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MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday–Sunday 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Thursday 11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
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Mudras and Their Meanings

self-guided tour

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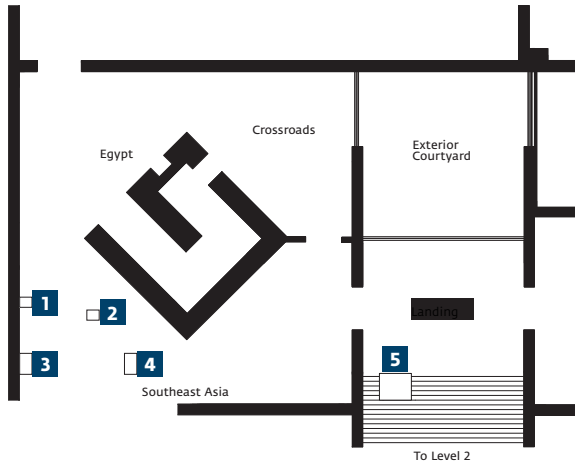
1717 N. Harwood St.
Dallas Texas 75201

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Buddhism developed in India during the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. and spread throughout Asia. Once Buddhism's founder, Siddhartha Gautama, attained spiritual enlightenment, he was called the Buddha, or "Awakened One." Representations of the Buddha serve as a focus for meditation and devotion and express the ideas of peace, harmony, and the power of enlightenment.

Often these representations of the Buddhas or bodhisattvas—a person on the path toward enlightenment and becoming a Buddha—express specific hand gestures, called *mudras*. These gestures symbolize various meanings. Visit the Buddhist gallery on Level 3 of the DMA and explore various *mudras* and their meanings.

LEVEL 3



1

GREEN TARA

Tibet
18th century

This gilt bronze sculpture represents Syamatara, or Green Tara, a beneficent female bodhisattva beloved in Himalayan Buddhism. She joins her left thumb and forefinger in the *vitarka mudra*, which signifies discussion, teaching, and intellectual argument. The circle formed by the joining of the fingers also symbolizes Dharma, or the wheel of law. Her lowered hand is in the *varada mudra*, which represents the granting of wishes, the giving of blessings, and charity.



2

BUDDHA

Cambodia
Late 12th–early 13th century

Sitting atop the coils of the *naga* serpent king, the Buddha Muchalinda's hands are placed palms up, in his lap, in the *dhyana mudra*, representing absolute balance and a meditative state. The serpent king had lifted the Buddha to prevent him from drowning in quickly rising waters sent by a demon.



3

MANJUSHRI

Tibet
18th–19th century

Manjushri, thought to be the oldest bodhisattva, represents infinite wisdom. Expressing the common *dharmachakra mudra*—a combination of the *vitarka* and *jnana mudra*—Manjushri holds both hands before his chest, joining thumbs and index fingers. This symbolizes the turning of the wheel of law (Dharma) and his first sermon after achieving enlightenment.

4



SEATED BUDDHA SUBDUING MARA

Thailand
14th–15th century

With his right hand pointing toward the earth, this Buddha expresses the *bhumisparsha mudra*, or the earth-touching *mudra*. Here, Buddha calls the earth to witness as he is threatened by Mara, a demon that denies him enlightenment. This *mudra* initiates the Earth Goddess's appearance and aids in the destruction of Mara and his armies.

5



SAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Thailand
c. 13th century

Here, the Sakyamuni Buddha, or the historical Buddha, displays the *abhaya mudra*, in which one or both palms face forward, typically a gesture of reassurance and blessing. In Thailand, however, the gesture probably references the time when the Buddha displayed supernatural powers by holding back floodwaters during the conversion of his disciple Kassapa. In Thai, the gesture is called *ham samut* (forbidding the ocean pose).

It is important to note that these gestures do not always mean the same thing to everyone. For example, some *mudras* in Southeast Asian representations don't always carry the same meaning as those in Indian art.