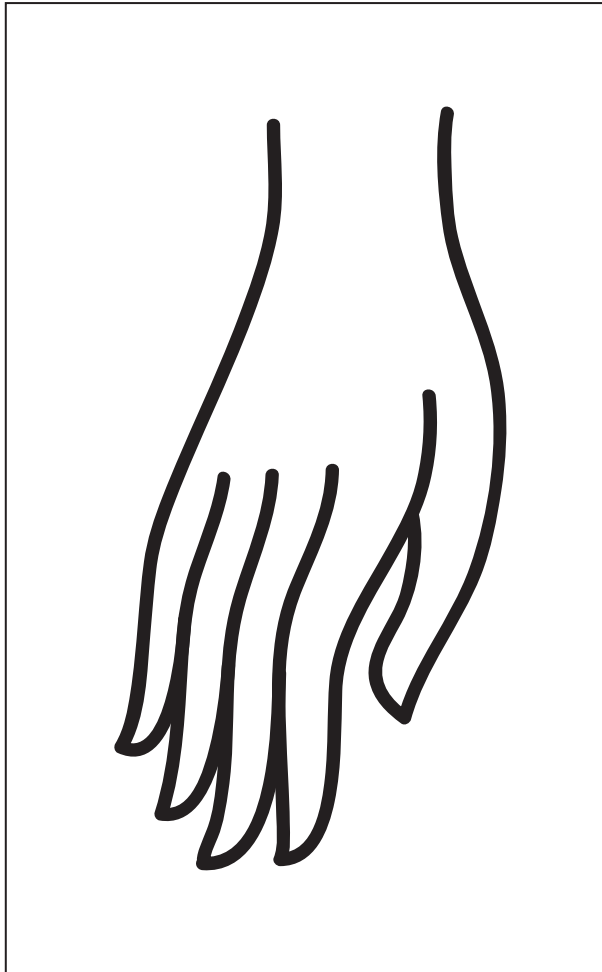
Bhumisparsha Mudra | Explorations



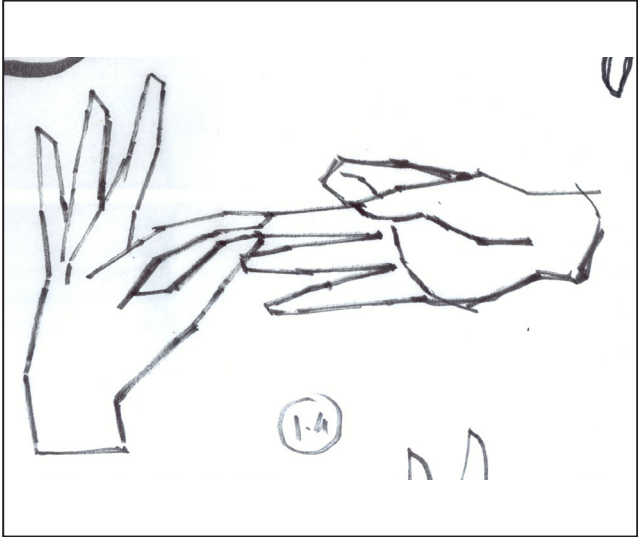
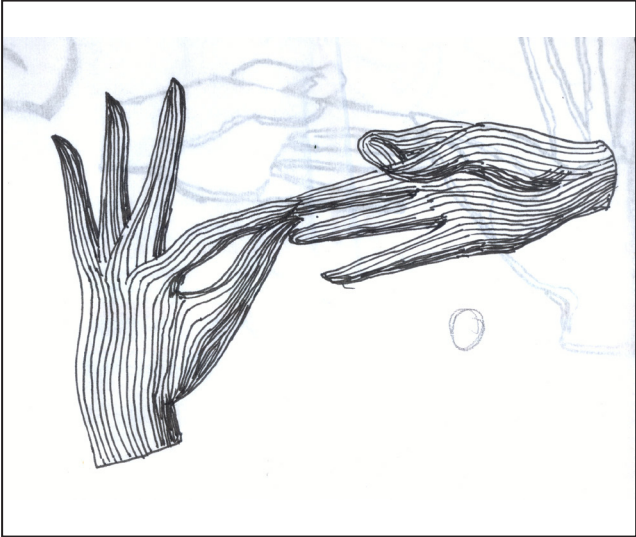
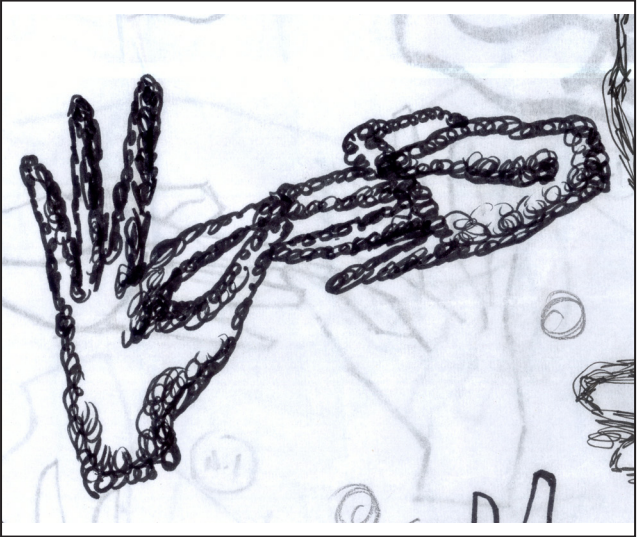
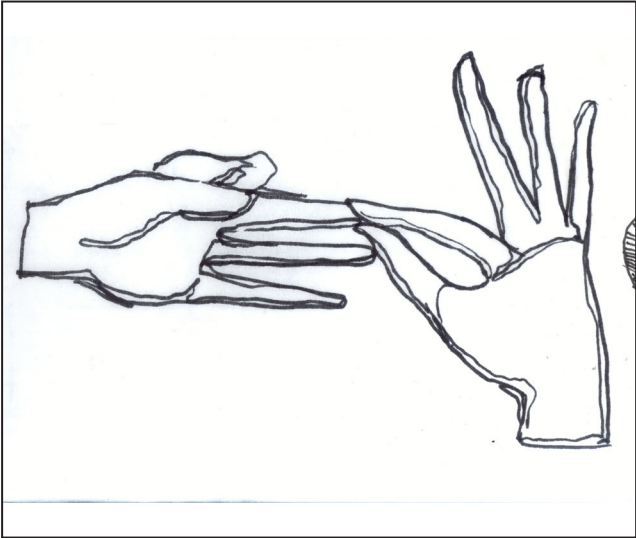
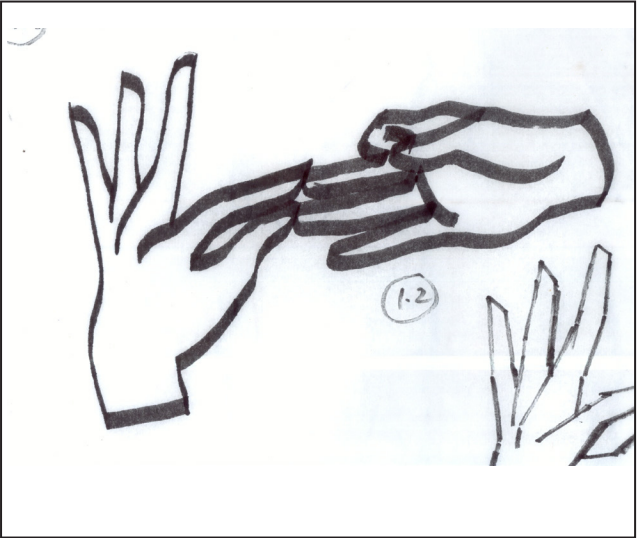


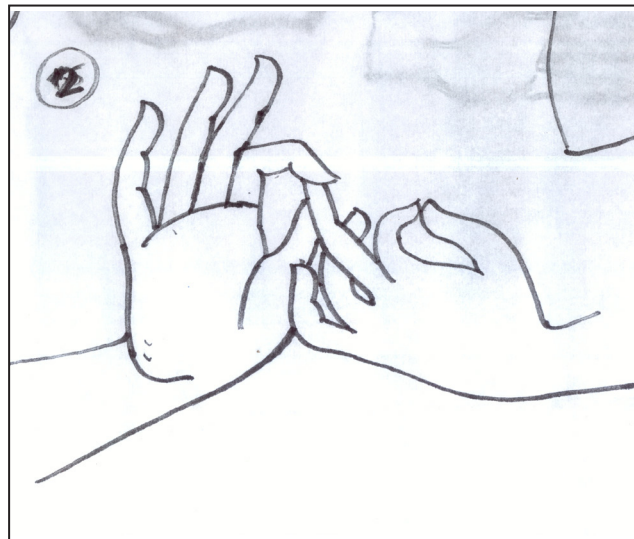
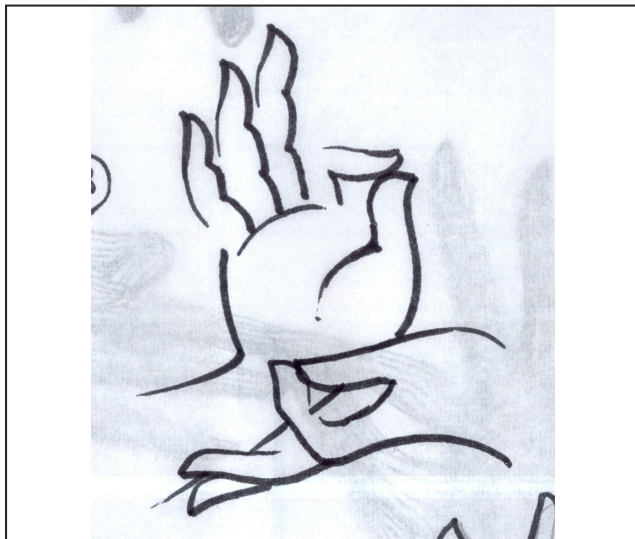
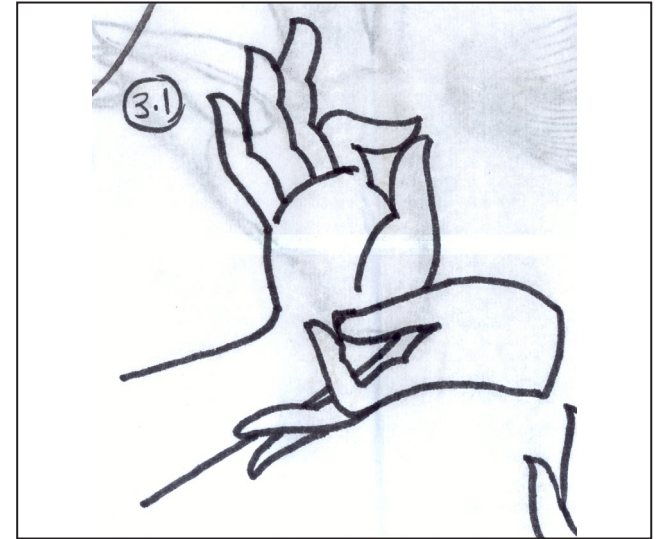
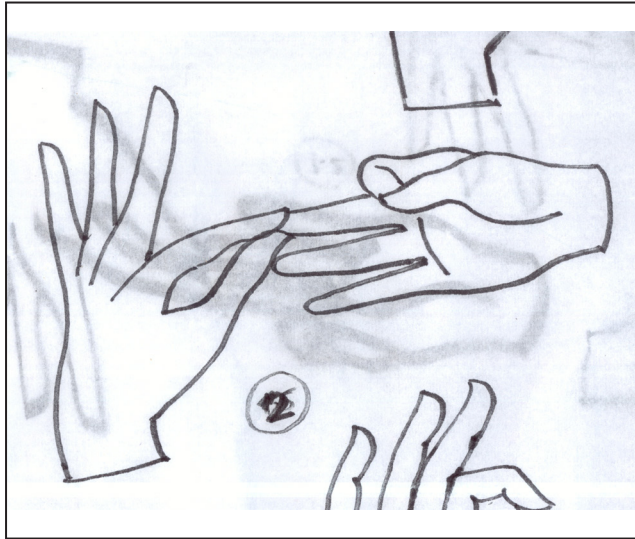


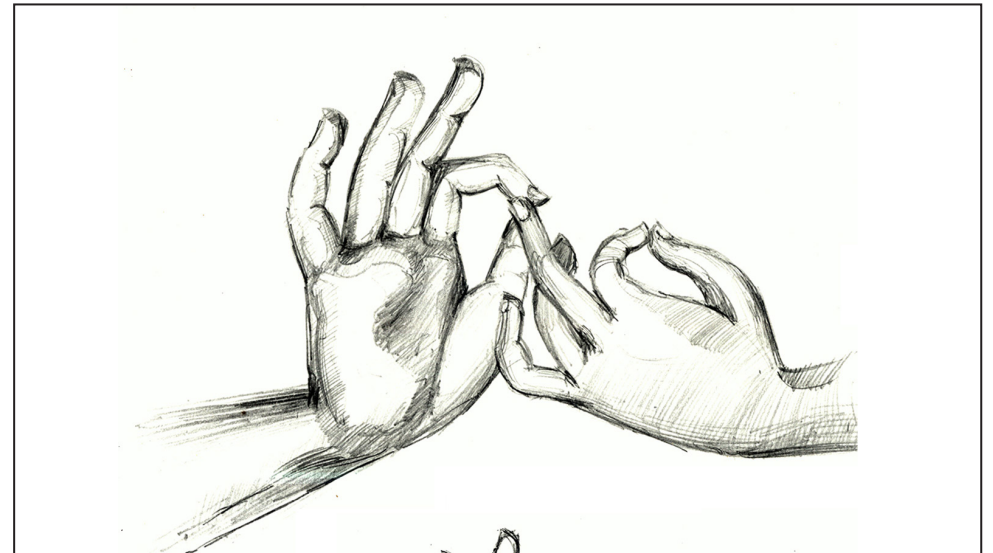
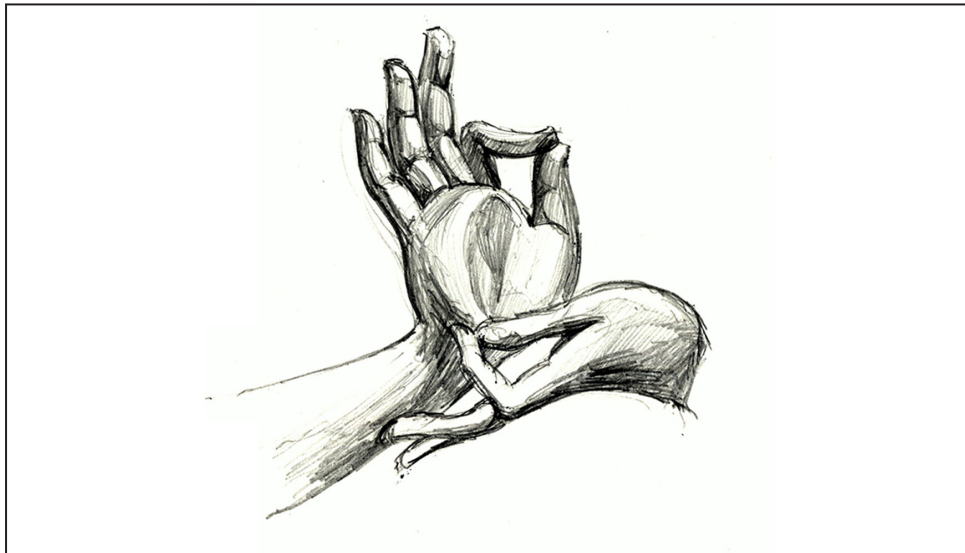
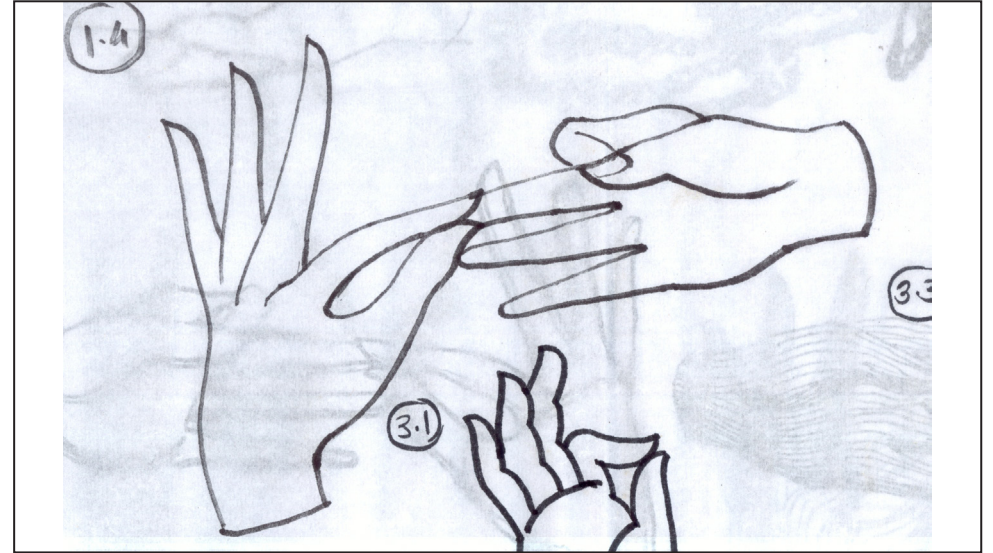
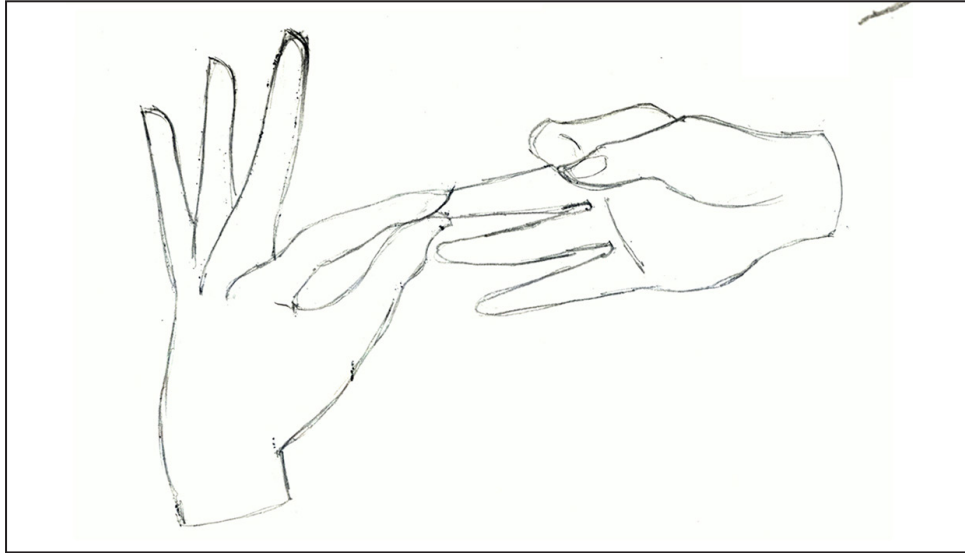
Bhumisparsha Mudra | Final



Dharmachakra Mudra | Explorations



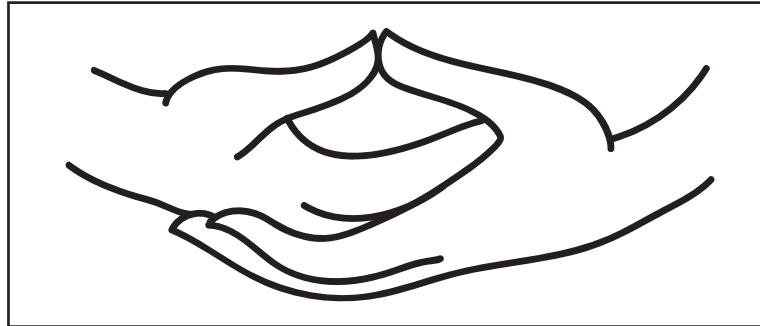




Dharmachakra Mudra | Final



Dhyana Mudra | Explorations



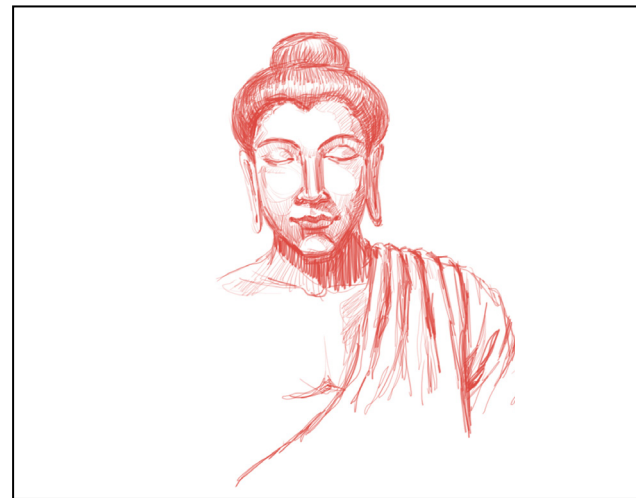
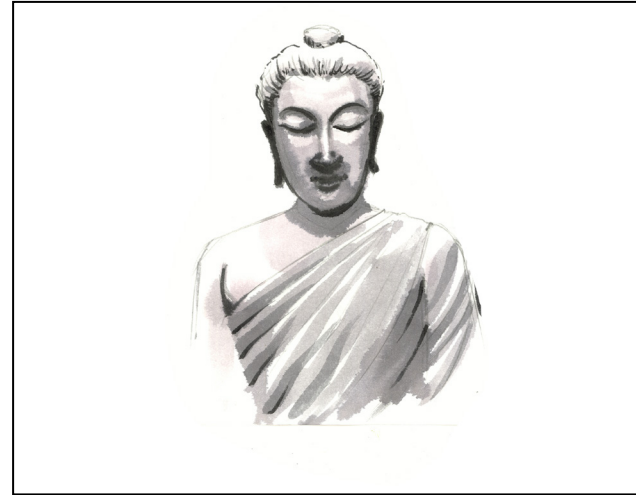
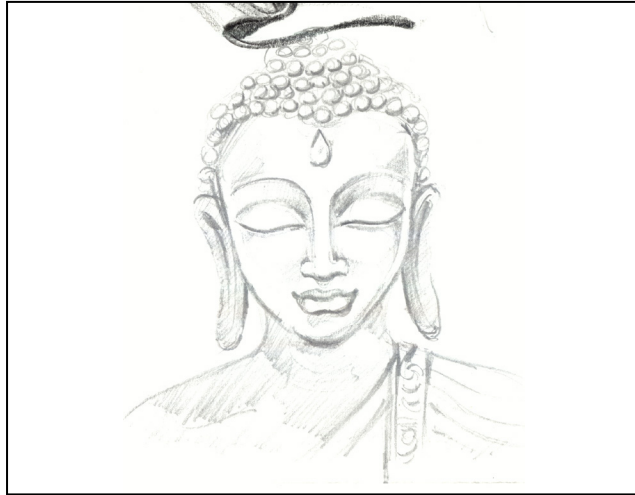
Dhyana Mudra | Final

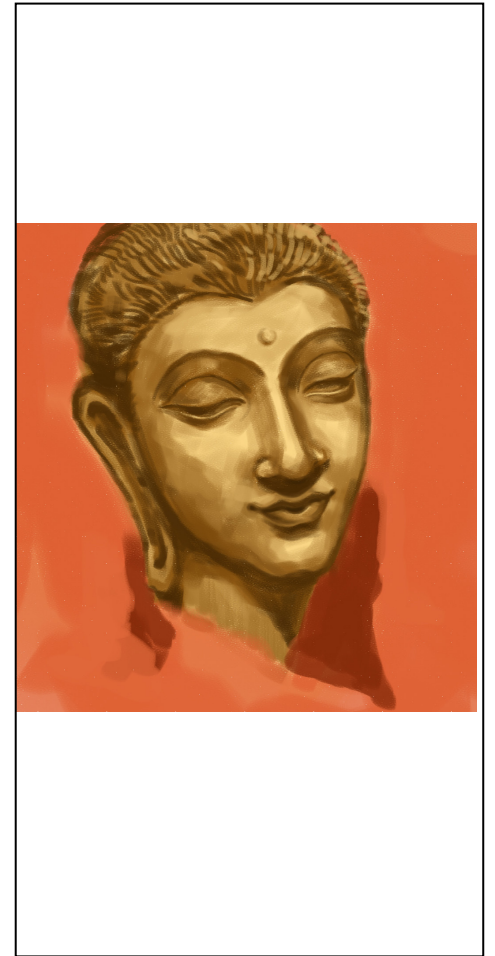
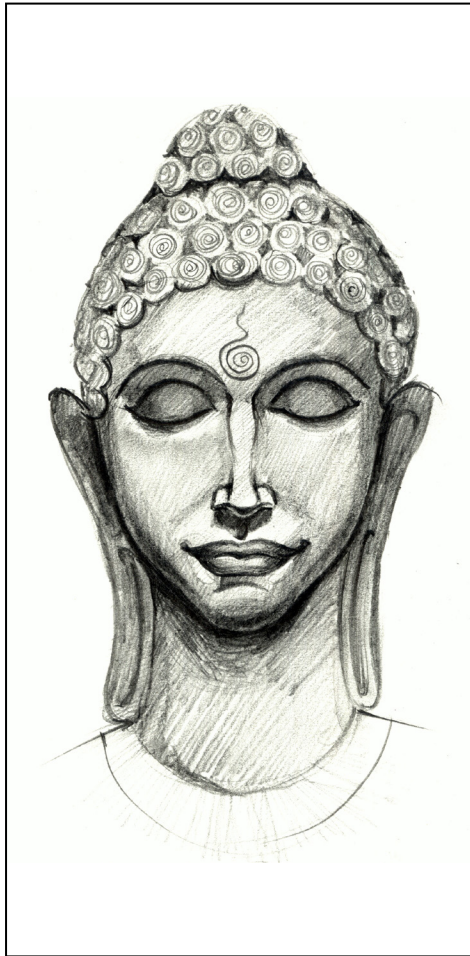


Vajra and Bell in Hand | Final

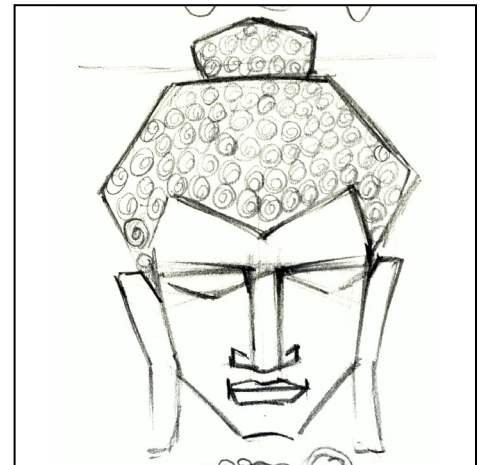
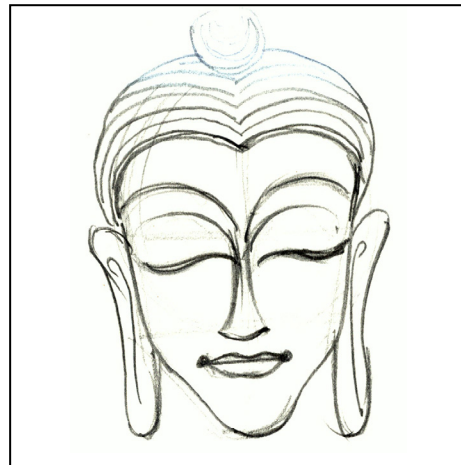
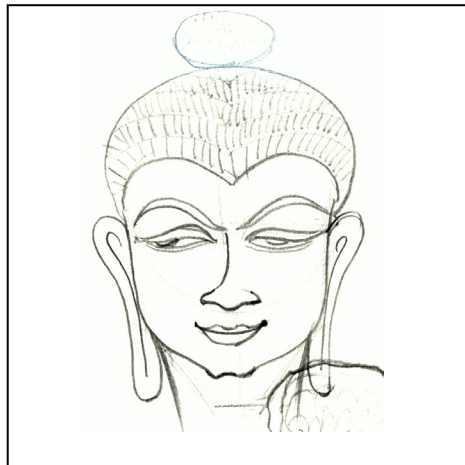
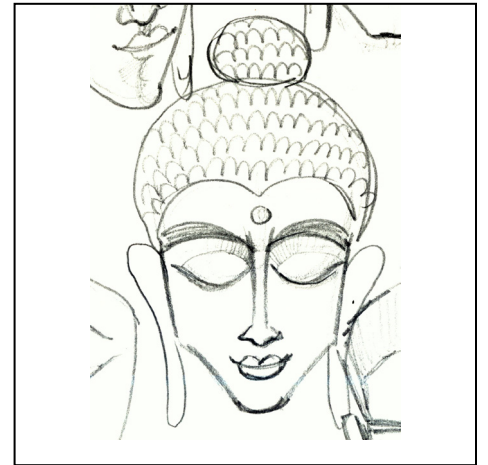
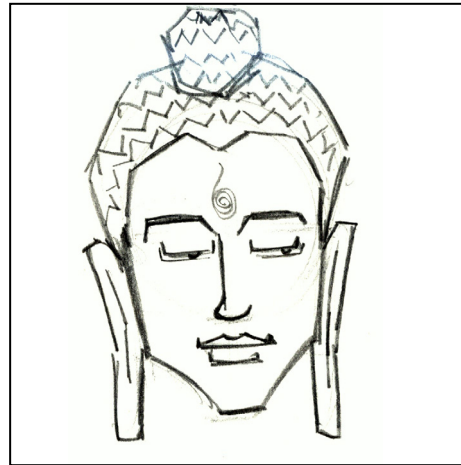


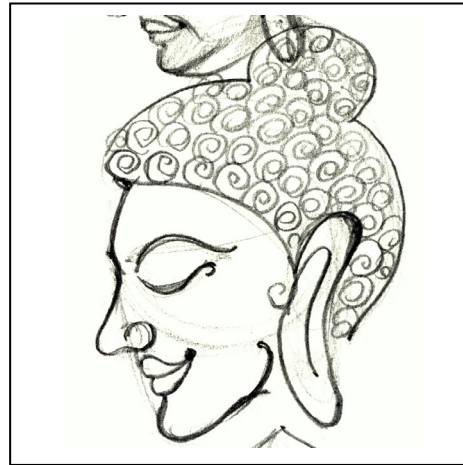
Face Study

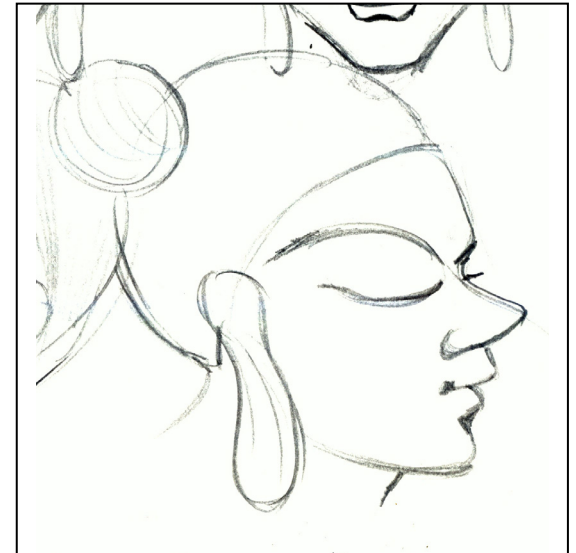
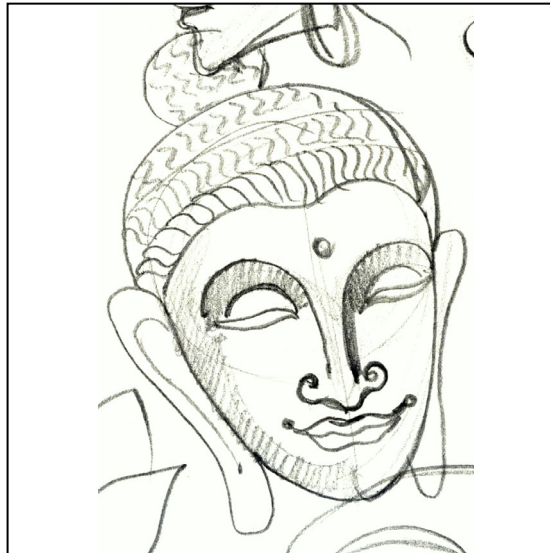
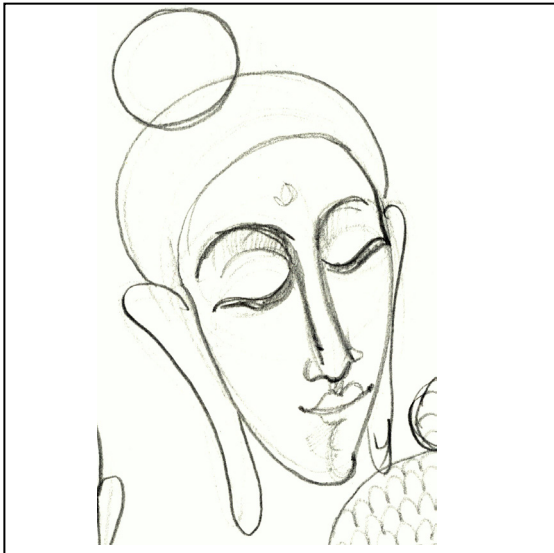
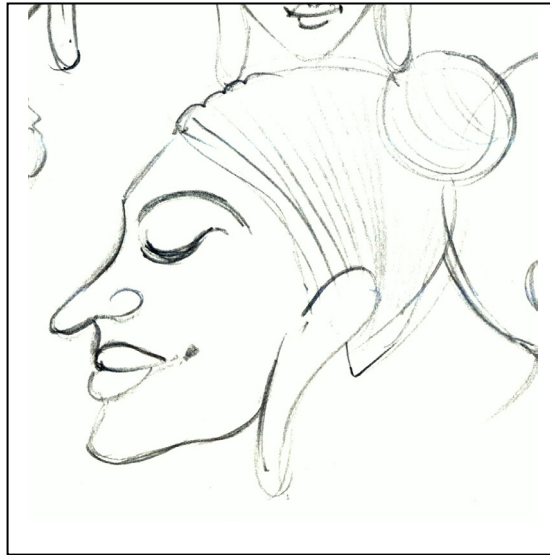




Face Explorations







Anatomy Study



Photograph



Study



Photograph



Study



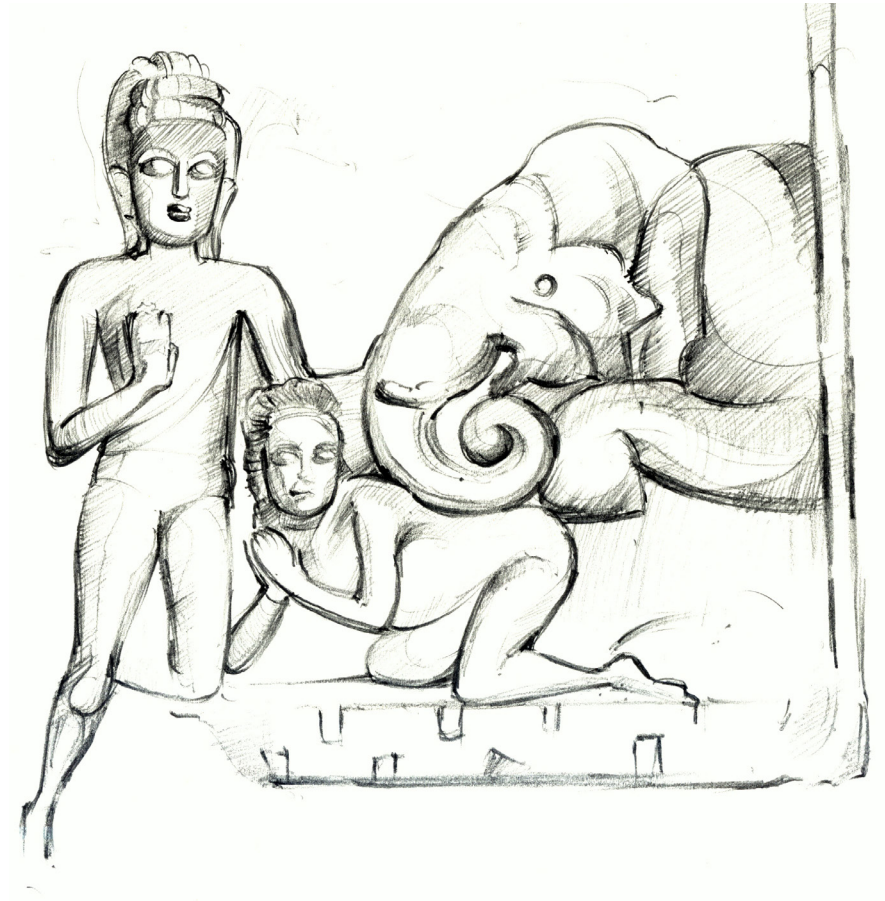
Photograph



Study



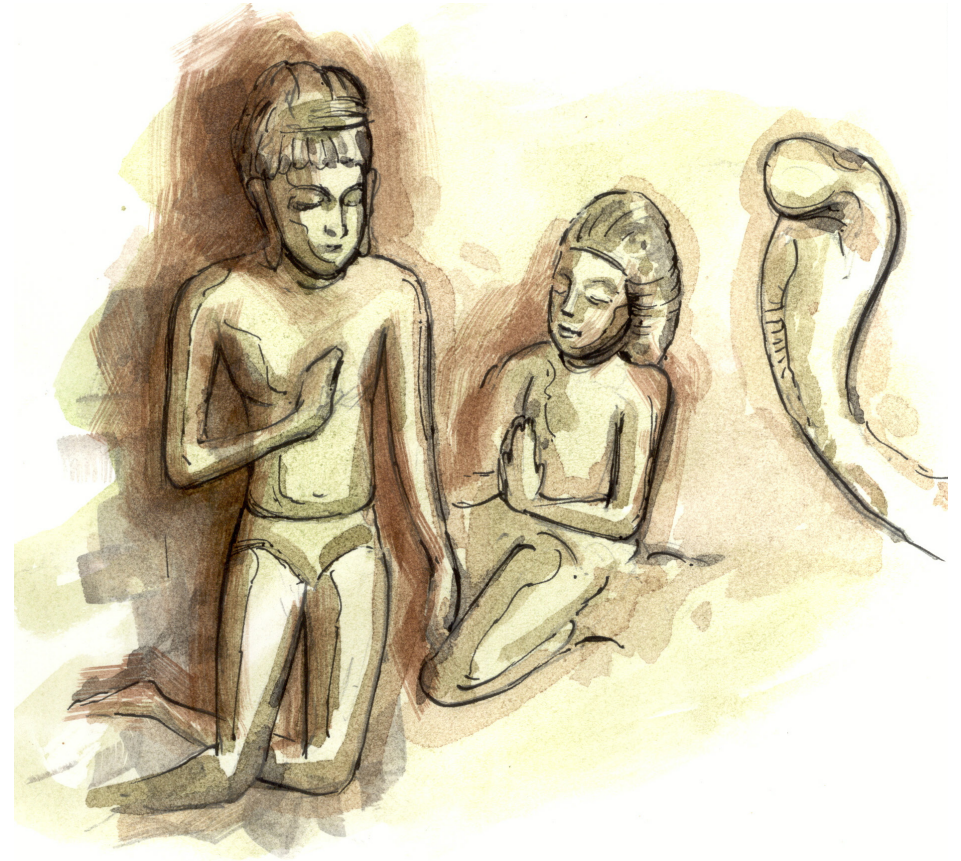
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Study



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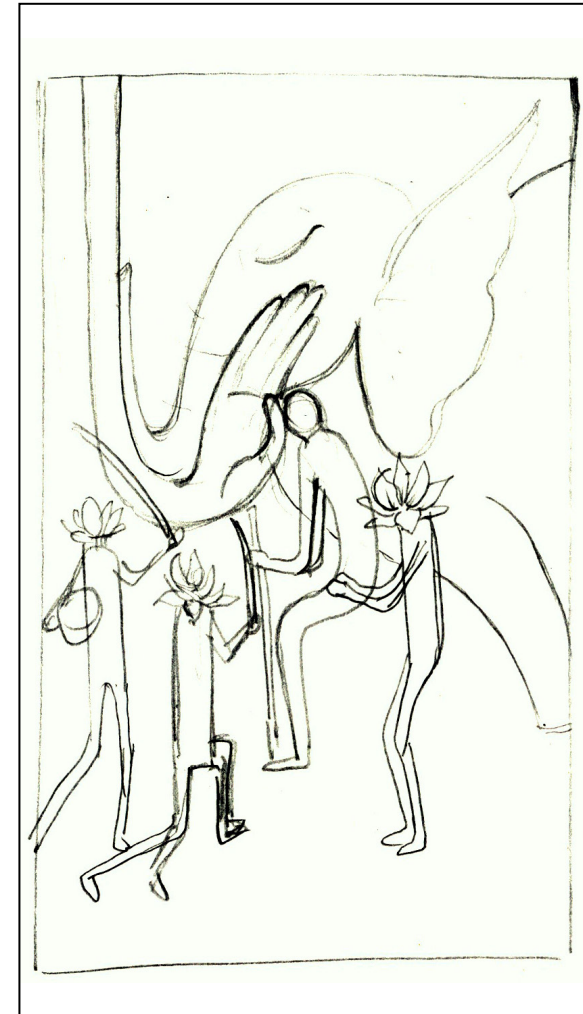


Study

Final Deliverable

A Series of Poster

Abhaya Mudra - Sketches







Abhaya Mudra - Poster | Attempt 1



Abhaya Mudra - Poster | Attempt 2

Abhay Mudra

Purpose - To stop the flow of negative energy (fear).
The abhaya mudra is the gesture of the fifth Dhyani Buddha, Amoghasiddhi.

Abhaya in Sanskrit means fearlessness, and the abhaya mudra symbolizes protection, peace, reassurance and the dispelling of fear.

According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha made this gesture immediately after gaining enlightenment.





Abhaya Mudra



Amoghasiddhi

Event 1 - Forbidding the relatives to fight
It is an event when Buddha's relatives were fighting over water rights. He organized a meeting with the leaders of both families and persuaded them to stop fighting, arguing human lives were more important than water.

Event 2 - The taming of the elephant Nalagiri
Devadatta (a cousin of the Buddha) fed alcohol to a particularly furious elephant named Nalagiri and had him attack the Buddha. The raging bull stormed towards the Buddha, who reached out his hand to touch the animal's trunk. The elephant sensed the metta, the loving kindness of the Buddha, which calmed him down immediately.

Abhaya Mudra - Poster | Attempt 3

ABHAYA MUDRA

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Abhaya Mudra

Amoghasiddhi

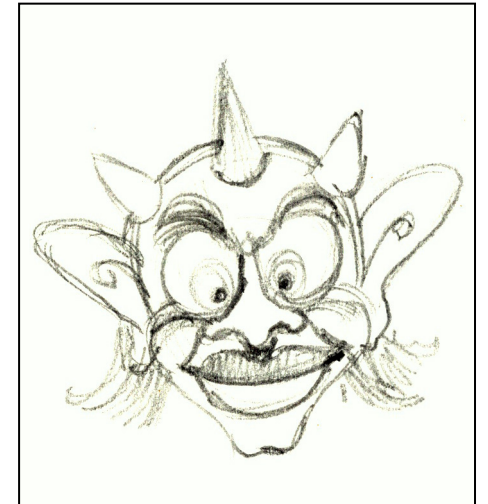
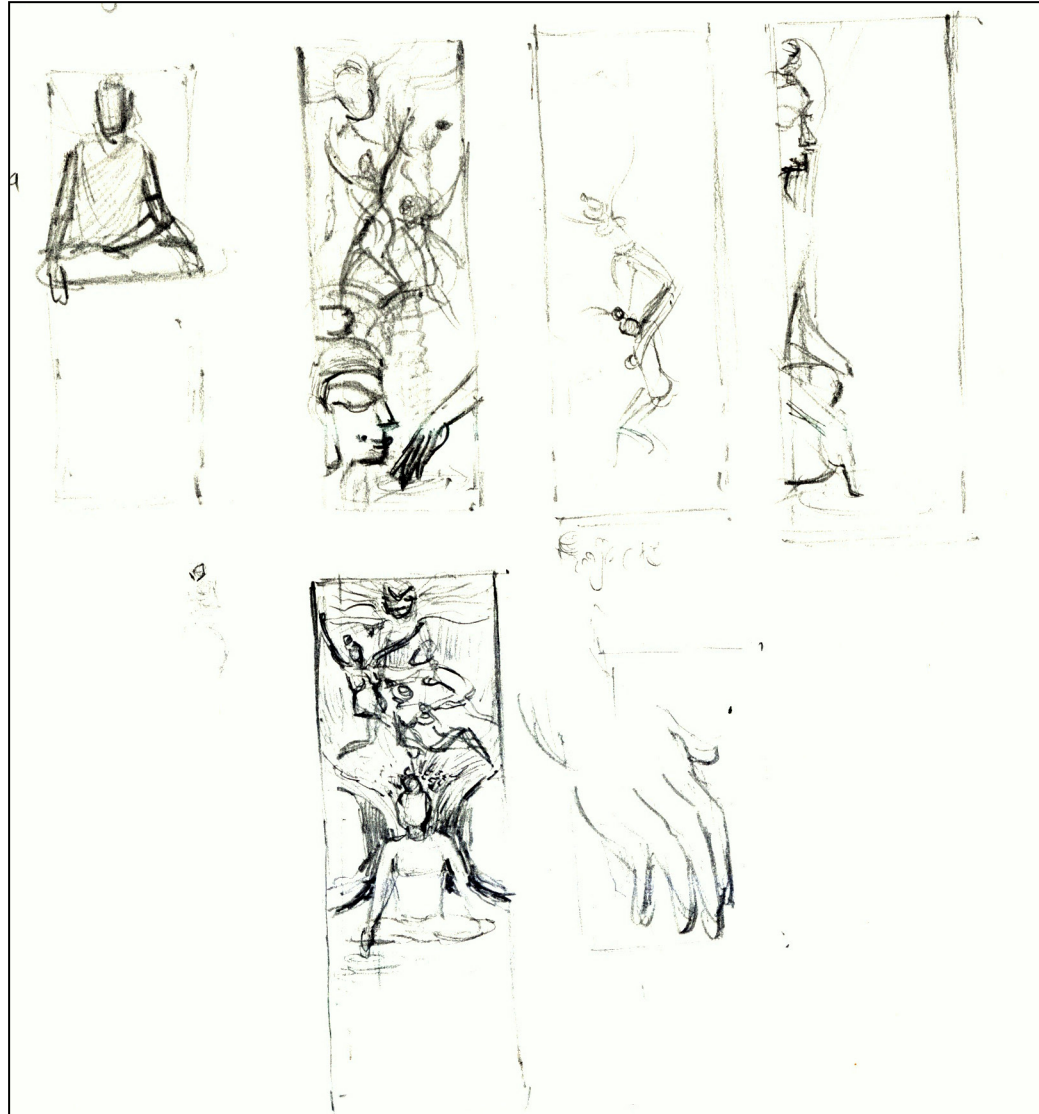
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Abhaya Mudra - Poster | Final



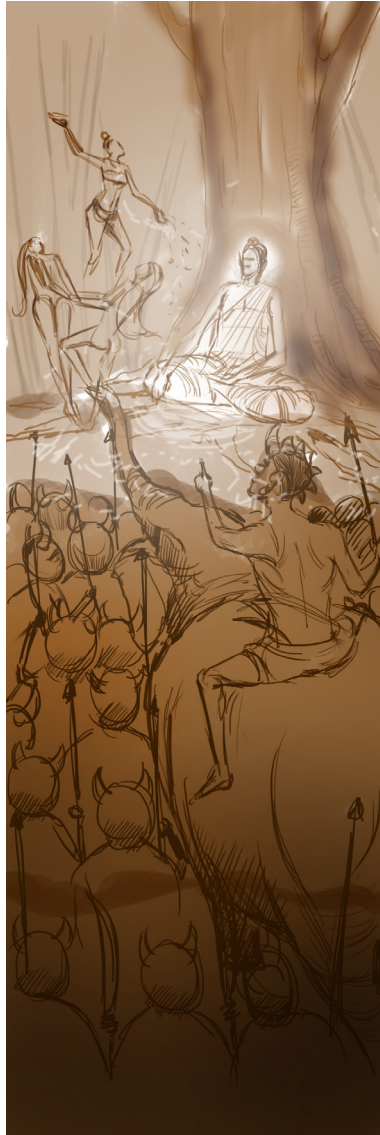
Bhumisparsha Mudra - Sketches







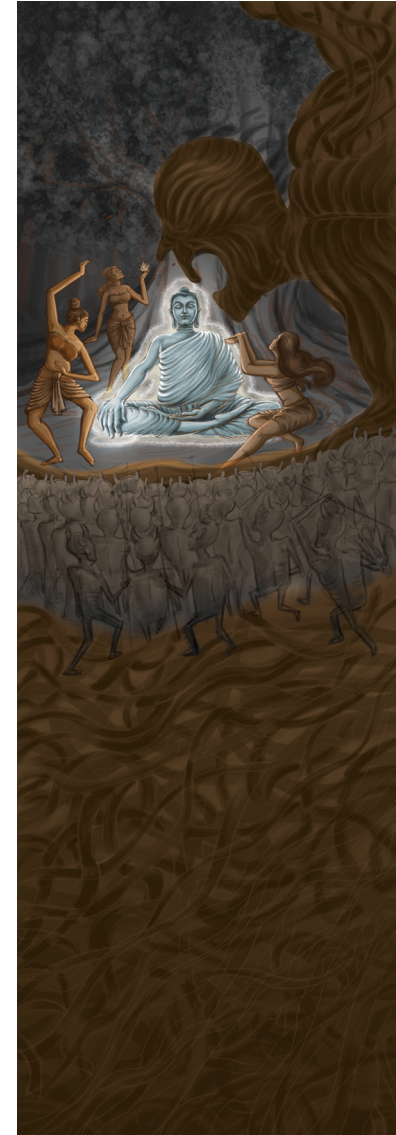
Poster | Attempt 1



Poster | Attempt 2



Poster | Attempt 3



Bhumisparsha Mudra - Poster | Final



Dharmachakra Mudra - Sketches



Dharmachakra Mudra.



Poster | Attempt 1



Poster | Attempt 2



Dharmachakra Mudra - Poster | Final



Dharmachakra Mudra - Vairocana

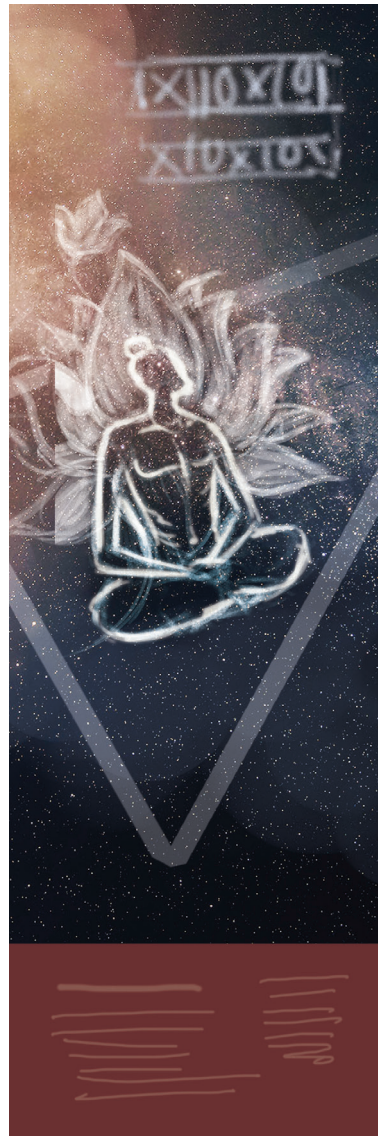
Purpose: To preach his companions the first sermon after his Enlightenment in the Deer Park at Sarnath.

Personality: Mudra of Gautama, the Dhyan Buddha Vairocana and the future Buddha Maitreya.

Meaning: Turning the Wheel of the Dharma or Law.

This gesture was exhibited by Lord Buddha while he preached the first sermon to a companion after his enlightenment. It signifies setting into motion the wheel of Dharma. Since the fingers are positioned near the heart of Buddha, the preaching is coming straight from the heart of Buddha. The three extended fingers of the right hand represent the three vehicles of the Buddha's teachings, namely: The middle finger represents the 'heavenly' of the teachings. The index finger represents the 'realms' of the teachings. The little finger represents the Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle'. The three extended fingers of the left hand symbolize the Three Jewels of Buddhism, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

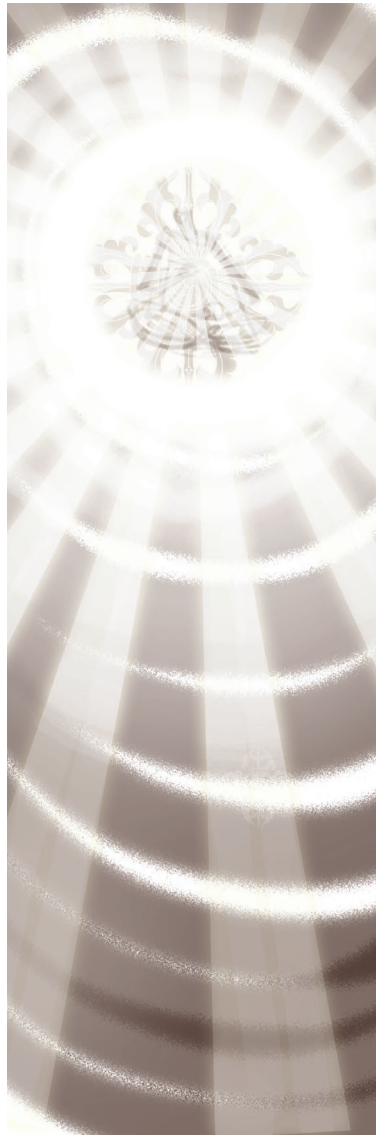
Dhyana Mudra - Poster | Sketches



Dhyana Mudra - Poster | Final



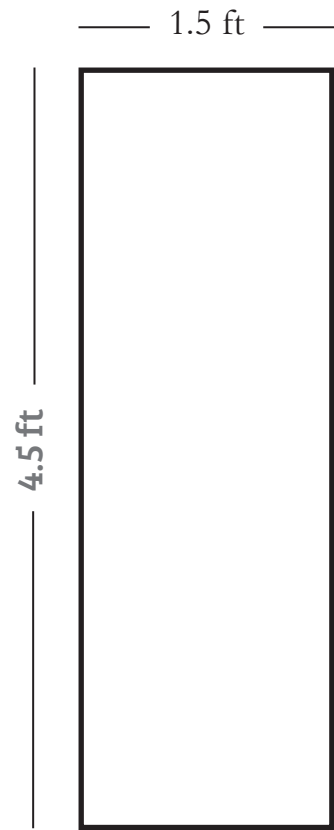
Vajra and Bell in Hand - Poster | Sketches



Vajra and Bell in Hand - Poster | Final



Size



Actual Size



Human Scale

References

Links

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha_(film))https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Buddha
<https://owlcation.com/humanities/Buddha-Statue-Mudras>
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Gestures of Yoga and Indian Dance - Expanded Edition by Cain Caroll and Revital Caroll
Mudras of the Great Buddha Symbolic Gestures and Postures by Exotic India Art
Mudra In Pan-Asian Buddhism Part 1: Primary Mudras of the Major Buddhas by John C. Huntington

