On Hands and Superpowers

Perfectly Imagined Instruments of Discovery, Creation and Healing

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Observing a ceramicist coax a vase out of a solid block of clay we realise just how enjoyable it is to watch hands at work. It doesn't matter whether it's pottery, ikebana, music or even finger painting - the sight of hands shaping the world is endlessly fascinating.

Hands are evolutionary marvels - sensory, mechanical, emotional and energetic tools that have shaped not only our environment but our very identity. From cave walls to healing tables, from rituals of war to rites of peace, hands are the ultimate interface between the inner and outer worlds. They refine our interaction with our surroundings, giving substance and form to thoughts, making them visible and tangible. Babies all over the world, the moment they first notice their own hands, stare at them in astonished recognition - like a magician seeing their first trick. From that instant, consciousness takes a gigantic leap forward.

For practitioners of Shiatsu and other body-based wisdom traditions, this comes as no surprise. We know that hands are more than flesh, bone and tendon. They are intelligent feelers - listening, speaking and intuiting. They direct energy, decode tension and respond to the hidden languages of the body.

This article is a reverent journey through the dimensions of humanity shaped by the hand - from the physical to the metaphysical, from the creative to the combative, from the intimate to the infinite.

The Hand as Icon

No other part of the human body has been so persistently represented in visual culture, myth, and memory throughout the ages. The prehistoric cave stencils of Cantabria, Spain, some of them over 40,000 years old, are the earliest known artworks, making the human hand both the subject and the creator of art's first chapter.

You might expect the face to hold that honour. After all, faces are more distinctive. Yet the hand is more universal. A face is bound to a specific person, but a hand - stencilled, sculpted and raised - can belong to anyone and still speak volumes.

From those cave walls onward, the thumb became the lever of invention. With it, tools were born, and with tools came the unstoppable wave of human creation. Hands became instruments of expression too, gestures and signs transforming into grammar and poetry. Our hands dance to accentuate movement or to tell stories. They grasp whatever is nearby - sticks, pigments, strings or clay - to create beauty. And yet, the story of the hand is not only one of creation.

The Dark Side of the Hand

During some of history's darkest chapters, hands themselves became targets. From pre-Columbian America to Inquisition-ridden Europe, from the courts of the Middle and Far East to the distant kingdoms of Africa, the hand was singled out for punishment. Theft, forgery or rebellion - each could cost you your fingers, or your entire hand. The principle of *lex talionis* - 'an eye for an eye' - was often applied quite literally: a crime committed by the hand was paid for by the loss of it.

Finger torture in the middle ages

Cave hand painting

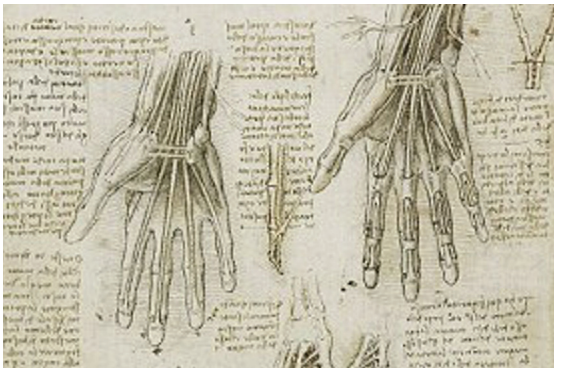
For musicians, it was particularly grim. A bad review could literally break you: the thumbscrew, popular in 16th-century Germany, crushed fingers until bones splintered. Inquisitors believed witches used their hands to cast spells, so burning or binding them became a way of 'silencing' the magic.

Hands represented agency, labour and identity, so destroying them was both practical (disabling a person) and symbolic (removing their honour, ability and freedom). Mutilated hands served as permanent warnings - punishments that lasted long after the pain had faded.

Creating Fine Art

The personal expression of the creator - the urge to give epiphany visible form - is what becomes art. Across time, these expressions have been shaped by beliefs, rituals and political agendas. In ancient Egypt, artists painted hands in hieroglyphs and tomb murals: stiff, formal and symbolic of rank and divine order. Classical sculptors gave us marble hands that seem alive to this day - grasping spears, holding drapery or frozen mid-gesture. Medieval art, by contrast, often flattened and simplified the hand; here, symbol outweighed anatomy. A hand could

be out of proportion, but it had to be correct. Then came Leonardo da Vinci, driven by precision, and declaring, "the hand is the window of the mind." What the Renaissance detailed with anatomical devotion, the Baroque and Rococo dramatised. Hands now fluttered with flirtation, teased with invitation or trembled with theatrical intensity.



Da Vinci's obsession

From caves to code, hands have never stopped creating — or being created. They've been carved in marble, painted in tempera, smeared in oil and more recently pixelated on screens: sometimes idealised, sometimes grotesque, but always central. In the fine arts, the hand is not just another body part, it is the ultimate collaborator, muse and storyteller.

Hands in Sports

Before balls, there were rocks. Before rackets, there were sticks. Early humans threw, caught and wrestled with their bare hands - the hand was the first piece of sporting equipment. And unlike a spear, you couldn't misplace it. Before gloves or even strips of cloth, bare knuckles did all the talking and most of the hitting. In Renaissance Europe, hands were at the epicentre of duels, with chevaliers wearing elaborate gloves designed as much for panache as for protection.

From Henna to High Gloss

Hand decoration has always carried meaning, from sacred ritual to fashion statement. In ancient Egypt, henna stained the hands of brides and the dead, while rings symbolised eternity and status. The Romans took it further, turning rings into legal tools - pressing your finger into wax became the insignia of instant authority. By the Middle Ages and Renaissance, nobles wore rings so heavy they could double as weapons. In the 20th century, nail polish hit the shelves and fingertips became tiny canvases. Rings are worn on every phalange and are now smart enough to track your pulse while you scroll. Henna is global. These adornments announce identity, mark rituals, flaunt status or simply delight in play. The hand remains a timeless canvas of beauty, identity and power.

By the early 1800s, however, gloves in sport were mocked as something for cowards. Countless broken fingers later, sanity prevailed: leather mitts arrived in the late 1860s, finally ending the madness of barehand catching. In both the ancient and modern Olympics, from javelin throws to weightlifting, the Games have always showcased the hand's versatility. So many medals owed something to gripping and grasping.

Hands Go Global

In 2005, Barbara Blackburn set the Guinness World record for speed-typing, at 216 words per minute, a reminder that dexterity didn't end with quills and chisels. In today's digital era, touchscreens and VR have turned the hand into a brush once more, only now it paints in pixels. Raised fists, painted handprints and sprawling murals continue to proclaim the hand as a symbol of resistance. And perhaps most endearing of all, pre-schoolers everywhere still trace their hands on walls and paper, echoing the gesture our ancestors left on cave walls forty millennia ago.

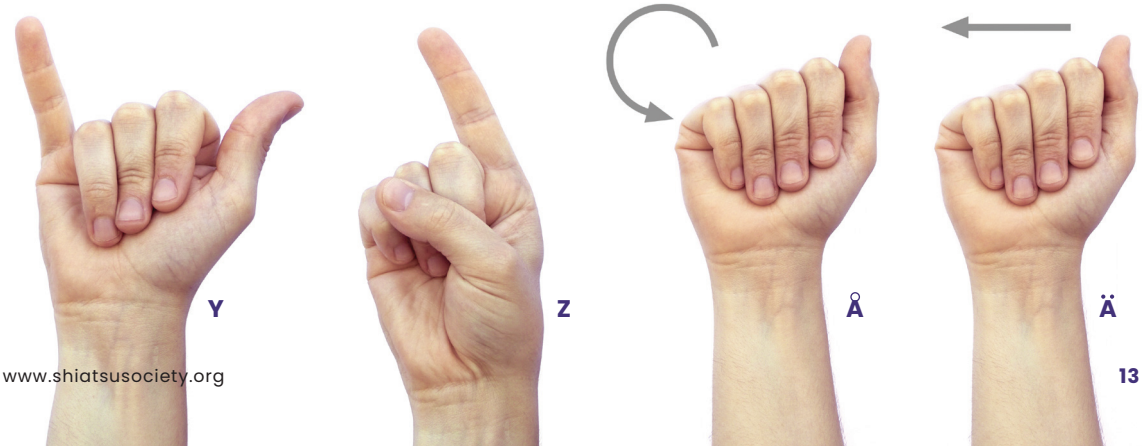
Looking back through history, the hand has always been more than its anatomy, it has carried meaning. Painted on cave walls, raised in protest, adorned with henna or even scarred by punishment, the hand has been humanity's most eloquent messenger. As Shiatsu therapists, we can see in this extended story not only symbolism but continuity: the same hands that once pressed seeds into the earth now press gently into the body to release tension, to restore flow, to listen where words cannot. In every culture, across millennia, hands have been trusted as transmitters of energy, intention and care. To

work with our hands is to touch both history and spirit - reminding us that the power to create, to harm, to heal and to bless has always rested in our palms.

Conduits Of Communication

Hands, being linked to many kinds of ancestral knowledge, become conduits of instant transmission. The ancestry of which we speak, might it be of two kinds? Certainly, it could relate to knowledge passed from generation to generation through millennia of human development, trial and error, method and madness. But might it not equally signify knowledge gained through incarnation after incarnation onto these and other planes of existence, perhaps even simultaneously occurring?

The shapes of energy cultivation, for example, known as mudra in esoteric tradition, are finely tuned constellations of form and function. The rites of spiritual practice, priesthood and worship all rely heavily on carefully sculpted hand forms, designed to act as conduits of



grace from the heavenly realms to these earthly densities. And back again.

The various modalities of healing that have risen and fallen, transpired and expired through the ages, these are also deeply reliant on the ability of the hands to match and shape, to monitor and calibrate.

Shiatsu is very much the story of touch - healing touch, caring touch and perhaps above all, listening touch. Many of us who feel the call of Shiatsu and related modalities find ourselves becoming instant friends with animals. They sense something different in our mode of contact. They prick up their ears, yawn spontaneously, adjust their posture to assist us in pinpointing our touch towards the parts of their anatomy where it is most needed.

In moments like these, we are reminded of the primal power and the magical importance of touch - its sheer immediacy and its ability to go beyond the superficial and deep below the surface. Animals do not have language in the sense we humans have and therefore touch becomes an even more important and transcendent tool. Our hands become sensitive vessels of communication, able to bridge the gap between animal and human sensibilities.

When we bring that experience into our practice of touch with humans, our hands become even more potent harbingers of open-ended communication. We can let go

of the small will of the hand and its simple ability to grip and grasp. The hand becomes a vast vehicle of infinite possibility, a channel for the great will, the will that recognises no difference between the now and eternity, between one individual fate and the fate of humanity.

Relaxing into the Universe

As we begin to relax our intention from specifics into a larger space where possibilities multiply, we start to open doors of infinity for ourselves and our clients. This does not happen all at once and certainly not on a regular basis, until our practice becomes routine and habitual. There are many foundational lessons to be learned, phases to experience, stages to journey through. Our hands will initially be relatively stiff, weak and lacking in the larger faculties of space holding. They will need to time to evolve, to understand and to gain the confidence to allow information to pass through unhindered, to allow flow to stream forth and inform the deeper aspects of our mind.

We are programmed to process information in units of knowledge, each to be separately analysed and quantified. With time, our hands guide us, together with hara, spine and pelvis, to root more securely into the earth and into the flow of timeless time. They assist us in gradually passing into a mode of being where we release the need to grasp discrete pieces of data and instead observe large vistas, where anomalies draw attention to themselves and thereby engage our sense and sensibility, our destiny and directionality.

Our hands become sensitised, in tune with our bodies' sense of integration and wholeness. We learn to trust them as magical instruments, capable of comprehending in an instant that which the slower, more pedestrian aspects of sensory comprehension may be incapable of computing.

In an instant, a whole story, a series of happenings, entire chapters of events, can be revealed to us, through the agency of touch with listening hands. It may be that we do not understand with our intellect everything our hands are able to intuit. We may be compelled to await the more detailed elucidation of detail and specifics, but a general feeling, a wide knowing, a deep sense of understanding may be imparted in a few instants.

The Field Around and Within Us

With that in mind, we might consider the exact polar equivalent in the minds and bodies, the souls and spirits of our clients. Is it not precisely the same for them; as our hands unlock the blocks and free the flow, that they in an instant can gain access to reams of information previously withheld?

We need not question the validity of such phenomena, beyond simply confirming for ourselves that we have not in any way willed the influx in any particular fashion, but instead maintained our role as fully present, compassionate conduits for another's access to a personal, ancestral or universal stream of truth.

Our hands, very often the matrix of contact and therefore communication, bear silent witness to the magic of alchemy and transformation, which, always unpredictable but equally potentially ever present, waits in the field around and within us.