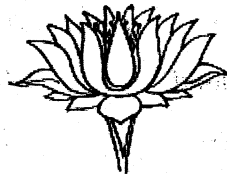
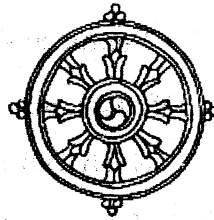


Buddhist Symbols

Since the making of human images of the Buddha was considered sacrilegious for a long time, Buddhist visual art has produced an elaborate vocabulary of symbolic and iconic forms of expressions. A great variety of Buddhist symbols is found in temples and in Buddhist visual art and literature. The following eight figures are among the more common ones. The lotus, the wheel, and the stupa can be seen in almost every Buddhist temple. One may understand these symbols as visual mantras. Contemplating these figures is an exercise in meditation to establish inner contact with the aspect that is represented.



Lotus Flower
Padma - Symbol of Purity. Can be of any colour except blue.



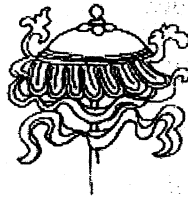
Dharmachakra
The wheel of the law. The eight spokes represent the eightfold path.



Stupa
The stupa is a symbolic grave monument where relics or the ashes of a holy monk are kept. It also symbolises the universe.



Triratana
The three jewels - the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.



Chattra
A parasol - protection against all evil; high rank.



Dhvaja
Banner - the victory of the Buddha's teachings.



Deer
The deer - usually in pairs - symbolises the first sermon of the Buddha which was held in the deer park of Benares.



Naga
The snake king. Vestige of pre-Buddhist fertility rituals and protector of the Buddha and the Dhamma.

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.



Dhyan 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."



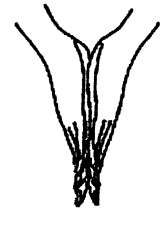
Dharmachakra Mudra
The gesture of teaching usually interpreted as turning the Wheel of Law. The hands are held level with the heart, the thumbs and index fingers form circles.



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.



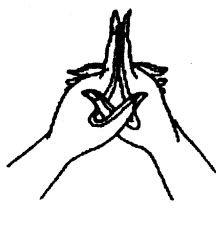
Namaskara Mudra
Gesture of greeting, prayer, and adoration. Buddhas no longer make this gesture because they do not have to show devotion to anything.



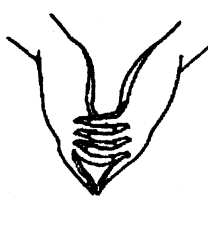
Jnana Mudra
Teaching. The hand is held at chest level and the thumb and index finger again form the Wheel of Law.



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