**How to do Prostrations**

To do a prostration, stand and face to object or person to whom you are prostrating. First create the mudra by putting your palms together as we might do in prayer with the heels of the hands and fingertips touching, but leaving space between the palms, by curving them slightly. The palms should be approximately at the heart-center, in the middle of the chest between the breasts. The hands will be upright, but relaxed.

Be sure to insert the thumbs between the hands, by tucking the thumbs inside the palms. The hands in this mudra represent a lotus blossom that has not yet opened, but is about to bloom. The empty space between the palms represents the dharmakaya[[1]](#footnote-1).

The use of the right and left hands represent skillful means and wisdom. By joining these two (skillful means and wisdom, the unity of which represents enlightenment) we create the auspicious conditions for the path to arise where it has not arisen, to never weaken, and to ever grow and flourish.

Next, raise the palms, still together, to the forehead; then to the level of the throat, and then to the level of the heart. This signifies the qualities of the buddhas’ three places and the purification of our obscurations of the three gates of body, speech and mind.

Now you slowly lower the body to the floor to kneeling, letting go of the mudra, and landing on the hands, palms open and fingers outspread against the floor. Your knees will touch the floor. Stretch the body out fully, sliding the open hands forward as you go. When the body is flat against the floor, raise the hands in the mudra over the head, and then reverse the motion so that you rise, using the hands to push upward to a standing position, (if you can rise without using the hands, this is also OK) repeating the placement of the hands at the forehead, throat, and heart center when standing. (When you are going down, and when you are pushing up, do not put the hands in a fist—open them fully.)

There are many types of prostrations: the full ones just described [Tib. gyang chag], and half prostrations [Tib. kum chag], prostrations where only the five points of the hands, forehead and two knees touch the ground. (The half-prostration is done kneeling, basically.)

One should try to do a correct form of the prostration, but even more important is the understanding that by doing the prostration, you are expressing respect and physically and mentally embodying the pure actions of body, speech and mind. As you bow, you express respect for the teachings, those who embody them, and the virtuous qualities the teachings articulate. One might bow to exalted sangha, as an expression of respect, appreciation, and interconnectedness.

You can see a video of our friend, Lobsang, at YoWangdu.com demonstrating the prostration style with which he is most familiar. <https://www.yowangdu.com/tibetan-buddhism/prostrations.html>. At the end of his full prostration, he raises his hands slightly. I was taught to raise the palms joined above the head, bending the arm at the elbow, and others teach to turn the arms so that the forearms are upward, with palms open, and then to raise the forearm while the elbow rests on the floor, as if lifting something in the open palms. This brings the palms up on both sides of the head, which is facing the floor.

1. The dharmakaya is sometimes described as the empty, unconditioned truth, into which illusion, ignorance, and any kind of concept, have never entered. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)