



Chakra Healing THERAPY

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Awaken Spiritual Energies
and Heal Emotional Wounds

.....

GLEN PARK



Chakra Healing

THE THERAPY

Awaken Spiritual Energies
and Heal Emotional Wounds

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**Awaken Spiritual Energies
and Heal Emotional Wounds**

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Destiny Books
Rochester, Vermont



*With love and gratitude to my twin sons, Joe and
Chris, who have profoundly enriched my life*

Chakra Healing THERAPY

“*Chakra Healing Therapy* offers an invaluable model for clear understanding of the relationship of chakras to health, mental well-being, and spiritual transformation. It is the most clear and in-depth exposition of the chakra system I have read and includes beautiful charts and diagrams; solid references related to research, psychology, and transpersonal theories of development; and specific practices for balancing chakras and grounding, many based on the Alexander Technique. Eastern theories of the chakras are integrated with Western developmental stages and correlated with various stages of life. The author shows the relationship of chakras to the endocrine system and neurology, suggests causes and solutions for chakra imbalances, and provides studies demonstrating the impact of body therapy on correcting chakra imbalances. This is an excellent reference for therapists and anyone with an interest in enlivening, balancing, and transforming their subtle energy system.”

BONNIE GREENWELL, PH.D., PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND AUTHOR
OF *WHEN SPIRIT LEAPS*, *THE KUNDALINI GUIDE*, AND *THE
AWAKENING GUIDE*

“Glen Park’s *Chakra Healing Therapy* is a modern guide to ancient insights—how the entire universe is intelligent and conscious, and how these qualities envelop and manifest in the human body. This book is important for anyone who is interested in spiritual evolution.”

LARRY DOSSEY, M.D., AUTHOR OF *ONE MIND*

“I am sure *Chakra Healing Therapy* will be of great value to suffering humanity at a time when deep trauma, past and present, is

affecting the lives of millions all over the planet.”

ANNE BARING, PH.D., AUTHOR OF *THE DREAM OF THE COSMOS*

“*Chakra Healing Therapy* is a tour de force, integrating the Alexander Technique, energy therapy, developmental psychology, and spiritual wisdom into an easy-to-understand, practical guide for personal healing and transformation you can develop on your own. Glen Park’s vast research and professional experience culminate in the most comprehensive, readable text I’ve seen for holistic personal growth, from healing fundamental wounds to advanced spiritual actualization.”

JENNY WADE, PH.D., DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND
AUTHOR OF *CHANGES OF MIND*

“*Chakra Healing Therapy* is groundbreaking in its unification of the Eastern wisdom of the chakras with Western psychology. It is both visionary in its scope and practical in its application, showing a truly holistic way of understanding psychological health and illness in which the chakras mirror back the development of the individual. This book will be of immense value to professional therapists and anyone seeking to maximize their own health and well-being.”

CAROLE TAYLOR, ASTROLOGER AND AUTHOR OF *ASTROLOGY:
USING THE WISDOM OF THE STARS IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE*

“Glen Park’s passion to understand and illuminate the secrets of the chakras finds an engaging and profoundly useful expression in this wonderful book. Highly recommended for all who care about self-healing, healing others, and helping to heal the world.”

MICHAEL J. GELB, AUTHOR OF *BODY LEARNING AND HOW TO
THINK LIKE LEONARDO DA VINCI*

“Prana, the chakras, and kundalini originate from and are central to the Tantric and Shakti yogic traditions, but the classic texts can be dense, culture bound, and obscure. Glen Park’s book is the result of

decades of practice and is based on her lived experience. She offers a clear, thorough, and accessible book on the chakras and subtle energy system.”

DAVID MOORE, DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL FOR F.M.
ALEXANDER STUDIES IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, AND
AUTHOR OF *SMART YOGA AND YOGA AND THE ALEXANDER
TECHNIQUE*

“There have been many books written on the chakras but none more comprehensive and incisive as *Chakra Healing Therapy*. Glen Park has achieved a most thorough synthesis of Western psychology and Eastern wisdom, shedding new light on the chakra system.”

JAMES D’ANGELO, PH.D., COMPOSER, WORKSHOP LEADER, AND
AUTHOR OF *SEED SOUNDS FOR TUNING THE CHAKRAS AND THE
HEALING POWER OF THE HUMAN VOICE*

“In *Chakra Healing Therapy*, Glen Park lays out a historic and fundamental understanding of the seven energy bodies: how they influence and support our physical, emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual development. Park provides case studies from her healing therapy practice, including personal exercises for healing developmental wounds. An excellent read and exploration for young therapists of any discipline.”

GRAY WOLF, INTEGRATIVE HOLISTIC THERAPIST

“Glen Park has written a lucid, informative, and well-illustrated book on the chakras and human development. She brings 30 years of working with the energy of the chakras and the Alexander Technique, and I can honestly say that I learned something new and interesting on every page.”

RICHARD BRENNAN, AUTHOR AND DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AT
THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE CENTRE, IRELAND

Acknowledgments

This book has been gestating inside me for over thirty years, and I am grateful to all the many people who have influenced me during those years—teachers, students, clients, friends, and family—and for the gifts I have received from the work of authors, artists, and other creative people. How lucky I have been to live in this place, in this time.

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PREFACE

My Personal Journey to Chakra Healing Therapy

At its heart, the journey of each life is a pilgrimage through unforeseen sacred places that enlarge and enrich the soul.

JOHN O'DONOHUE

It was the fall of 1979 and I was visiting California, having been fortunate enough to receive a small arts council grant enabling me to explore women's theater in the States. I had just left the fringe theater group that I had toured with for eight years in the UK. I felt burned out. I had decided to change careers and planned, upon returning from the United States, to train as a teacher of the Alexander Technique with Don Burton, who was a wonderful trainer. I loved this body-oriented work, having had lessons for several years that had helped me overcome a recurring problem of sciatica.

In San Francisco, the New Age movement was burgeoning, well ahead of developments in the UK. I was staying with a friend of a friend, who encouraged me to have a psychic reading, which felt a bit like taking a trip to the moon, inexperienced as I was in anything New Age. But I was curious and went along, introducing myself as someone with no experience in psychism and a certain amount of skepticism. I can remember only one thing about the reading: As she began to look at my aura and chakras, the psychic told me that, much to her surprise, considering my skepticism, she could "see" that I was extremely psychic. She told me that because I had no idea of this ability, it had become a liability. I was vulnerable to picking up negative energy from people and places, which was making me ill, and she advised me to train in psychic development so that I could learn how to protect myself.

Several pinches of salt later, I returned to the UK and began my teacher training. The Alexander Technique is a method of retraining ourselves in everyday movements of life, such as sitting, standing, and walking, in a way that promotes health and efficiency. It also helps improve the highly specific movements of specialists such as athletes, musicians, dentists, hairdressers, and many more, for whom habitual and repetitive movements can cause problems.

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955) was born in Tasmania and as a young man began a promising career as an actor until he suffered from voice problems, especially on stage where he became hoarse while reciting. He sought medical advice but no doctor was able to explain or cure his problems so he decided he must be doing something wrong, misusing his vocal organs in some way. This led to many years of exploring the tension patterns throughout his body, and discovering how they can be triggered by habitual reactions to everyday stimuli, such as the thought of reciting. He cured his own vocal problems and his general health, and began teaching his discoveries, first in Australia and later in England and the United States. His method became known as the Alexander Technique. In 1931, after teaching for more than thirty-five years, he began a three-year teacher training course and continued to train teachers of the Alexander Technique until his death at the age of eighty-six.

His method involves teaching movement principles and hands-on bodywork. Students are shown ways to think about their movement and balance that improve coordination and ease. In addition, teachers of the technique work very sensitively with their hands on the body, both during movement and while a student is lying at rest on a therapy table. This work brings about release and balance in the musculature, giving students the experience of a different way of being and moving. Alexander Technique teachers are both teachers and hands-on practitioners working directly on the body.

Practitioners who work with touch know how impossible it is to separate the mind from the body. We constantly experience the effect that muscular release has upon the mind, generating feelings, thoughts, and memories for our clients. Alexander Technique trainee teachers receive a huge amount of gentle, releasing hands-on bodywork, while simultaneously working consciously with the way they think about their balance and

movement. This includes mindful awareness and intentional directions to the body. They use themselves as a laboratory, applying the principles of the Alexander Technique to themselves before working with other people. As a result, a trainee emerges from this full-time training, which generally lasts three years, significantly changed in mind and body. In fact, during my training, I began to realize that I was having psychic experiences. I began seeing auras around people and picking up the thoughts and feelings of others. Some of these experiences were pleasant, but some were quite disturbing, and I was reminded of the words of the Californian psychic. I decided to take her advice and undertake some training so that I could have a better understanding and control of these paranormal experiences.

So, alongside my training in the Alexander Technique, I trained in psychic development with Ivy Northage in England, learning to see auras more clearly and to protect myself from the negative energies of other people. I also began to learn about the chakras, centers of energy and consciousness located in the spine and head, and how to open and close them at the psychic level.

On one occasion during my Alexander Technique training, we were honored by the visit of a Tibetan lama, one of the most respected monks and teachers of Tibetan Buddhism in the UK. He watched the work we were doing in our training course and described it as “High Tantra.” This was praise indeed, as it suggested that this bodywork was comparable to the ancient spiritual purification practices of Tantric yoga. Many teachers of the Alexander Technique will say that their training opened them to a spiritual awakening. This certainly was the case for me.

Toward the end of my training, I visited San Francisco again. I was keen to make contact with the Californian psychic reader in order to find out from her where I could learn more about the psychic training she had received. She put me in touch with her teacher, Michael Symonds, who very generously invited me to spend a week training with him. That week sowed the seeds of this book and changed the direction of my life.

Michael taught that the chakras embody a model of consciousness that involves the whole body and extends beyond the body into the aura. He was a gifted clairvoyant who could “see” that each chakra had three subtle levels of depth: the psychological, the psychic, and the spiritual (and I have added the non-subtle physical level of the body in this book). He was

particularly interested in the psychological level, and he often collaborated with psychotherapists who would send him clients for a reading, especially clients who were having trouble recalling events from their childhood. Michael would evaluate the chakras and then discuss what he saw in the programming of each chakra, and what in the early life of the client could have created this programming. His prompts would open up memories for clients that they could take back to their therapist for further consideration.

In the short week that I studied with him, I learned how to give chakra readings using Michael's map of the psyche. He invited volunteers, often graduates of his training, to join us so that I could give them a reading. Because I had been training in psychic development for over a year, I was a quick learner. When I returned to the UK to finish my training in the Alexander Technique, I offered a few chakra readings to fellow students and friends and was astonished at how useful they found them. But my main focus was to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique, which I loved. I wanted to offer the hands-on skills that I had learned to as many people as possible, and I found the work very rewarding. I was helping people learn how to use their bodies well, to overcome back pain and other physical problems, and to become more in touch with their bodies as they became mindful of how they were using themselves. This approach generally promoted health and happiness.

But sometimes I found that the changes my students experienced went deeper than the purely physical level. Muscular releases might cause a person to cry or have some other emotional release, or it might help them get in touch with a deep memory that needed consideration and healing. Wilhelm Reich, a psychotherapist and student of Sigmund Freud, described the muscular tightening patterns of the body as "body armor." As these muscular patterns release with hands-on work, the emotional armor that they support breaks down. I found that my Alexander Technique training did not address these psychological phenomena adequately, but if I looked at the issues from the perspective of the chakras, I was able to support my students in understanding and integrating emotions and memories that were arising. I began to offer my students chakra work when it seemed appropriate to the way they were responding to my hands-on work. Because the chakras are located physically in the body as well as in the subtle planes, I found that I could continue working with my hands while also addressing the psychological issues that were being raised by the muscular

releases. I was able to tell my students which chakras were flowing well and which needed energetic and therapeutic support. Sometimes I would work silently, and at other times my student and I would talk about the psychological issues associated with a particular chakra, while at the same time I would give energetic healing to the chakra with my hands. This work complemented my Alexander Technique work beautifully.

It seemed to me that the chakra work was building bridges between “talk therapy” and “body therapy.” Touch is so fundamental to human life, starting with the earliest stages of life both inside and outside the womb, and healing touch can go to places that talking cannot reach on its own. Not that traditional therapy is not also vital; in fact, when a client needed a lot of therapeutic support, I would advise them to see a counselor or psychotherapist, in conjunction with doing the bodywork with me. I felt so positive about the combination of Alexander Technique work and chakra work that I wrote my first book, *The Art of Changing*, about it. The first part of that book was a thorough introduction to the Alexander Technique, and the second part was an exploration of related fields, with the largest section about the chakras and the energetic experience of the body.

Sadly, Michael Symonds died of AIDS before my first book was published, but he knew that it had been accepted for publication and that I had acknowledged his contribution. Knowing he was dying, he asked me to send a copy to his parents, which I duly did. I sent it by sea mail, as the cost of sending a heavy item by airmail to the USA was extortionate in those days. But unbelievably, within a week a letter arrived from his parents thanking me for the book! It felt like a minor miracle, and I imagined Michael, up in the ether somewhere, magicking that book over the Atlantic to his family home! Michael introduced me to a very insightful chakra map of the psyche. If I hadn’t spent that week in California with him, my life would have worked out very differently, and this book would not have been written. The seeds he sowed have grown and flourished as I developed his ideas.

The years passed and my chakra work began to take on a life of its own. Now a significant number of my clients were coming to me for work with the chakras, and I began teaching other Alexander Technique teachers how to work with the chakras, and “chakra healing therapy” was born. Working with the chakras as an embodied developmental map of consciousness can

help throw light on the multifaceted nature of our individual interior experience. Chakra therapists show their clients how to become aware of the different chakras within the body and their psychological functions, as parts of a multilevel map of the psyche. With this awareness, clients learn how to mentally support healing and integration of different aspects of themselves. This work is combined with hands-on healing of the chakras, which gives clients the experience of a more balanced and integrated system, both mentally and physically, which in time they can maintain for themselves.

Now, having worked with the chakras for more than thirty years, I have a deeper understanding of the chakras. I have often been astonished and very moved by the way in which hands-on work, combined with an understanding of the chakras, can give people insight into their problems, tools for working with them, and the potential for deep inner healing. Their experiences became my research project, and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with them all. This book evolved as a response to the request of many clients and colleagues to collate years of experiential learning and put it into one volume in order to tell the story of the chakras and how we can work with them to support our own personal and spiritual growth.

This book is about the intelligence that speaks through the body, which, as we learn its language, helps us understand ourselves better. I would like to think that it is part of a journey into understanding the human psyche and its relationship to the body. This understanding can enable us to live happier and more fulfilled lives, and I hope that this book can make a small contribution to realizing that vision.

INTRODUCTION

Setting the Stage

The chakras were first described in ancient Hindu teachings, which go back as early as the third millennium BCE (and maybe earlier), and they became a central part of the Tantric spiritual traditions that developed from Hindu philosophy during the second century CE and onward.¹ In Hindu theory, the chakras were generally linked with the practice of yoga, a system of physio-psycho-spiritual development designed to enable a person to move into higher states of consciousness. *Yoga* is a Sanskrit word meaning “to yoke” or “to unite,” and traditionally it is seen as the process of yoking the earthbound self to its divine nature, thus spiritualizing the whole self. It involves meditation and many other spiritual practices in addition to the postural exercises that are popular in the West.

The word *chakra* is also Sanskrit, meaning “wheel,” “disk,” or any arrangement in circular form or organization, and this circular form is how chakras appear to clairvoyants who are able to see the subtle energetic structures interpenetrating the physical body. There are many schools of Tantric yoga, with a huge variety of very detailed practices.² In most of these traditions, each chakra is represented by a mystical diagram called a *yantra*, which is a geometric illustration used for meditation. Each chakra yantra has a seed sound connected with it. Yogic spiritual practices included visualizing the yantra in its location on the spine while intoning the seed sound, in order to enhance the energy of the associated chakra and support transformation. This book features an illustration of a simple chakra yantra linked to the relevant chakra at the beginning of each chapter, a diagram of each chakra yantra placed on the body in the “Physical Level” section of the chapter, and a full-color illustration of all the chakra yantras on the body in the color insert (see [plate 1](#)).

These Eastern ideas began to be introduced into the West during the late nineteenth century. Helena Blavatsky, who cofounded the Theosophical

Society in 1875, wrote widely on Eastern philosophy.³ In 1919, Sir John Woodroffe, under the pen name Arthur Avalon, wrote *The Serpent Power*, the first English translation and commentary on some of the Tantric texts on yoga and the chakras, and from these beginnings the Western esoteric tradition of the chakras was born. Other theosophists, including Charles W. Leadbeater, Alice Bailey, and Rudolf Steiner, wrote about the chakras in their work, and Carl Jung introduced a psychoanalytic perspective on them.⁴ Hindu teachers began coming to the West to share their spiritual wisdom, and as a result yoga teaching became widespread and popular in America and Europe, and the chakras became part of the New Age culture blossoming in the 1960s.

In this modern esoteric tradition, the chakras are understood to be subtle energy centers located in the body that connect the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of our being. To explore this concept, consider that Einstein proved that matter converts into energy with the famous $E = mc^2$ formula. In addition, quantum physics points to the possibility that consciousness influences matter and is itself a form of energy. Following from these two theories, we can propose that mind and matter are both forms of energy, and in this way the concept of the chakras as invisible psychoenergetic centers becomes more viable.

Some Hindu specialists argue that the chakras were never seen as centers of energy or consciousness and that in the original Tantric concept of them, they were simply vehicles for meditation. But the Sanskrit scriptures refer to them as divine energies of consciousness, and the names given to the chakras in these texts strongly suggest that those early authors did perceive a conscious element in each chakra, with yantra meditations devised to influence the energy and consciousness of each chakra and the area of the body it governed.⁵

There are many different systems of chakras, both in Hindu writings and in the West, with different numbers of major chakras in addition to numerous minor chakras. I shall be writing about a system of seven major chakras and will include the minor chakras at the centers of the hands and feet, which is the system best known in the West.

The Energy Structure of the Chakra System

In the womb and at birth, a baby has one simple curve in the spine from the head to the tail, which we call the primary curve. Then, as the baby learns to support her own head and to sit up, secondary curves in the neck and the lower back develop (see [figures](#)). The secondary curves add strength and elasticity to the spine. The major chakras are located at the turning points or nodes of the primary and secondary curves, as though they created those changes of direction in the spine, like the wheels of a pulley.

Leadbeater showed correspondences between the chakras and nerve plexuses, or junctions where spinal nerves are bundled for efficient distribution to various parts of the body, and this concept has been adopted by the Western esoteric tradition.⁶ It helps explain the different types of sensory information that we receive in different areas of the body and informs much of our understanding of the chakras. For example, we feel sexual desires in the lower abdomen and pelvic area (corresponding to the Base and Sacral Chakras); when we feel anxious, we sometimes get “butterflies” in the stomach (Solar Plexus Chakra); when we feel filled with love for someone or something, we tend to experience expansion across the chest (Heart Chakra). Recognizing that different sensations, emotions, and thoughts arise in different areas of the body can become a valuable tool in understanding the consciousness of the body and developing our self-awareness.

The **Base Chakra** is located at the bottom of the primary curve of the spine, at the tip of the coccyx. It is linked to the coccygeal plexus.

The **Sacral Chakra** is positioned in the sacrum (S1), at the first of the five fused sacral bones, which is the point where the primary curve turns into the secondary curve of the lumbar spine. It is linked to the sacral plexus.

The **Solar Plexus Chakra** is positioned at the place where the lumbar curve changes into the primary curve of the thoracic spine (T12/L1). It is linked to the solar plexus.



Fig. I.1. Primary curve of a baby's spine

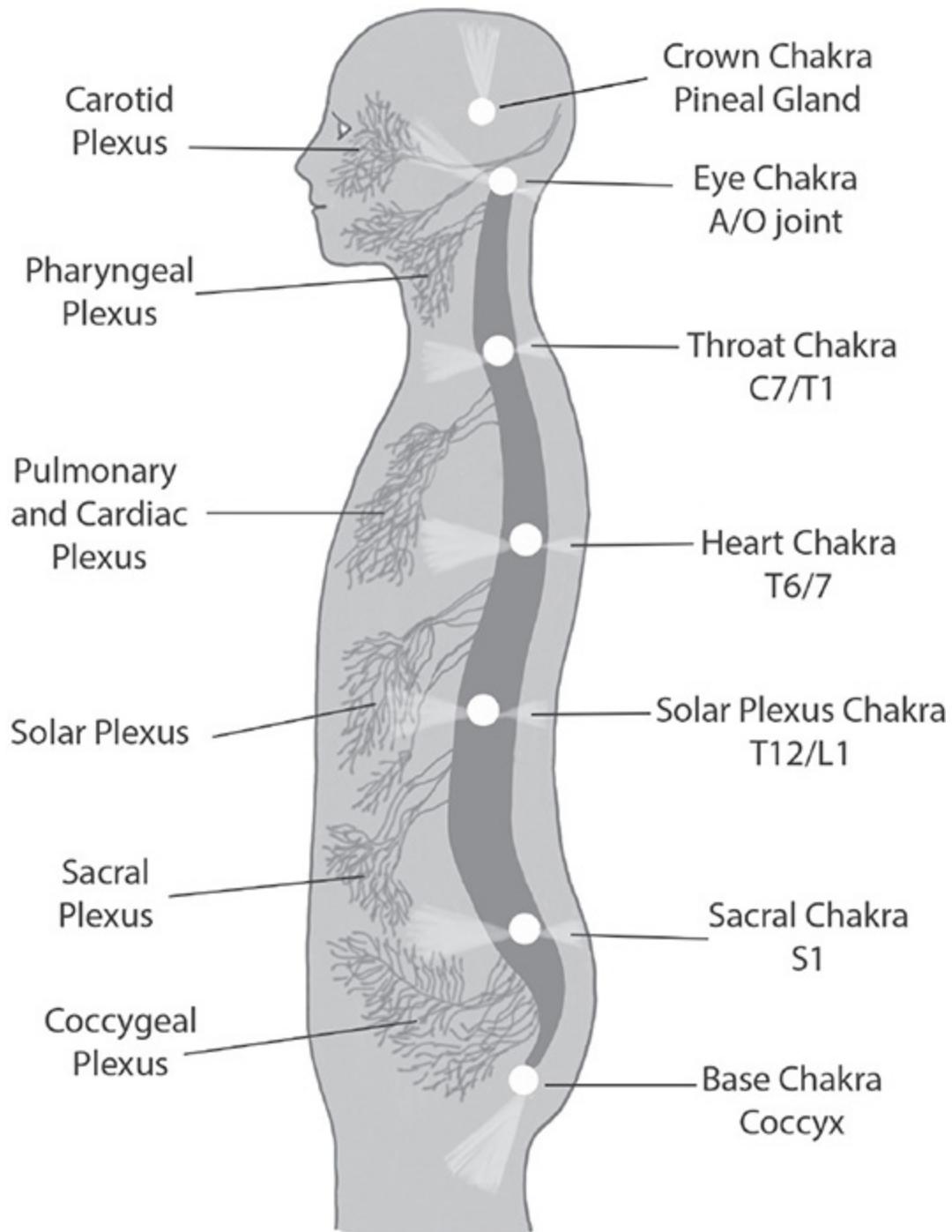


Fig. I.2. Adult spine with primary and secondary curves, chakras, and nerve plexuses

The **Heart Chakra** is found where the primary curve reaches its outermost point on the thoracic spine, at the node of the curve (T6/7). It is linked to the pulmonary and cardiac plexus.

The **Throat Chakra** is at another turning point, where the primary thoracic curve turns into the secondary cervical curve of the neck (C7/T1). It is linked to the pharyngeal plexus.

The **Eye Chakra** is at the top of the spine at the atlanto-occipital joint (C1). It is linked to the carotid plexus.

The **Crown Chakra** is located at the pineal gland at the center of the skull. It is the only major chakra not located on the spine.

In addition to the seven major chakras, there are minor chakras at the hands and feet. The chakras of the feet are receivers of earth energy and part of our energetic grounding mechanisms. The chakras of the hands receive information from the outside world and transmit the combined experience of our total chakra system. They can also channel spiritual healing energy.

Together, the chakras are the foundation of the body's energetic structure. For chakra healing therapy, three aspects of this energetic structure are key: the aura, the *nadis* (energy channels), and kundalini and pranic energy flows.

The Aura

In the Western esoteric tradition, the physical body is understood to be penetrated and surrounded by an energy field, the aura, which we now know includes a measurable electromagnetic field extending about three feet from the body.⁷ Each chakra is itself an energy center with an energy field surrounding it. Together, the energy fields of the chakras form the aura. At the subtlest level, the aura merges with the invisible field of spiritual energy and consciousness, sometimes called the universal energy field or the Ground of All Being, that permeates all of creation.

The chakras are each associated with a particular color, from red at the Base Chakra through to violet at the Crown Chakra (see the [table](#)). During meditation, especially with their eyes closed, some people see colors arising. These colors can indicate that subtle energies are moving through the chakras. For example, green arising suggests that the Heart Chakra is flowing more strongly or healing in some way; blue arising indicates that

the Throat Chakra is becoming more energized; orange suggests that the Sacral Chakra is activated.

In a guided meditation, visualizing a rainbow of colors flowing out of the chakras can be rejuvenating, helping to nourish and energize each of the chakras (see [plate 2](#)). However, the rainbow image is not how most clairvoyants would see the auric field around a person. When people learn to see auras, at first they usually see a white glow around the body, and with practice they can then begin to discern subtle pastel colors expanding outward from the body (see [plate 3](#)). Some skilled clairvoyants can see detailed shapes and messages in the aura and interpret these different shades and shapes when they give psychic readings.

Scientific studies have correlated information from clairvoyants who can see the energy fields of the chakras and aura with readings from biofeedback sensors on research subjects to measure data such as electrodermal activity and temperature. This has led to the creation of hardware and software programs that can give out a detailed reading on the chakras based on biofeedback data. These readings have proved to be reliable indicators of a person's physical and psychological state, as understood through the chakras.

Nadis: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

Any flowing current in the body is a *nadi* (Sanskrit for “stream of moving water”), and traditional Hindu texts speak of thousands of nadis flowing through the body. Some nadis are equated with nerves, muscles, arteries, and veins, while others are channels of subtler energy flows, such as acupuncture meridians.

The chakras control the reception and transmission of a vital life force, called *prana*, that flows as a complex system of subtle energy currents in the body. For our study, we explore three major nadis in this pranic system: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Sushumna, the central nadi of subtle energy, flows from the Base Chakra through the spinal column and into the head, terminating in the Crown Chakra. All the chakras are connected to Sushumna, which enables them to function as a united energy system. The Ida nadi, traditionally known as the Lunar feminine channel, runs from the Base Chakra up the left side of the body to the Eye Chakra, or in some systems to the left nostril. The Pingala nadi, or the Solar masculine channel,

runs from the Base Chakra up the right side of the body to the Eye Chakra or the right nostril.

In some Western pictorial representations, Ida and Pingala weave in and out of the chakras, and in others they don't (see [fig. I.5](#)). These differences are understandable when we remember that these subtle channels actually represent a much more complex system of currents, as shown in figure I.3, in which Ida is the left side of the system and Pingala is the right side.⁸ For our purposes, we will use the simple concept of left and right channels, as this is an easier model to work with when considering the left and right sides of the body.



Fig. I.3. Tibetan representation of nadis

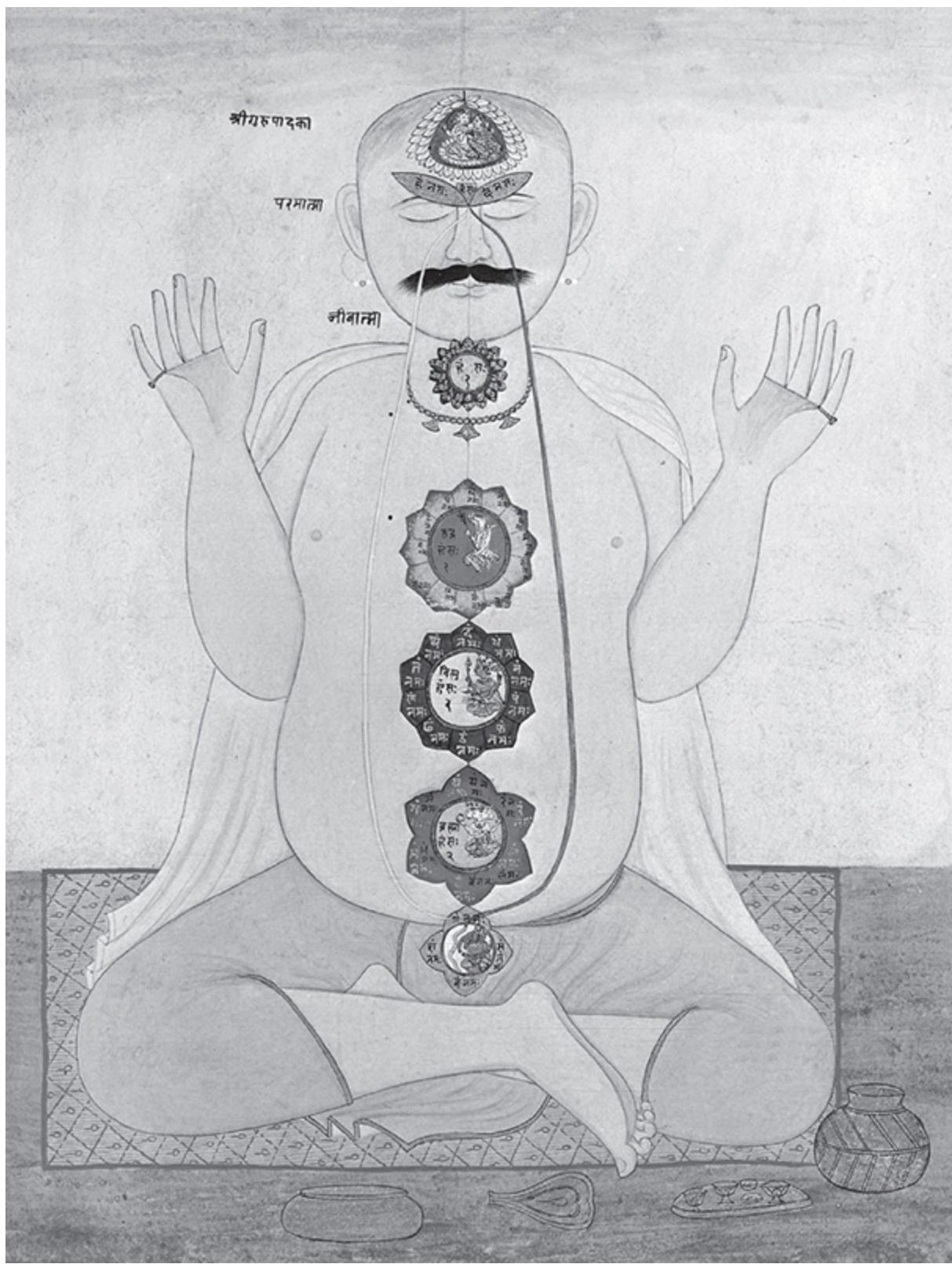


Fig. I.4. System of chakras and nadis, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India, circa 1820 (see [plate 4](#) for a color depiction of this image)

Photo: John Webb from *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy* by Philip Rawson (Thames & Hudson, 1973).

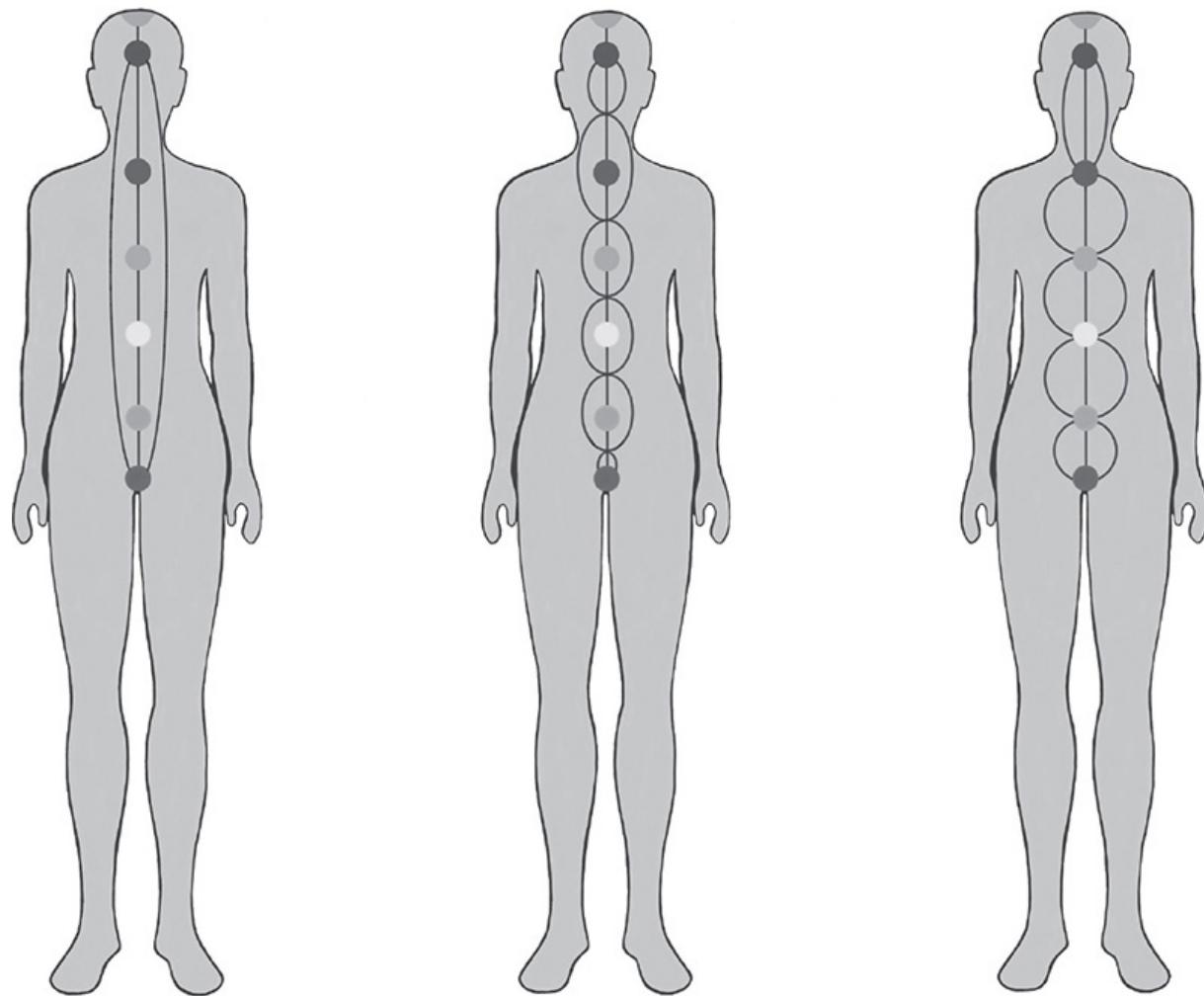


Fig. I.5. Different ways of showing the nadis: from simple left and right channels to those that weave in and out of the chakras

Kundalini and Prana

Kundalini is the pure creative energy of the universe, the spiritual energy that triggers the formation of each human being, activating the pranic

energy system that controls the life systems of each individual.

In Tantric mythology, Kundalini Shakti, meaning “coiled energy,” is depicted as the sleeping goddess Shakti, coiled as a snake, in the Base Chakra. Shakti represents the divine feminine creative energy of the universe. She is the consort of Shiva, the divine masculine formless energy. She has separated tiny fractions of herself to create the universe, including each individual being, and she longs to reunite with Shiva. Depending on the mythological source, either in the womb or at birth, with the first breath, Kundalini Shakti enters the Crown Chakra and travels down through the Sushumna nadi to the Base Chakra. There she coils herself three and a half times, lying as a dormant snake, maintaining the energy field of the individual until that person is reawakened through spiritual practices, or until the person dies and the kundalini energy returns to its source. When Kundalini Shakti is activated in a living person, she rises up through the chakras to meet her beloved Shiva in the Crown Chakra. When Shiva and Shakti are reunited and become one, the person experiences nondual consciousness.⁹

Prana is the active life force energy of each human being, and it is responsible for all of our physiological and psychological functions. It is equivalent to chi or ki in the teachings of traditional Chinese medicine. Prana is sometimes equated with the breath, and many yogic practices work with the breath as a way of enhancing the flow of prana through the nadis of the body. Breathing through the left nostril stimulates the Lunar Ida nadi and through the right nostril, the Solar Pingala nadi. When pranic energy flows freely through the nadis and the chakras, we experience a sense of physical and psychological well-being and have the potential for spiritual growth.

In Tantric yoga, the mind and body are seen as a microcosm of the universe, and nondual consciousness is described as the process by which, through working on the whole person, self and universe become one. The path to enlightenment is the process of awakening the dormant kundalini energy, which then flows out from its coiled resting state in the Base Chakra, moving through the central Sushumna nadi, purifying and activating each chakra in turn, and finally entering the Crown Chakra, bringing liberation and enlightenment to the aspirant.

Some modern theorists argue that kundalini and prana are the same energy, so working to increase the balance and flow of prana in the mind and body is a process of awakening kundalini.¹⁰ Others would say that prana is a denser subtle energy and kundalini a more refined spiritual energy. However, all theorists seem to agree that working to create an optimum pranic system allows kundalini to rise through the chakras as a positive and enriching experience. In a person whose energetic system is less balanced, distressing experiences may accompany the rise of kundalini energy.¹¹ For this reason, Tantric scriptures advise that their intense spiritual practices should be carried out only with the guidance of a teacher.

This book does not deal with detailed Tantric practices. It is an exploration of the embodied mind or the ensouled body, working with the chakras as psychoenergetic centers. Chakra healing therapy simply encourages a more balanced flow of prana throughout the mind and body, allowing self-awareness, healing, and the potential for personal and spiritual development.

Levels of Effect in the Chakra System

Each chakra has influence on various levels of our being. In the following chapters, where we explore the chakras one by one, we will examine four levels in depth: the physical, the psychological, the psychic, and the spiritual.

Physical Level

Here we consider the physical location of each chakra (see [figure I.2](#)), as well as any findings of scientific research relating to areas of the body linked to each chakra.

All the chakras work at the physical level during embryological development, possibly acting as a blueprint for that development. As we've discussed, the chakras are located at turning points in the curve of the spine, and their locations correspond with those of various nerve plexuses. The chakras have also been correlated with different endocrine glands. Problems in the flow of energy in a particular chakra can produce physical problems in that area of the body or the related endocrine gland. Note, however, that

there is some disagreement about the correlations between chakras and endocrine glands. In particular, our understanding of the endocrine system is still developing; in recent years, for example, scientists have classified the heart as an endocrine gland and ascribed endocrine function to the enteric nervous system embedded in the digestive tract, which is known to produce a variety of hormones.

Many modern writers list a huge number of physical correlations for each chakra, including such things as precious stones, metals, and Tarot suits.¹² These correspondences have been developed as part of the modern esoteric tradition, but I will not be exploring them in any detail. Our interest in the chakras lies in their function as embodied centers of consciousness, and the table below delineates the specific physical correlations that have relevance for that study, including some of the correlations from Woodroffe's translation of the original Sanskrit texts. In the column showing endocrine glands, you will find the correlations that I use and also, in parentheses, the alternative.¹³ I will explain the reasons for my views in the chapters on the individual chakras.

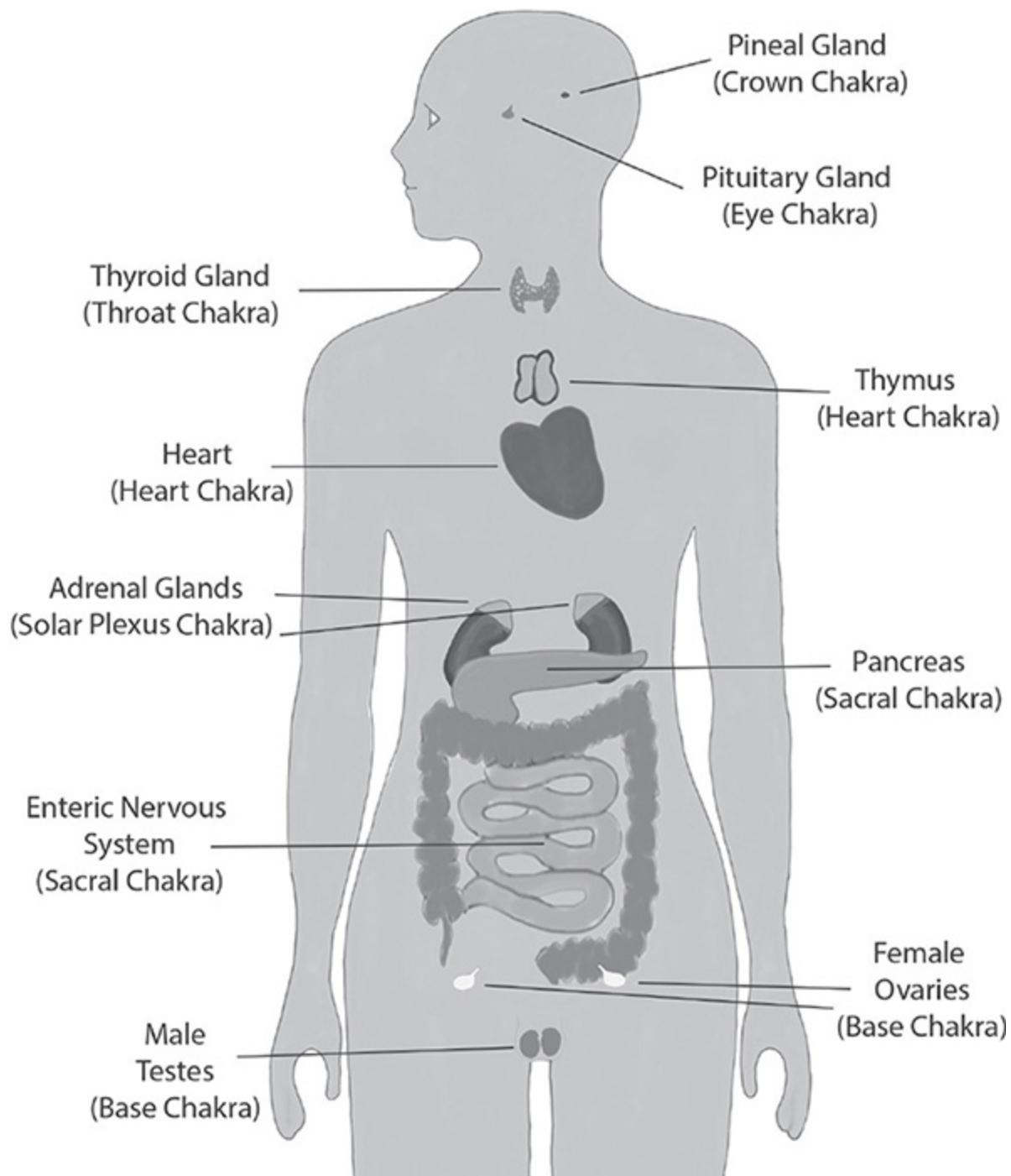


Fig. I.6. Endocrine glands linked to the chakras

PHYSICAL CORRELATIONS TO THE CHAKRAS

CHAKRA	POSITION ON SPINE	NERVE PLEXUS	ENDOCRINE GLAND	PETALS ON YANTRA	SENSE*	SEED SOUND*
Crown	Pineal gland	None	Pineal (pituitary)	1,000	N/A	N/A
Eye or Brow	Atlanto-occipital joint	Carotid	Pituitary (pineal)	2	Thought	Om
Throat	C7/T1	Pharyngeal	Thyroid	16	Sound	Ham
Heart	T6/7	Pulmonary and cardiac	Thymus Heart	12	Touch	Yam
Solar Plexus	T12/L1	Solar	Adrenals (pancreas)	10	Sight	Ram
Sacral	Sacrum (SI)	Sacral	Pancreas, Enteric nervous system (gonads)	6	Taste	Vam
Base or Root	Tip of coccyx	Coccygeal	Gonads (adrenals)	4	Smell	Lam

*These correlations were drawn from *The Serpent Power* by Sir John Woodroffe (New York: Dover Publications, 1974). Woodroffe did not include the Crown Chakra in his tables of properties.

Psychological Level

Each part of the body holds the memory of its own experience. Your body is, in essence, a crowd of different members who work in harmony to make your belonging in the world possible.

JOHN O'DONOHUE, *ANAM CARA*

A large part of this book is devoted to the manner in which the chakras work at the psychological level, as this has proved to have the most value in my work as a chakra therapist. As the concept of the chakras has become more accepted in our culture through the success of yoga teaching, they have become understood through popular keywords and phrases that express psychological qualities, such as *survival* for the Base Chakra, or

love for the Heart Chakra. These keywords are useful for identifying essential qualities of each chakra, but at a deeper level, our chakras are programmed by our experiences, good and bad, and can differ enormously from person to person.

THE LOWER CHAKRAS

The three lower chakras carry the imprints of our early life experiences. From our conception through our infancy, the Base Chakra is dominant and becomes programmed by the experiences of that stage of life. During childhood, the Sacral Chakra becomes dominant and is programmed. During puberty and adolescence, the Solar Plexus Chakra becomes dominant and is programmed.

The three lower chakras are programmed during the stages of life when we receive our greatest gifts and our greatest wounding. As we develop and mature, that programming affects the growth and development of the upper chakras, which in turn guides the manifestation of our individual multifaceted personality.

Karma

The programming of each lower chakra through the experiences of each stage of life is critical in understanding the developing psyche, but that is not to say that the psyche is a blank slate at birth or that the adult human being is purely the product of early experience and conditioning. We know that every human being arrives in this world with a unique stamp of individuality. We are a product of nature and nurture, as the common phrasing goes.

Hindu philosophy explains the “nature” side of our personality (and also some of the events we might confront in a lifetime) using the concept of karma. *Karma* means “actions,” and the theory of karma suggests that all the deeds of our lives, including our thoughts, words, and actions, are

put in the pot of our karma, creating an energetic thrust that is returned to us in some way during our life or in some future lifetime. It is a spiritual version of the law of cause and effect. Past actions and thoughts leave residues that influence future circumstances and our response to them.

However, we cannot use karma as the explanation for any bad event in our lives. That mind-set can lead to complacency, lack of compassion, and stagnancy. It's true that karma can throw obstacles in our path. Alternatively, from the perspective of the Hindu belief in reincarnation, it could be that our higher self, in preparing for this lifetime, chose to take on some difficult challenges that, in effect, would develop good karma.

Our lives can be seen as a journey of personal and spiritual development in which we are growing our souls and our ability for love, compassion, wisdom, creativity, and other virtues. If we understand that happiness can result from our good thoughts, words, and deeds, and that our difficulties are here for us to learn from, then we put our lives in a framework of meaning that helps us when the going gets rough and allows us to be compassionate when we see others struggling with their lot.

The karma we bring into each life is stored deep in the spiritual level of the Sacral Chakra. As kundalini rises up through the chakras, it burns away this karma on its journey to the Crown Chakra and enlightenment.

THE HEART CHAKRA AND THE UPPER CHAKRAS

We begin our journey through the chakras with the lower chakras, through which the individual ego is constructed, and we end with the upper chakras, which have the ability to express our highest potential. The upper chakras are not connected to a stage of life in the way the lower ones are. At the psychological level, the upper chakras reflect and express the qualities of

the lower ones. For example, a difficult childhood will affect the way we express ourselves (Throat Chakra) and the way we view the world (Eye Chakra).

The Heart Chakra is the game changer. Human beings have the potential for self-healing and redemption, and this life task begins with the Heart Chakra. The upper chakras reflect the programming of the lower chakras until such time that the central chakra of the system, the Heart Chakra, flows strongly, when they can begin to take on deeper inspirational qualities. The more we are able to develop the energy of the Heart Chakra, the more potential we have for healing the lower chakras and for realizing our true selves through the upper chakras. A strongly flowing Heart Chakra has the potential to transform our lives, heal our woundedness, and invite us into the spiritual levels of our being, where great riches lie.

The table on the facing page gives the Sanskrit name for each chakra and its translation into English. I will use these translations to support my exploration into the consciousness of each chakra. I also include some of the popular keywords that many twentieth-century writers have given the chakras. The end column shows the stage of life linked to each chakra.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NADIS

Another important aspect of the chakra map of the psyche is the influence of the nadis. As noted earlier, in traditional Hindu texts Ida is denoted as the left, feminine, Lunar channel and Pingala as the right, masculine, Solar channel. They govern different qualities and different paths of development for each individual. Sushumna is the central channel of balance between the right and left. In Hindu and Tantric practices, Sushumna is the channel that aspirants wish to develop in order to experience higher states of consciousness, bringing the influences of Ida and Pingala into balance.

CHAKRA	SANSKRIT NAME	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	POPULAR KEYWORDS	STAGE OF LIFE
Crown	Sahasrara	Thousandfold	The whole self	Maturity
Eye or Brow	Ajna	Perceive, Command	Wisdom, vision	Maturity
Throat	Vishuddha	Purified, Virtuous	Communication, self-expression	Maturity
Heart	Anahata	Unwounded, Unstruck	Love, acceptance	Maturity
Solar Plexus	Manipura	City of jewels	Power, self-worth	Young adulthood
Sacral	Svadhisthana	Home of the Self, One's own abode	Sensual pleasure, relationship	Childhood
Base or Root	Muladhara	Root Support	Survival, grounding	Conception, birth, infancy

An easy way to begin to understand the differences between the two channels is to look at how we physically use the two different sides of our body. People who are right-handed typically use their right hand to initiate activity and the left hand to support that activity. For example, if they need to reach for something on a high shelf using a stepladder, they will reach with their right arm and keep themselves steady on the ladder with their left arm. Consider other activities in life, such as greeting someone with a wave. The initiating side will usually be that of the dominant hand.

In the Tantric texts, the active initiating role was considered masculine, and the supportive relational role was considered feminine. As the majority of people have right hand dominance, the map of the chakras shows the right side as the active masculine channel (Pingala), with the left side as the reflective relational feminine channel (Ida). This understanding was enriched by the cosmic metaphor of Solar and Lunar channels, Solar being

the warm, active self-expressive energy and Lunar being the cool, reflective relational energy.

Masculine and Feminine

The relationship of masculine and feminine energies to the sun and the moon would have had much greater significance in ancient times, when there was no artificial light. The sun ruled the day and the moon ruled the night, so you worked actively during the day, and during the dark evenings you sat by the fire, or by the light of the moon, and related to your friends and family. It is easy to see why these qualities were considered masculine and feminine in the ancient Hindu texts, which were all written by men in a historical time when women were defined by their relationships to men. Nowadays it is seen as discriminating to differentiate masculine and feminine in these ways, but we do all have a left side and a right side, and we all have an active independent side and a supportive relational side to our personalities that ideally need to be in balance.

In Hindu mythology, Shakti, the goddess of manifestation, rises up from the Base Chakra to meet Shiva, the god of formlessness, in the Crown Chakra. Here masculine and feminine are represented vertically through the chakras in the account of our experiential energy (feminine, in the Base Chakra) rising up to meet our inspirational energy (masculine, in the Crown Chakra). With the Ida and Pingala channels, masculine and feminine are represented horizontally through the chakras, balancing the relational and the autonomous aspects of the self (see [plate 5](#)). In this book, I shall tend to refer to Ida as the Lunar channel of relationship and Pingala as the Solar channel of autonomy. Similarly, in the vertical plane I will differentiate

between experiential (upward) and inspirational (downward) energy flows, avoiding the implications of the gender-specific words as much as possible.

The Solar and Lunar channels of the chakra system have parallels with the Tree of Life in the Judeo-Christian Kabbalah system. This esoteric tradition is extremely complex and open to many different interpretations. The Tree of Life can be seen as a mystical diagram of the universe that has three columns and can be mapped onto the body. It has a masculine and a feminine column, and the path of spiritual development can be seen as one of balance through the central column, creating the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine.¹⁴ This is similar to the role of the central nadi, Sushumna, of the chakra system.

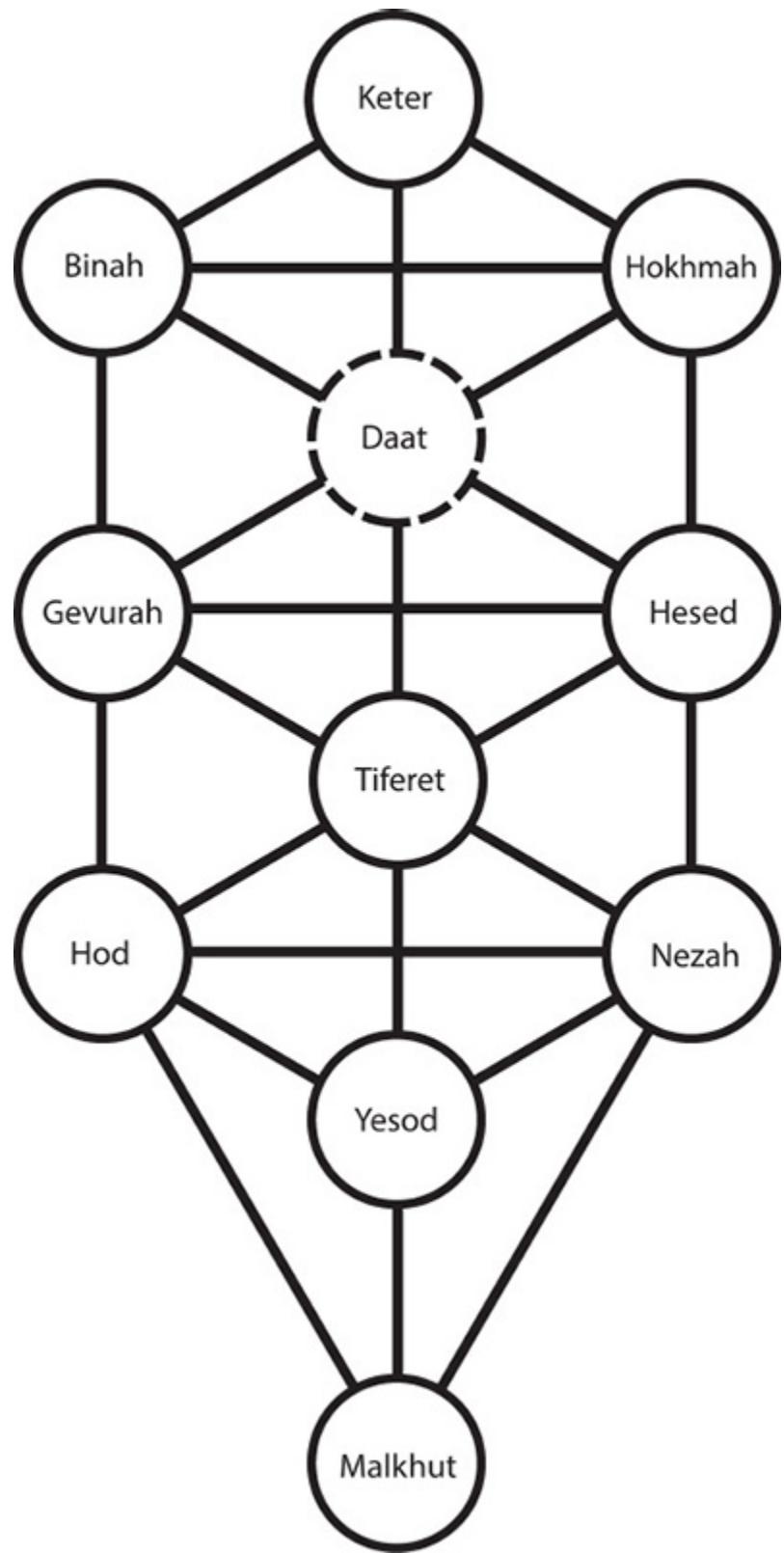


Fig. I.7. The Tree of Life of the Kabbalah system

(Note: I have not included translations of the Hebrew names because each name has several meanings and can be interpreted in very different ways in this complex tradition.)



Fig. I.8. The caduceus



Fig. I.9. Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve standing on either side of the Tree of Knowledge, depicted by many artists, can also be seen as representing a masculine, feminine, and central path of knowledge, and the original mystical story that gave rise to the Kabbalah's Tree of Life.

The caduceus, later adopted as a symbol of medicine, shows the wand of the Greek god Hermes, which he used to balance the antagonistic forces of the two serpents weaving around it. Like the chakra map and the Tree of Life, the caduceus similarly conveys the need to balance opposing tendencies in life and maintain a central path.

The different adaptations each of us can make to the left or right of the central channel adds a further level of complexity to the chakras as a representation of our unique psychology. Very few popular texts on the chakras include more than a brief mention of the left and right channels in the chakra system. However, I consider them important because they enable us to discover significant parallels with modern theories of developmental psychology. We will explore these parallels throughout this book because they suggest a universality in our understanding of human development that

stretches back to ancient wisdom traditions and forward to modern developmental theory. Looking at the chakras and the nadis together, as we understand and experience them through the body, brings exciting potential into our thinking about the relationship between mind and body.

Dominance and Prominence

All the chakras open at the psychological level during childhood, but as noted earlier, during the various stages of our development, a different lower chakra is dominant. This does not mean that the other chakras are not operating during those stages; we simply see that one of the lower chakras has dominance over the others.

Once we have reached maturity, there are no stages of dominance for the chakras, but each of us will have different levels of power and flow in individual chakras, and it is likely that one or two of our chakras will have more influence than others at the psychological level. I use the term *prominent* to describe these more influential chakras; in my mind, *prominent* suggests that although a particular chakra plays a leading role in a person's psychology, it is not working entirely alone, and it is not dominating a stage of development. I hope this distinction adds clarity.

Some adults will have a prominent Sacral Chakra, others a prominent Solar Plexus Chakra or Heart Chakra, or one of the upper chakras may be prominent. Other chakras may be very strong or very weak, and all these variations contribute to the individual nature of each human being. In addition, each of the chakras may be inclined toward the Solar or Lunar channel or balanced between them, giving each individual a unique map of the psyche.

Psychic Level

Human beings have the potential to develop many psychic abilities, but often we—or the people around us—fear and distrust these abilities. Nevertheless, many people will readily admit to some extrasensory experiences that they cannot easily explain rationally: the telephone rings and they know exactly who it is, or they have a precognitive dream or a moment of foresight, when they seem to have accessed the future before its time. The most common psychic experience is awareness of another person's feelings, but because this can easily be explained away by body language and other nonverbal cues, it is difficult to prove there is a psychic element at work here. Rupert Sheldrake's research shows that a majority of people can tell when someone is staring at them from behind, validating a level of psychism and also challenging the accepted view that our minds exist only inside our heads.¹⁵ There is a great need for research and development in this area, and a need to recognize and integrate the research already done, and yet the scientific culture in the West suffers from taboos and denial around psychic and paranormal abilities.

The psychic level of the chakras is a transitional level sitting between the psychological and the spiritual levels. There are different types of psychic aptitudes connected to each chakra, and it would seem inevitable, from a chakra perspective, that psychic abilities would increase as we journey deeper toward spiritual awakening. In the ancient Hindu traditions, it was understood that disciplined spiritual practice would increase psychic abilities, or *siddhis*.

At the psychological level, we do not want the flow through the chakras to be closed off, but at the psychic level, being too open can be problematic, allowing us to pick up negative energies without knowing it and causing great distress. Understanding and developing our chakras at the psychic level can be a useful way of controlling our psychic mechanisms; at the psychic level, we can learn to “open” and “close” the chakras.

There is a minor chakra at the center of the sole of each foot and at the center of the palm of each hand. The feet chakras receive energy from the earth. This energy travels up the legs into the Base Chakra, feeding and nourishing it. The hand chakras can both receive information from the outside and give out energy from our energy system. If a person is consciously meditating or healing, the hands can channel energy from the

universal field of energy that permeates our world. In this way both feet and hand chakras work at the energetic psychic level, and it is at this level that we shall explore them in this book.

CHAKRA	ASSOCIATED COLOR	PSYCHIC LEVEL
Crown	Violet and white	Knowing
Eye/Brow	Purple	Clairvoyance, clear seeing, intention
Throat	Blue	Clairaudience, clear hearing, telepathy
Heart	Green	Healing, loss of boundaries
Solar Plexus	Yellow	Moves energy around, psychic protection
Sacral	Orange	Clairsentience, clear feeling
Base/Root	Red	Receives energy from the earth
Feet	N/A	Receives energy from the earth
Hands	N/A	Receives and gives out energy

The preceding table shows the psychic qualities associated with each chakra. It also notes the color associated with each chakra, but note that this is not meant to imply that each chakra emits only one color. The associated color is simply the one best suited for nourishing and healing each chakra when you are working with guided visualization.

Spiritual Level

Spiritual energy flows constantly downward through the Crown Chakra to the Base Chakra, connecting us to the world of spirit, but we cannot be in touch with our spiritual nature until we develop the Heart Chakra deeply. The Heart Chakra is the entry point into the spiritual realm, where we have the potential to function more consciously at the spiritual level of our being.

There are three realms of life in the chakra system (see [plate 6](#)). The Base Chakra is our entry point into the earth realm, where we experience life through the physical, psychological, and psychic levels of the chakras. The Heart Chakra is the gateway to the spiritual realm, where we can access the spiritual levels of the chakras, and the Crown Chakra is the gateway to the divine realm, where we have the potential to know ultimate enlightenment.

At the psychological level, the upper chakras are influenced by the qualities of the lower chakras, but when the Heart Chakra is flowing strongly they function at a deep spiritual level. They become centers of inspiration and spiritual guidance rather than simply reflecting the gifts and wounds of the lower chakras.

The Crown Chakra functions unconsciously in most of us throughout our lives, but when the Heart Chakra has developed sufficiently and we are functioning more often at the spiritual level of the chakras, we have the potential to enter the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, where we become conscious of the deepest divine essence of our being, the ultimate reality that permeates everything. When this happens, we have entered the divine realm.

CHAKRA	SPIRITUAL LEVELS
Crown	Receives spiritual energy; gateway to the divine realm and enlightenment
Eye or Brow	Inspirational thinking, manifesting intention
Throat	Uncovering the true self, calling
Heart	Witnessing; gateway to the spiritual realm
Solar Plexus	Servant of spirit

Sacral	Holds karmic patterns until healed
Base or Root	Receives energy from the earth; gateway to the earth realm

The Chakras and Developmental Psychology

It is possible to show some interesting parallels between the psychological levels of the chakras and the stages of human development as described by developmental psychologists over the past 150 years. These stages of development are not exactly the same as the stages of life governed by each lower chakra, because as psychologists have demonstrated, one stage of life can include more than one stage of development. By exploring the parallels and differences between the two approaches, we are able to bring together the academic research of modern social science and psychology with the esoteric tradition of the chakras, combining them with the body-centered experiential client-based learning that I have been involved with as a hands-on therapist.

The study of modern psychology began in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, introduced the idea of developmental stages with his theory of psychosexual stages.¹⁶ These were based on his concept of libido, the primal sexual drive, which is present in infancy and thereafter repressed, channeled, and transcended, depending upon the different psychological challenges experienced during different stages of early life. Freud's ideas laid the ground for a developmental approach to psychology.

Jean Piaget was the first researcher to develop an evidence-based study of cognitive development in children, and his work continues to be applied today.¹⁷ Since Piaget, the field has burgeoned with well-known names, such as Abraham Maslow, who looked at development based on human needs and diagrammed a hierarchy of needs (see [plate 7](#)). Erik Erikson explored the stages of ego development.¹⁸ Lawrence Kohlberg looked at the stages of moral development.¹⁹

In modern times, theories about the stages of human development initially described it as linear, moving through each stage of development from dependence to autonomy. Any research findings that didn't fit this

linear model were considered anomalous. But with the rise of the women's movement in the 1970s, researchers such as Carol Gilligan and Jean Baker Miller began to question these assumptions.²⁰ Gilligan, who was working alongside Lawrence Kohlberg researching moral development, noticed a different pattern of development in many of her female interviewees. She challenged the preconceptions about moral development that she and her colleagues had been working with. She suggested that there was a distinct, although not exclusive, female path of development, based more on relationship and connection rather than independence and autonomy.

In 1996, Jenny Wade published *Changes of Mind*, a brilliant academic meta-study of consciousness development that integrated the work of many different developmental psychology theorists, showing how they overlap, and proposing a higher-order schema that incorporates them all, including the concept that development can travel along different pathways, as proposed by Gilligan. In 2000, Ken Wilber wrote *Integral Psychology*, in which he laid out a comparative study of many different theorists, using charts showing how their theories overlapped. He also showed how modern developmental theories had parallels with the ancient wisdom traditions, including chakra theory, Buddhism, and Kabbalah, and with the ideas of writers such as Plotinus and Saint Teresa of Avila.

In order to explain the different pathways, Wade used a diagram based on the Kabbalah's Tree of Life, albeit an inverted version. As we have seen, the Tree of Life has certain parallels with the chakra system, especially when the Solar and Lunar nadis are included in the analysis. In the Kabbalah and the chakra systems, this three-channel model can be mapped onto and experienced through the physical body, so by applying Wade's structure to the chakras, we have an opportunity to bring psyche and soma together, using the valuable insights of developmental psychology.

Wade uses the terms *implicate order* to describe formless consciousness prior to any manifestation and *explicate order* for the stages of manifest consciousness shown as circles on the diagram in figure I.10. We will explore Wade's meta-structure throughout this book and consider parallels and differences with the chakra system, drawing out useful information that correlates with our understanding of the chakras.

Cultural Considerations

If the majority of individuals in a community have a particular chakra that is very prominent at the psychological level, then the qualities of that chakra will probably be expressed through the culture of that community. In the chapters that follow, we will briefly explore how each chakra can psychologically impact a community at a cultural level. Just as each individual psyche is a combination of different chakra influences, so a society is influenced by the qualities and values of the different prominent chakras of its members and reciprocally influences the population through its values.

Chakra Healing Therapy

I have been working with this chakra system alongside my Alexander Technique teaching for over thirty years. While the Alexander Technique specializes in addressing our physical bad habits, chakra healing therapy addresses our psychological bad habits, and working with the two together brings a more holistic approach to self-awareness and change than either technique could achieve on its own.

The in-depth spiritual practices of early Hinduism and later Tantra are beyond the scope of this book. These practices were designed to lead the aspirant into higher states of spiritual consciousness and ultimately to the divine realm of self-realization and awakening, and they were always carried out under the tutelage of an enlightened teacher or guru. In the West, we have adapted the ancient teachings to create systems of self-development that are suitable for our culture, in the way that all religious and spiritual traditions adapt themselves to changing circumstances.

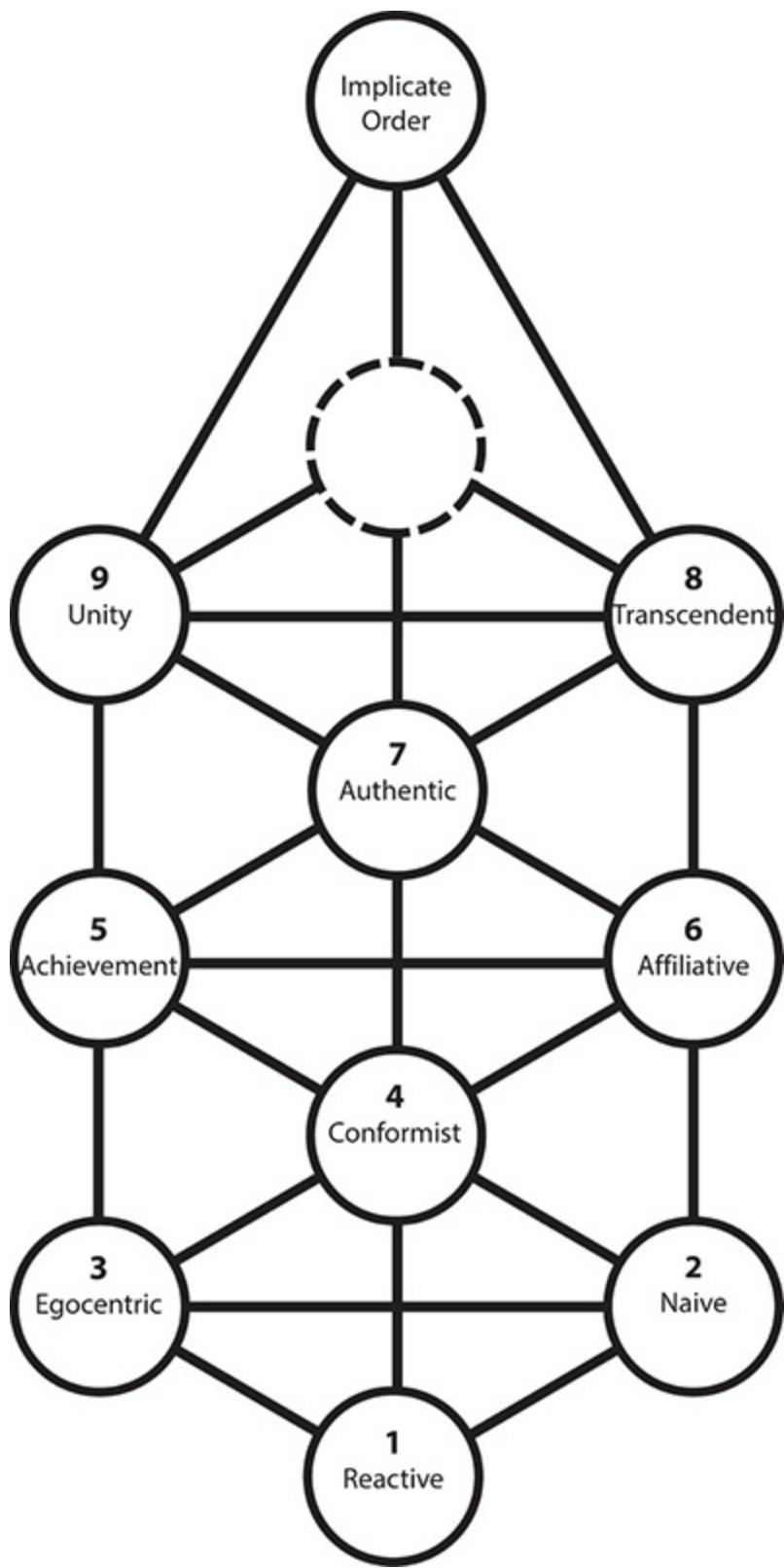


Fig. I.10. Wade's model of developmental psychology: the unfolding of consciousness in the explicate order

J. Wade, *Changes of Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), fig. 9, page 253.

In chakra healing therapy, we focus first on the psychological level of the chakras, leading to the healing of childhood wounds, and then progress through the development of a strongly flowing Heart Chakra, which then opens the door to greater creativity and fulfillment and to the spiritual level of the chakras. Because the chakras are transformative centers of energy and consciousness, working with them at all levels is a process of personal and spiritual growth. Understanding and integrating the physical and psychological levels of the chakras enables access to an experience of the psychic and spiritual levels, with accompanying states of inspiration and well-being. Working with a chakra therapist who uses healing touch can enable this self-development in a gentle and safe way.

Life has evolved through touch. Embryologically, it is the first sense to come into being. Our sensitivity to touch is profound. It can stimulate our earliest, largely unconscious memories and our primitive responses. Touch reaches deep into our psyches. When the touch is sufficiently sensitive and aware, it can induce deep relaxation, healing, heightened awareness, and a powerful connection to our experience of soul or spirit. Chakra healing therapy works with touch to nourish the mind through the body and the body through the mind.

Central to this work is an understanding of the body as the temple of the soul. We experience everything through our bodies—our sensations, our emotions, our thoughts, and even our deep spiritual experiences. The whole world is brought to us through the consciousness of the body. Memories, thoughts, and emotions are stored in the cells of our body.

Every muscle fiber has nerve fibers connected to it, as do all our organs. Our nervous system, which is an outreach of the brain, cannot be separated from the rest of the body. Not only every movement but every *thought* of movement sends messages back and forth between our body and the brain. This interaction of mind and body occurs even at the cellular level. In *The Biology of Belief*, Dr. Bruce Lipton, a microbiologist, describes research

demonstrating that the individual cells in our bodies are influenced by the environment around them, both physical and energetic. Our very DNA is controlled by signals from outside the cell, including energetic messages from our thoughts and feelings. Our consciousness affects every living cell in the body.²¹

The chakras offer us an individualized map of our embodied consciousness, and by working on mind and body together, we can initiate deep healing and growth. As we explore each chakra, I will offer a selection of practical exercises that can help purify, nourish, and strengthen each chakra. You'll also find short case studies that can give you an idea of how chakra healing therapy can help bring understanding and balance into our individual lives. I have altered names and places in these case studies to maintain the anonymity of my clients.

I would like to encourage you to keep a journal beside you as you read this book, in which you can jot down discoveries about yourself as you explore each chakra. It can also be used for some of the practical exercises, where I suggest you write down your thoughts on a topic.

And so the structure is erected and the stage is set. We are ready to begin our exploration of the journey of life through the chakras.

ACT ONE

The Lower Chakras

The Earth Realm



1

The Base or Root Chakra

Sanskrit name: Muladhara

English translation: Root Support

Dominant stage: Conception through birth and infancy

Central themes: The inner animal; grounding center; survival consciousness

Oh joy! A new human being is on the way. The world awaits him.

BERTOLT BRECHT,
THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

On its journey to humanity, the embryo actually travels through all the shapes of evolution. . . . The inner sphere of the womb mirrors and completes the outer journey of evolution.

JOHN O'DONOHUE, *ETERNAL ECHOES*

Even in our scientific and secular world, a newborn baby awakens in us a sense of the miraculous. We gaze upon it with awe and reverence.

Somehow this tiny creature grew inside its mother from the invisible seeds of sexual union. And one day this tiny creature will be a full-grown human being. So much growing has already happened within the womb, yet there is so much more growing to do, physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

In the early weeks, the developing embryo replicates millions of years of evolution. It moves from an amoeba-like state through tadpole, lizard, monkey, and ape until it finally begins to take shape as a human fetus. Ontogeny (the development of the individual organism) recapitulates phylogeny (the evolutionary history of the species). During this period, the human animal is an instinctual being grown out of millions of years of evolution, carrying the neurological wisdom of this long past. Its motivation is simply to stay alive, to survive—a species instinct supported by pre-awareness states of consciousness.



Fig. 1.1. Survival consciousness

Physical Level

Human beings have a triune (three-part) brain based on three evolutionary developments (see [fig. 1.3](#)). During fetal development, the reptilian complex develops first, comprising the brainstem and the cerebellum. It

governs vital functions such as heartbeat, breathing, and body temperature. The limbic system, an early mammalian addition, develops above the reptilian complex; it records memories of agreeable and disagreeable experiences and is connected to emotional development. Its main structures are the hippocampus, the amygdala, and the hypothalamus. On top of the limbic brain is the neocortex, a primate development driving the unique human traits of thinking, language, and imagination. The Base Chakra is related to the reptilian brain, the earliest part of the brain to have evolved, which is very active during fetal development and in the early months of life. During this phase of development, instinctual processes that were evolved millions of years ago are programmed into the fetal nervous system and instinctual consciousness is born.

Base Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	Ṃ = Lam
<i>Position</i>	Tip of coccyx
<i>Neurology</i>	Coccygeal plexus Reptilian brain
<i>Endocrine Glands</i>	Gonads
<i>Petals on Yantra</i>	4
<i>Sense</i>	Smell
<i>Color</i>	Red

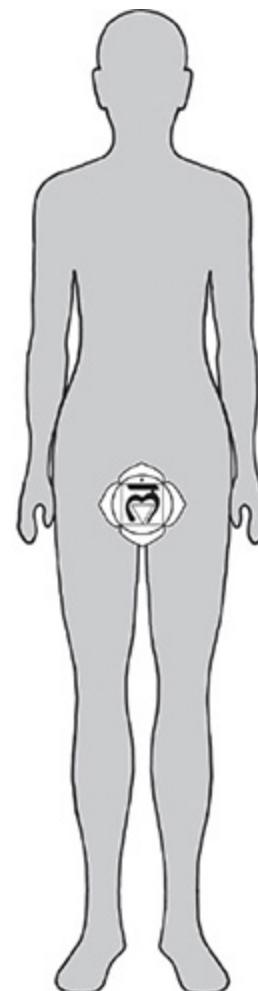


Fig. 1.2. Base Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

We still don't really understand the consciousness level of embryological development. In his book *Embryogenesis*, Richard Grossinger tells an amusing story of a lecturer in embryology keen to explain to his young son how humans and animals are formed from tiny eggs:

An embryologist, after waiting for his child to become old enough to learn how animals are formed, showed him (at age six) pictures of cells gathered in different planes as tissues, then cross-sections of those tissues assembled in the organs. He had taught this rigorous sequence to graduate students for years, and no one had ever challenged its essential adequacy. But the perplexed child said: "Daddy, how do the cells know which of them are going to form those organs?"

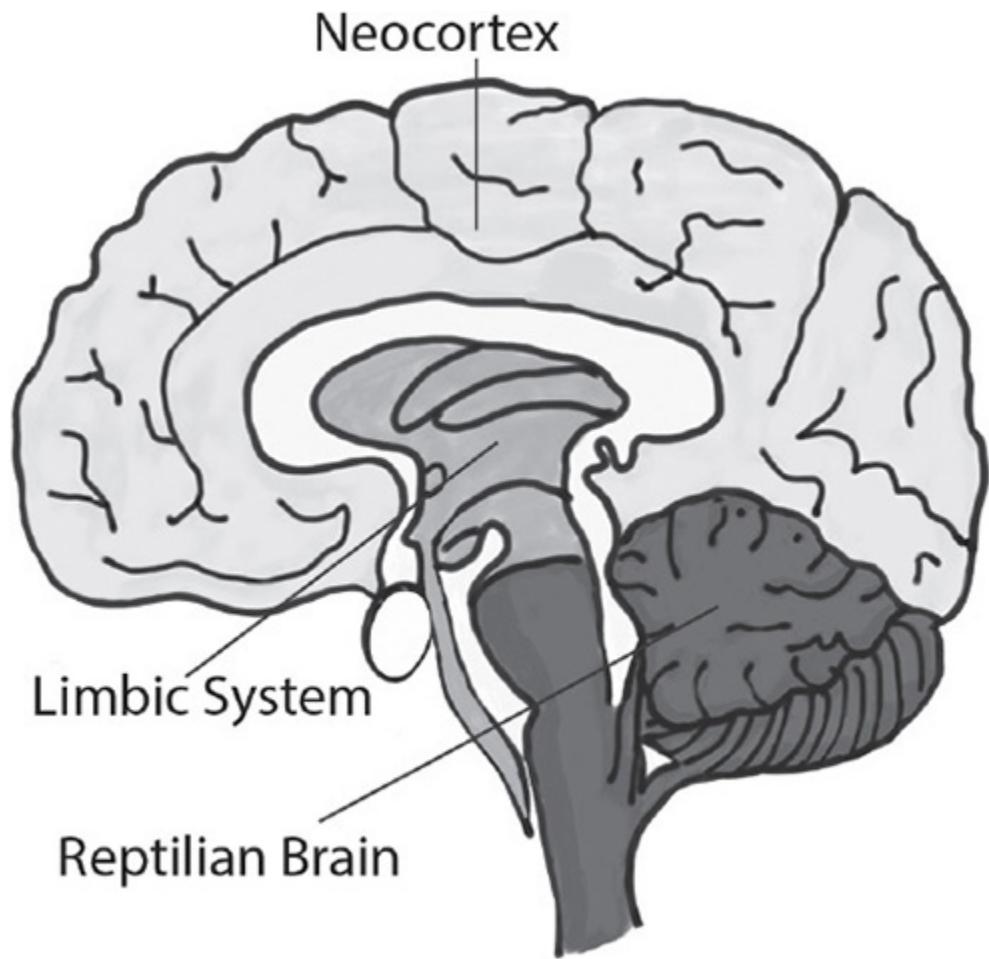


Fig. 1.3. The triune brain

What could the professor say? Initial questions have not been answered without evasion while we have moved on to secondary matters. It takes a child to see that the “emperor” is naked.¹

Do embryological cells have intelligence? If so, where does this intelligence come from? Does it arise out of matter, or is intelligence primary, informing the physical? Hinduism and many other spiritual traditions hold the belief in a spiritual intelligence that is the Ground of All Being, primary to everything manifest in the universe. Matter is imbued with this intelligence, and life is formed from it. But this conceptualization is very different from the Western scientific tradition, which maintains that life and consciousness evolve from matter.

What we do know is that the majority of the neurons in the brain are generated during the first three months of pregnancy, so a baby is born with most of the brain cells it will ever need. But whereas scientists used to think that all neuronal development took place within the first few years of life, more recent research has shown that it continues throughout life. In addition, as they mature, humans undergo a process called synaptic pruning, in which frequently used neuronal connections are strengthened and infrequently used connections are eliminated. This explains why some of the instinctual abilities that babies are born with, such as holding their breath when submerged in water, become lost and have to be relearned later in life.

The endocrine glands associated with the Base Chakra are the reproductive glands—the ovaries and testes. Some authors instead associate the reproductive glands with the Sacral Chakra because of the importance of sexuality to that chakra.² They suggest that the adrenals are the appropriate endocrine glands to associate with the Base Chakra because the “fight or flight” response governed by the adrenals seems connected to survival. However, from my perspective, the adrenals have a much more sophisticated response to danger than a young infant is capable of. The “fight or flight” response is indicative of how powerful a person feels. If you feel powerful, you fight; if you feel powerless, you flee. These responses are much more suited to the Solar Plexus Chakra, which has *power* as one of its popular keywords. The instinctual response of a baby is

the simpler reaction of “approach or avoid,” a primitive response that can be witnessed in even the simplest of single-celled organisms, such as an amoeba.³ It is governed by the basic instinctual drive to stop discomfort. The hungry baby will take the nipple and be calmed by it, while the replete baby will reject the nipple, possibly noisily!

In addition, the relational and intimate sexuality associated with the Sacral Chakra is already a refinement of the purely instinctual sexual drive that keeps the human race alive. This pre-egoic drive is essential to our survival—and survival is linked to the energy of the Base Chakra. For this reason, the reproductive glands, which govern our sexual drive, seem to be the more appropriate correlation for this chakra (see [fig. I.6](#)).

The proximity of the reproductive glands to the Base Chakra serves as a secondary support for this connection. The testes are adjacent to the Base Chakra. The ovaries are located between the Base and Sacral Chakras and possibly link to both chakras because the creation of an embryo and its development into a new human being is a process that goes beyond the instinctual sexual act that initiates it. The adrenals, in contrast, are located in the region of the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Human sexuality can be expressed in different ways through all the chakras, but it originates in the Base Chakra as the manifestation of the primitive life force that creates us all and makes possible the survival of the species.

Body Language

The Base Chakra is located at the tip of the coccyx in the space between the coccyx and the perineum. It is associated with the coccygeal nerve plexus, which feeds the area around the coccyx and the pelvic floor (see [fig. I.2](#)). In our sophisticated modern society, we consider it rather impolite to talk about this area of the body, home to the genitals and excretory organs. We are secretive about these lower bodily functions and often use words that describe these organs and their activities to curse or make risqué humorous remarks. We call someone we dislike “a pain in the backside” or worse. I leave to your imagination the many words and phrases that come to mind relating to this area of the body.

Psychological Level

The Base or Root Chakra is the dominant chakra operating through the early stages of development in utero and during the first year or two of life. The newborn baby is focused solely upon survival, that instinctual part of our psyche functioning as a physical animal needing food, rest, warmth, and comfort, crying out when primal needs are not being met and resting peacefully when they are. Just as psychologists would argue that the experience in utero, during birth, and during the early months of life has an enormous impact on the development of a healthy or unhealthy psyche, so, in the language of energetics and the chakras, is the Base Chakra programmed during this period according to our experience before, during, and after birth. This programming will act as a blueprint for the development of our instinctual survival consciousness.

The Sanskrit name for this chakra, *Muladhara*, “Root Support,” emphasizes the positive value of this chakra and is rather more upbeat than the modern keyword *survival*. It helps us remember that the Base Chakra, though dominant only in the earliest stage of life, continues to function in the background as the root support governing those animal instinctual drives that keep us alive through adulthood.

Base Chakra consciousness is visceral, sensual, and emotional. The sexual act, conception, fetal development, and birth are all powerful experiences of touch. Touch is the mother of all our senses, evolutionarily prior to all the others. During pregnancy, the developing fetus is bathed in amniotic fluid, held by the soft surround of the womb and the movements of the mother. Once born, babies need to be touched and held—in fact, on a survival level, they need touch as much as they need food, as has been demonstrated in controversial experiments with orphaned rhesus monkeys in which the baby monkeys preferred to starve with a maternal substitute that was soft and pleasant to touch rather than to be provided food by a metal wire substitute.⁴ We evolve through touch, and with this foundation in our psyche, for the rest of our lives we find that loving touch brings us back into our bodies, into our grounded center, and into our connection with the earth.

Other senses are also in the process of being formed during this embryological period. The fetus begins moving its limbs and hears the

gurgles of the mother's digestive system, her heart beating, her breathing, and the sound of her voice, which it learns to recognize. Red is the color associated with this chakra, and indeed, the first color that the fetus sees is the dark red glowing world from within the womb. In an ideal birth, the baby immediately learns the smell of the mother, smell being the most animal-like of our senses, and the one that is linked to the Base Chakra. The baby feels the warm flesh of the mother, hears her voice, looks into her eyes, and tastes and attaches to her nipple. All of its sensory processes are awakened and fixated on the mother, on whom the baby is entirely dependent for survival. And the baby shares this experience with the young of all mammalian species. This is animal instinct at work.

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

The three major nadis all originate in the Base Chakra, the Sushumna channel travels through the center of the coccyx to the sacrum and through the spine. The Ida channel runs up the left side of the body, and the Pingala channel travels up the right side. When the baby has a need—when it is hungry, cold, tired, wet, or hurting—all it can do is cry, and if it is lucky, the world, usually in the form of the mother or father, will help. Through this challenging and often painful process, the tiny being learns about the survival needs of “in here” and about those needs being met through the world “out there.” This is the beginning of separation and development of an individual self. The Solar Pingala channel represents the outward expression of the individual, the cry for help, while the Lunar Ida channel represents our experience of the world out there meeting those survival needs, the beginning of relationship. With the Base Chakra we are at the unconscious instinctual beginnings of these aspects of consciousness. The Sushumna channel represents the balance between these two aspects.

Base Chakra Consciousness in Adulthood

Our early experiences, in utero and in the early months of life, program the Base Chakra. If this is an easy period—if the pregnancy is happy and straightforward, the birth is easy, and we are loved and cared for as infants—the energy of this chakra will flow well as we mature into adults. We will tend to have a good relationship with our body throughout our lives, in touch with its calls for food, warmth, rest, or other instinctual needs. We

will operate with a sense that the physical body and the physical world are essentially safe places to be. We will have strong “root support” and will feel generally well grounded and in touch with reality (unless traumas in later stages of life make us feel more vulnerable). In short, we will feel a basic sense of trust in life.

Infant-Centered Births

Birth always carries some risk and challenge. Even in a normal and successful birth, many hospitals can make a baby’s entry into the world less than ideal. Bright lights and loud voices, being held upside down and encouraged to cry by hands covered in surgical gloves, being placed on cold scales to be weighed—all this can intensify the birth trauma and negatively influence Base Chakra programming. In recent years, midwives and hospital staff have become more aware of the importance of the context surrounding birthing and made their delivery wards more “newborn friendly,” influenced by the work of theorists such as Frédéric Leboyer, who discussed the importance of a more infant-centered approach to birth.⁵ For similar reasons, we have seen an increase in women requesting home births, water births, and ways of respecting and honoring a new birth as a deeply spiritual moment in a family’s life, and a way of making this miraculous experience as easy as possible for mother and baby.

In contrast, if the time we spend in utero, at birth, and/or during the first year or so of life is traumatic, we may not have such an easy relationship with our instinctual processes. In addition, looking at the arena of nature versus nurture, we may also have problems with our Base Chakra energy that arise not from how we are nurtured but from nature—in other words,

genetic or inherited difficulties, both physical and psychological, can negatively affect our basic sense of trust in life.

Negative Programming and Imbalances in the Base Chakra

Negative programming creates a less balanced flow of energy in the Base Chakra. We might not be so easily in touch with the needs of our inner animal, unaware of the cries of our body for food or rest. We may have a basic mistrust in life, or an ungrounded feeling that the body, or the earth, is not a safe place, and this underlying anxiety could go on to influence the more complex psychological developments that take place as we grow into adulthood. In extreme imbalances, we might be very cautious about taking risks, for every risk is a possible survival issue. For example, the body could seem very unsafe to us; we might develop severe hypochondria and fear annihilation at the slightest health issue. Alternatively, we might take far too many risks, unaware of the danger we put ourselves in or unconsciously courting danger to prove that we can survive.

Some imbalances can be represented in the chakra system by the left and right nadis, Ida and Pingala. Imagine a tiny baby who is left to cry in distress. Initially the crying intensifies, but eventually the baby becomes quiet and withdrawn, at some unconscious level accepting that the world is not coming to meet his or her needs. Energetically, the intensified crying would be an expression of the Solar Pingala channel, which represents the self-expressive side of our nature. The silent withdrawal would be an expression of the Lunar Ida channel, a turning-inward in reaction to the lack of relationship.

The theme of separation and attachment is central not only to the Base Chakra but to the whole of human life. Birth is a traumatic separation from the mother, and the baby's need to attach to a caregiver is an instinctual response to that trauma and a means of healing it.⁶ Balancing our need to be a separate self with our need to be in relationship to others is an ongoing challenge of life, expressed in different ways as we move through the chakras. The Solar and Lunar channels represent this creative antagonism at the center of our lives, with Sushumna, the central channel, representing balance.

In an adult with a Base Chakra imbalance, the overly cautious person would be imbalanced on the Lunar Ida channel and the overly reckless person on the Solar Pingala channel. Cautious or reckless behavior could also, of course, arise from challenges in higher chakras, but the map of the psyche begins to be drawn in the programming of the Base Chakra at the beginning of life.

Developmental Psychology and the Base Chakra

We have looked at how the Base Chakra governs our earliest experiences in life, which is also the starting point for several developmental theories. Now we will look at some of those theories and see how they can help inform our understanding of Base Chakra consciousness.

REACTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

In the late nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud, often called the father of psychoanalysis, began to formulate his theory of psychosexual development. He argued that the fundamental vital force of every human being was a sexual energy that he called libido, a concept that was deeply shocking to the culture of his times. He suggested that there were five psychosexual stages of development: oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital.⁷ The oral and anal stages cover the period when the Base Chakra is dominant, when the infant derives comfort from sucking the breast, from emptying the bladder and bowels, and from the sensual experiences of the body. Later psychologists challenged this purely sexual and gender-biased interpretation of human development. However, Freud did bring to light the visceral nature of infant experience and intuitively recognized the primal nature of our sexual energy, echoing the Tantric concept of kundalini energy.

In 1950, Erik Erikson, one of the first modern developmental psychologists, published his well-known work *Childhood and Society*, in which he proposed that there are eight stages of development in the socialization of a person from infancy to adulthood, and each stage constitutes a challenge in which the human being faces a crisis. He called the first stage a crisis of basic trust, in which the individual learns to trust the world “out there” and the body “in here” or makes some kind of

adaptation to cope with the lack of trust that he or she feels.⁸ This stage begins at birth and extends to about one year of life, which corresponds to the psychological development outlined in the programming of the Base Chakra.

More recently, Jenny Wade's meta-study in *Changes of Mind* (1996) compares theories of psychologists with research findings of neuroscience, considering different approaches to infantile consciousness. She concludes that in the first few months of life, the baby's behavior is governed primarily by the reptilian complex of the triune brain, with instinctual responses that are motivated purely by the desire to cease discomfort. (This is similar to the "approach or avoid" response mentioned earlier; see [here](#).) These are the pre-awareness survival instincts that we share with the whole animal kingdom. Wade calls this stage of consciousness Reactive Consciousness, and it appears as the starting point on her diagrammatic chart of consciousness (see [fig. I.10](#)).⁹

NAIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

The next stage in Wade's analysis, called Naive Consciousness, begins to appear at about three months of age, when the baby begins to interact more with the environment, and continues to about the age of two.¹⁰ This developmental stage corresponds to a transitional phase in the chakra system, when the Base Chakra remains dominant, but the relational responses and the more conscious pleasure seeking, or pain avoidance, of the Sacral Chakra begin to appear. During this transitional phase, ideally we will integrate Base Chakra consciousness into our developing psyche—though, as we've discussed, trauma can cause negative programming and imbalances. We'll talk more about this transition and Sacral Chakra consciousness in the next chapter.

Even as adults, the reactive neurological processes of Base Chakra consciousness still govern a large percentage of our behavior. These instinctual processes constitute the submerged mass of the iceberg of adult consciousness, with our aware consciousness being the exposed tip. Hundreds of intelligent although pre-aware psychophysical processes are giving us root support in every moment of our lives. This animal consciousness is constantly functioning to keep us alive, breathing, digesting food, staying warm, moving, sleeping. The calls of our inner

animal—fatigue, hunger, cold—break into our conscious awareness with less immediacy than they do in an infant, but they are still ever present. When we neglect these primal voices, we fall into imbalance. When we hear them and respect them, Base Chakra energy flows easily and provides a grounded support for our well-being.

Psychic Level

At a psychic level, the Base Chakra is simply a receiver of earth energy, constantly open and channeling the energy of the earth into our chakra system. When earth energy is flowing through us well, we have a feeling of calmness and safety and being present. When it is not flowing well, we feel ungrounded, with a constant low level of anxiety, or we find ourselves living in a dreamy unreal world of the imagination, rather than the physical world, which feels unsafe to us.

Some psychics can see how well a person is connected to the earth by looking clairvoyantly at that connection, which they see as a “grounding cord” descending from the base of the spine down into the earth, rather as though we still have long energetic tails at the end of our spines. Visualizing a tail or a flowing energetic grounding cord can help increase the flow of earth energy into the Base Chakra. (See the Grounding [Visualization exercise and illustration](#).) To put it more mythically, we completely depend on Mother Earth to sustain and nourish us, and the grounding cord connects us to Her like an energetic umbilical cord.

Some people have experienced being “out of their body.”¹¹ This often happens as a result of physical or emotional trauma, when people cannot bear the painful feelings of the situation they are in and find themselves floating above their bodies. Psychically, this experience can be understood as the mental and energetic selves pulling away from the physical self. The grounding cord loses its connection with the earth, and we lose connection with our physical animal body. The energy then travels up the spine and the person functions at the psychic level of the Crown Chakra, and often has a profound and life-changing experience. We will look at this further in the chapter on the Crown Chakra.

Feet Chakras

At the center of the soles of the feet we have chakras that also receive energy from the earth. This energy travels up the legs and into the Base Chakra, feeding and nourishing it. Together, the feet chakras, the Base Chakra, and the grounding cord form our energetic grounding mechanism. Energetic blocks in the legs, feet, and pelvis can disrupt the flow of energy and our connection to the earth. For example, if only one leg is transmitting earth energy to the Base Chakra, we are only able to be partially grounded (see [plate 8](#)). This imbalanced flow can cause sciatica, which can be alleviated through hands-on work and visualization. The earth energy traveling through the left leg will feed the Ida channel, and through the right leg, the Pingala channel, so energy blockages in the legs can affect the balance of these two channels.

Spiritual Level

From a spiritual perspective, conception, embryological development, and birth are the processes by which we move from the divine realm into the earth realm, creating a physical body and a separate self. Hindu philosophy involves a belief in reincarnation and attributes spiritual beingness to each human before conception. In other words, the spirit of every human has experienced many past lives and selects or is selected for the new life. At some point between conception and birth, this spiritual energy enters the fetus or the newborn baby.

Hindu teachings suggest that we first “take in” spirit at birth, with our first breath. Breath and spirit are equated in many spiritual traditions. The word *inspiration* can mean both breathing in and receiving spiritual wisdom; at the other end of the spectrum, when we die and spirit departs, we *expire*. Birth, when the baby first exists separately from the mother, is seen as the moment when the divine Kundalini Shakti energy enters the Crown Chakra, travels down the spine to the Base Chakra, and coils herself, like a snake, to rest there. This downward inspirational flow of kundalini energy opens the Base Chakra and creates a connection between spirit and earth, so the Base Chakra becomes the receiver of earth energy at the spiritual and psychic levels. As the resting place of kundalini, the Base Chakra is also a storehouse of potent spiritual energy waiting to be

reawakened. The traditional imagery of a snake does evoke the experience of our embryological development, in which we begin as a reptile and evolve in the womb into a human being. Not coincidentally, the dominant brain during infancy is the reptilian brain.

From a more scientific perspective, embryologists have discovered that the fetus does not experience the oceanic bliss that Freud suggested was the *in utero* experience. By the third trimester, the fetus is sensitive to the emotional and physical environment of the mother and reacts to any stress from her. They argue that these stressful experiences allow the fetus to begin the process of differentiation even before birth.¹² This view supports the idea that the Base Chakra is being programmed throughout our time in the womb.

Wade has compiled interesting research that may throw some scientific light on these differing views. She suggests that there are two types of consciousness working in parallel during fetal development: “fetal consciousness,” as it is understood by neuroscience and which I include as part of Base Chakra consciousness, and a transcendent “Preand Perinatal Consciousness,” which is of quite a different nature.¹³ The evidence for Prenatal Consciousness comes from two main sources: first, the reports of adults reexperiencing their time in utero during altered states created by therapeutic treatments such as hypnotic regression or hallucinogenic drug therapy; and second, the memories of young children (aged two to four years) who talk about their birth and prebirth experiences. The latter is a fairly new area of research, one less easy to dismiss by mainstream scientists who would dismiss altered states as unreliable by definition.

Young children have unexpectedly described their experience as a fetus inside the womb or during birth. They give an account of looking at themselves from outside the fetus and the mother’s body, seeing themselves during pregnancy or during birth, with a clear visual awareness of what is going on, despite never having heard any account of the experience from the people around them. Details of their accounts of their births can sometimes be verified by medical records, such as the cord being around the neck, the face scratched, or the position in which they were born.¹⁴

This research lends weight to the theory that we have a transcendent mature consciousness prior to conception and birth, as well as the instinctual consciousness that develops with the growing fetus, and that

during pregnancy or after birth, these two types of consciousness merge and instinctual consciousness dominates. This links with the teachings of many spiritual traditions that suggest that we come from the divine world and enter this material world by contracting our expanded divine consciousness into the tiny fetus or baby.

Cultural Considerations

The scientific name for our species is *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The name *sapiens* derives from the Latin verb *sapere*, which means “to know” or “to discern.” So the signifier of our species is “we know that we know”; we are aware of knowing. It is our capacity to reflect that differentiates us from most other species (we know that other species are also capable of reflective reasoning, but not to the same extent as our species). This capacity to discern takes us beyond the instinctual behavior of the Base Chakra, so by definition there have never been *Homo sapiens* cultures that operated only at the level of the Base Chakra.

It is easy to imagine that our early human ancestors had very prominent Base Chakras because the struggle for survival was such a major part of their day-to-day lives. *Homo erectus* tribes, our most ancient human ancestors, migrated out of Africa about two million years ago. The only sign that they operated at more than an instinctual level is our discovery of the primitive tools they made. Neanderthals were the first of our human ancestors who, more than 60,000 years ago, ritually buried their dead.¹⁵ So even these ancient cultures show a consciousness level beyond general instinct, although the Base Chakra would have been very prominent in early human societies.

In our increasingly mind-oriented modern civilization, we can tend to devalue and lose touch with the part of us that is animal. Our animal nature is seen as a force opposing our intelligence and spirituality. The very word *animal* is often used disparagingly, such as when people are accused of “behaving like animals.”

The shadow emerges in our culture through a media fascination with fear and violence, which confronts us with our own death and survival issues. Our culture also tends to express an obsession with sexuality, often degenerating into pornography. Repressed human animality is far worse

than the natural behaviors of the wild creatures with whom we share this world.

The mainstream scientific community has adopted an explanatory model of mind and body in which the body is seen as a machine housing the brain and the brain is considered identical to the mind. This model elevates the mindbrain and devalues the body, and it adds to our denigration of the physical animal part of ourselves. In contrast, the chakra system offers us a theory of mind in which mind inhabits the whole of the body and expands beyond it.

The consequences of our culture's ungroundedness can be seen in our responses to the greatest threat humanity has ever had to face. The environment that nurtures and supports us, our Mother Earth, is being desecrated in the interests of wealth creation and consumerism. Human activity is causing runaway climate change, and we are approaching a critical point where our survival as a species is threatened. Climate change denial, head-in-the-sand politics, and clinging to "business as usual" can be seen as at least partly the result of a species dissociated from its animality and unconscious about its survival needs. Devaluing and denying our animal nature plays a huge part in this self-destructive behavior.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Poor Root Support

I saw Agneta for just one session because she was from Sweden and on a short visit to England. She thought chakra therapy might be able to help her. She was an attractive woman in her twenties with no obvious problems in her work or her relationships. She told me, with some embarrassment, that she suffered from an exaggerated sense of terror whenever she got even slightly ill or had a minor accident. She confessed to being an extreme hypochondriac, fearing

she would die at the first sneeze of a cold. Apart from that, she felt that there was nothing much wrong with her.

I was curious as to what my hands would discover when I worked with her. She lay down on my therapy table fully clothed, on her back, with her head and legs supported by cushions, allowing the spine to stay lengthened. (Without cushions, the spine may tighten in the fully supine position, which can exacerbate back problems and impede energy flow.) I placed one hand under her lower back and my other hand on her abdomen, checking that this felt safe and comfortable for Agneta. The Base Chakra area of the body is highly sensitive and private, so a chakra therapist would never make direct contact with the pelvic floor. A hand under the lower back in the area of the sacrum usually feels quite safe to most clients, and if it doesn't, we can work with a hand in the aura around the lower body, without making any hand contact, or alternatively with our hands on the client's legs and feet.

Chakra therapy usually begins with the Base Chakra and works up the spine for two main reasons. First, as we've discussed, the energy of the Base Chakra links to the beginning of our psychological journey in life, and we mirror that developmental evolution in our healing work. Second, many people are at least slightly ungrounded, and if we focus our work mainly on the upper body, with lots of movement in the head and no root support, their energy can become very imbalanced. This can lead to bad headaches and disorientation.

With one hand above and one below Agneta's abdomen, I was able to get a sense of the energy flow in the lower part of her body. I was quite surprised. The Base Chakra felt completely absent, as though there were a huge vacuum, a black hole, where the energetic flow of the chakra should be. This was not a case of mild ungroundedness. I had never felt a Base Chakra so abandoned by life force. I told Agneta, as gently as I could, what I was feeling. I explained how the Base

Chakra is programmed during the fetal period and the first year or two of life. I described how it affects our survival mechanisms and asked her if anything significant had happened to her during her mother's pregnancy or early in her life. Agneta had something of an "aha" moment. She explained that her parents had separated in the first year of her life, and she had been brought up by her father, who had been a good father to her.

Together we pieced together an understanding of how this dramatic loss of her mother, and all the emotional turbulence surrounding it, had given Agneta, as a baby, an unconscious terror that she was going to die. Her Base Chakra had been programmed by this experience and was in a permanent state of red alert that her survival was under threat. This had morphed into severe hypochondria.

As we talked, Agneta's unconscious fears were made more conscious, and with my hands still energetically connecting to the first and second chakras, energy began to return to this area and she was able to experience to some extent a feeling of root support and groundedness, which was new to her. She also felt huge relief in understanding why she reacted so extremely to minor illnesses and felt able to be more accepting and compassionate toward herself about it.

I was sorry that she was unable to continue working with me, which would have enabled us to stabilize the new energetic changes in her system. But I did feel that she had taken a positive step in the long journey toward self-understanding.

Nourishing the Base Chakra

Nowadays the virtual world of the internet tends to take up more of our time and attention than the physical world that supports our lives. Our mental world is expanding exponentially (quantitatively, although perhaps not qualitatively!), and this makes it very easy for us to become spaced out or ungrounded, so we have to consciously take care of the inner animal that is trying to take care of us. This means listening to the body's calls for food,

rest, and exercise. Every time we sleep or rest, the Base Chakra takes charge, allowing us to rejuvenate. But often, instead of resting, we reach for sugar, caffeine, or some other stimulant to give us more energy so we can keep going.

Resting does not get very good press in our crazy modern world. I remember when I was working in a theater group, on tour, which is a fairly exhausting occupation, asking a fellow actor what he was planning to do with the precious day off we had the next day. “Oh,” he said blithely, “I think I’ll waste it!” What a great response! And a surprising one, given our cultural drive toward “busy-ness,” where resting is seen as a waste of time. Look at animals everywhere and notice how good they are at resting. Let them help us remember our animal roots.

Resting re-grounds and rejuvenates the Base Chakra, but there are lots of other ways that we can nourish it. Walking in nature is a great way to reconnect with the earth and energetically come back into the body. Gardening is also an excellent grounding activity, as is housework. Beatrix Potter rose to fame writing and illustrating short stories for children about little animals who were constantly cleaning and cooking and looking after their adventurous baby animals. Indeed, caring for the “nest” is an instinctual activity for many animals, and housework has a rather soothing and ritualistic quality that connects us to our Base Chakra. The daily routines and rhythms of life are grounding, especially when carried out with conscious awareness of their soothing and grounding potential.

Eating slowly and mindfully can be grounding, especially if the food is wholesome. Other grounding activities can include taking a shower or a leisurely bath, or receiving a massage, especially a foot massage. In fact, being mindful is grounding in itself, no matter what you are doing.

Following are some suggestions for more formal grounding exercises.

SEMI-SUPINE REST

One of the fundamental Alexander Technique practices is putting your body in the position of maximum rest for the spine. We also call this the “semi-supine position” because it involves lying on your back (supine), but it also involves raising your head by resting it on a few paperback books or a firm cushion, and raising your knees so your

feet are flat on the floor—so you are supine, but not fully supine (semi).

This position allows the curves of the neck and of the lower back to gently open out. Compression of the discs between the vertebrae in these secondary curves of the spine can cause a lot of problems. Twenty minutes or so in the semi-supine position allows these discs to decompress, encouraging muscular release of unnecessary tension and rejuvenating the whole spinal structure.

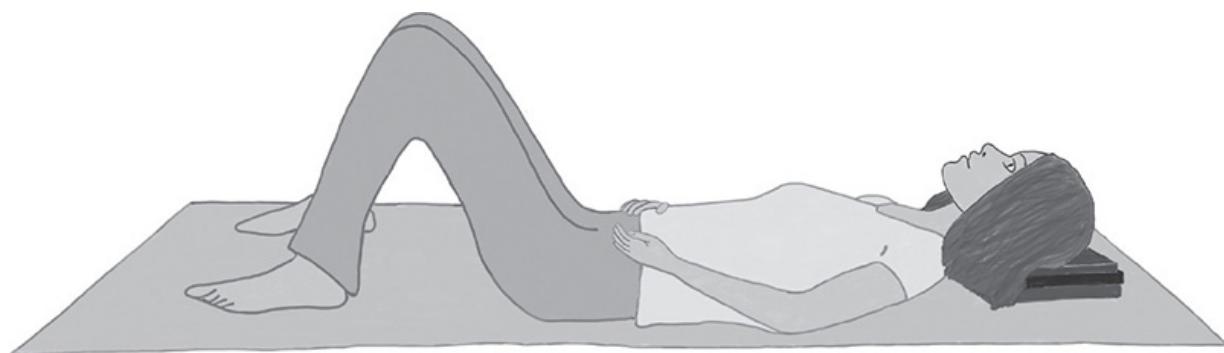


Fig. 1.4. The semi-supine position

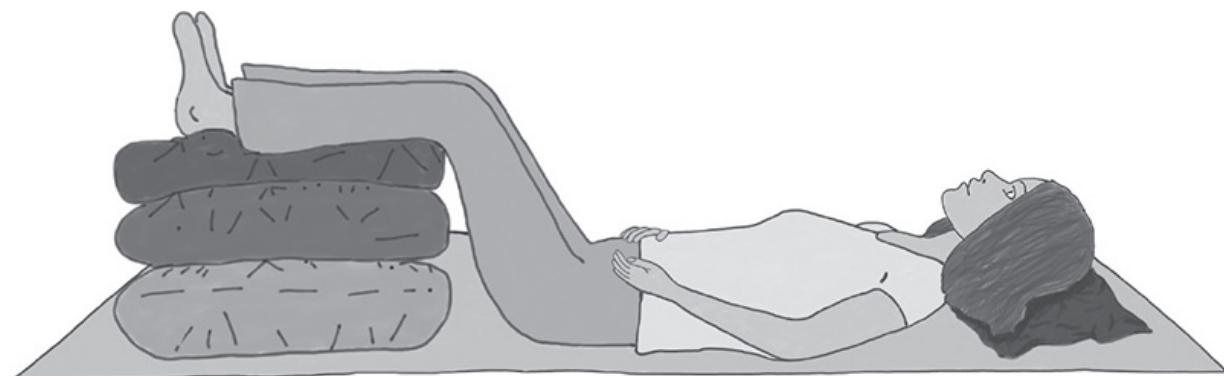


Fig. 1.5. Alternative position of rest for the spine

Lying down in the semi-supine position for twenty minutes, especially in the middle of the day, also allows us to pause and rest, physically and psychologically, putting us in touch with our physical animal body, which is grounding and nourishing to the Base Chakra.

Lie down on a rug or carpet, preferably in a quiet, warm space. Let your head rest upon several paperback books or a firm cushion.

You should feel a gentle stretch at the back of the neck, though without feeling squashed up in the front of your neck. If you feel any soreness in this position, a little extra padding under the head or the lower back may help.

Rest your hands facing downward on your abdomen, not touching. Your elbows should be bent and resting at your sides.

Set your feet flat on the floor, with your knees bent upward toward the ceiling. Your knees should be about hip width apart, with your feet fairly close to your bottom (see [fig. 1.4](#)). This position allows the curve of your lower back to open out and be gently stretched. If your legs keep falling inward or outward in this position, an alternative is to lie on the floor and rest your legs from the knees to the feet on the seat of a chair or on a stack of cushions just high enough that the line from your bottom to your knees is almost vertical (see [fig. 1.5](#)).

Pausing in your daily activities to rest is always grounding, and this practice can be used to nourish the whole mind and body, including all the chakras. In my book *The Art of Changing*, the second chapter is dedicated to explaining the semi-supine position and exploring the ways in which we can think about our body while lying in that position.

WAKING UP THE LEGS

This quick leg massage can really help with grounding.

Take off your shoes and sit on the floor with your right leg stretched out in front of you and the left leg bent at the knee so that you can hold your foot in your hands. If it's easier to do this sitting on a chair, that's fine too. With both hands, lightly stroke your left foot gently and soothingly, on the top and the bottom. Then stroke your ankle, your calf, your knee, and your thigh, ending with your buttocks and your lower back. This action needs to be very light and caring.

Now, go back to your left foot and massage it as deeply as is comfortable for you. With your hands, wiggle each of your toes around, feeling the movement of the joints. Massage your ankle joint,

and then use your hands to twist your whole foot clockwise and counterclockwise, as far as is comfortable, so the ankle is being moved passively. Move up to your calf and massage it all over as deeply as you can. Massage your knee and then, holding your foot and calf, move your lower leg up and down, working the knee joint, passively if you can. Notice how the knee joint is like a hinge and only moves up and down, unlike the ankle, which can rotate. Now move into the thigh, with strong, deep, but not agonizing massage, and then up into the buttocks and lower back. Then move your whole leg from the hip, passively if you can, noticing how the hip rotates.

Now, go back to your foot again and slap it quickly all over. Do the same with your ankle, calf, knee, thigh, hip, and buttocks.

Stand up and compare how your two legs feel.

Sit down again and repeat the entire sequence for your right leg.

Your legs will be very grateful for this attention! And now, having woken up all the nerve endings in your legs, you will probably have a sense of being much more grounded.

GROUNDING VISUALIZATION

This simple exercise can be done anywhere, even when you are just standing in line at the supermarket. It is a good exercise for bringing balance to the body, especially if you are feeling ungrounded.

Begin by standing with your feet hip width apart. Be aware of the weight of your body flowing down through your legs and feet into the earth below. Slowly rock your body very slightly forward and backward, swaying from your ankles so that your weight falls on the front and then on the back of your feet. Give attention to all the sensations you feel as you gently rock.

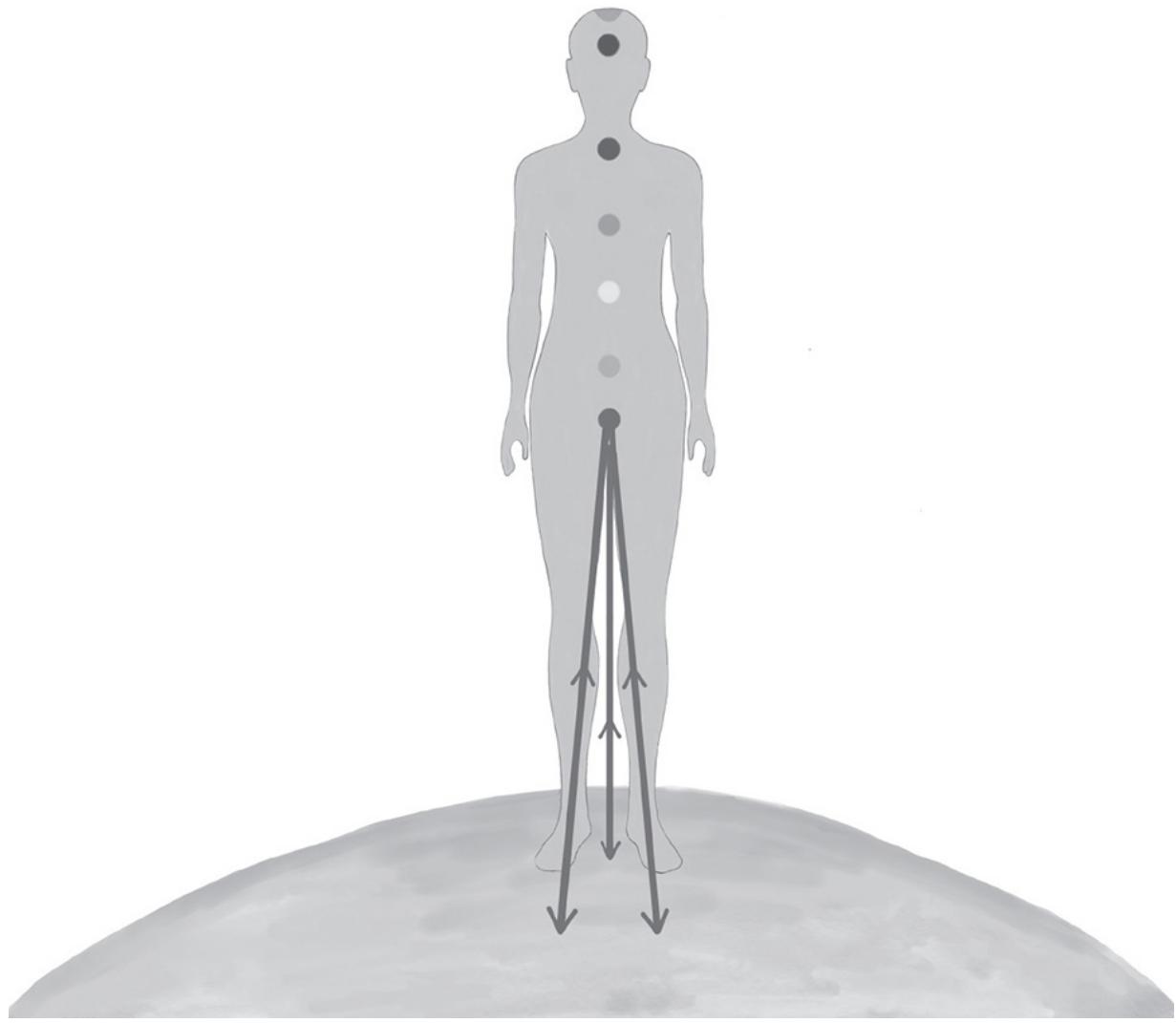


Fig. 1.6. Grounding through the feet, legs, and grounding cord

Now come to rest with your weight balanced on your feet. Slowly move your weight onto your left foot and then onto your right foot, swaying gently from one foot to the other and noticing all the sensations that movement creates.

Come to rest with your weight balanced between your left and right feet and between the front and back of the feet. This is the best position for balance in the body when you are standing. Notice whether that position is different from your habitual standing position.

Now visualize your weight dropping down through your feet into the earth below you. Visualize an energy channel or grounding cord running down from your coccyx and connecting into the earth, so

there are three vectors of your weight flowing down into the earth. The center of Earth is extremely hot. Visualize Earth's heat as a powerful red energy that cools as it reaches the surface. Imagine this red energy rising up through your feet, legs, and grounding cord and into the Base Chakra. See the chakra and the area of the body around it glowing red with earth energy.

From time to time, sway forward and backward and from side to side from the ankles, very gently, as though you were a tree, bringing your awareness to your weight falling down through your feet and grounding cord and the earth energy rising up into the Base Chakra.



CONNECTING WITH YOUR INNER INFANT

Find a little time to reflect on your infancy. If possible, do a little research to find out how your mother experienced her pregnancy, your birth, and the first year or two of your life. Were these experiences easy and happy or fraught with tension and difficulty? Keep in mind that an experience that was easy for a mother may not have felt the same for a baby. For example, sometimes a quick birth can be easy for the mother but traumatic for the baby. For an infant, being pushed too quickly through the birth canal can compress the bones of the cranium too abruptly and make it difficult for them to return to a relaxed state. Find out as much as you can about the tiny being that was you, in the womb, being born, and in the very early years. See if you can develop a picture of that infant and whether you were peaceful and contented or shocked or distressed. Try to have an inner dialogue with your inner infant and get to know him or her better. See if your inner infant can help you understand your relationship to your body and how you take care of it. How safe do you feel in your body, and how safe do you feel on this earth that you share with all the other animals?

It can be helpful to write down your thoughts about these questions in a journal.



CONNECTING WITH YOUR INNER ANIMAL

The Base Chakra is situated in an area of the body about which we have many social taboos. There seems to be a certain cultural shame about the fact that even such magnificent, brilliant, and creative creatures as we are, we still have to perform some very basic instinctual functions, just like all the other animals in the world, who do not suffer the same embarrassment about them as we do. Take a moment to reflect on this area of your body, and notice what sensations, emotions, and thoughts arise as you give it your attention. Write down your responses in your journal.

See if you can give this area of your body some appreciation and gratitude for the functions it performs. Give thanks to the inner instinctual animal that is the foundation for all of your life.

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2

The Sacral Chakra

Sanskrit name: Svadhishthana

English translation: Home of the Self; One's own abode

Dominant stage: Childhood

Central themes: The inner child; pleasure center; relationship; tribal consciousness

*“When you wake up in the morning, Pooh,” said Piglet at last,
“what’s the first thing you say to yourself?”*

*“What’s for breakfast?” said Pooh. “What do you say,
Piglet?”*

*“I say, I wonder what’s going to happen exciting today?” said
Piglet.*

Pooh nodded thoughtfully.

“It’s the same thing,” he said.

A. A. MILNE, *WINNIE-THE-POOH*

A newborn baby is dominated by the will to live, the determination to survive, and it is some time before signs of a different kind of consciousness emerge. The caregiver looks hopefully for the first smile that is not just the result of wind, the first signs of recognition that are not in the caregiver's imagination, the first sounds that have a trace of intentionality behind them (other than cries of distress!), an infant not simply bent on animal survival but beginning to develop a desire for communication and relationship. Although attachment to the mother begins almost immediately after the separation of birth and develops as part of the baby's survival mechanisms, it is only after about three months that we begin to see the first hints of conscious awareness. Now the baby begins to respond to the primary caregivers with the simplest acts of connection and relatedness—eye contact, a smile, a gurgle of pleasure. When this happens, we are witnessing the next stage of development on the journey toward maturity: the tentative beginnings of Sacral Chakra development.

The Sanskrit name for the Sacral Chakra, *Svadhisthana*, derives from *sva*, meaning “self,” and *adhishthana*, meaning “abode” or “dwelling place,” yielding the interpretation “home of the self ” or “one’s own abode.” This chakra marks our development beyond the instinctual animal self to the beginning of an individual personality.

Physical Level

The Sacral Chakra is positioned at the top of the sacrum, a strong triangular structure made up of five bones that fuse together during late adolescence and early adulthood and support the weight of the upper body as it is spread across the pelvis and into the legs. It is linked to the sacral nerve plexus of the peripheral nervous system (see [fig. I.2](#)).

Sacral Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	ॐ = Vam
<i>Position</i>	Top of sacrum (S1)
<i>Neurology</i>	Sacral plexus Limbic system Enteric nervous system
<i>Endocrine Glands</i>	Enteric nervous system Pancreas
<i>Petals on Yantra</i>	6
<i>Sense</i>	Taste
<i>Color</i>	Orange

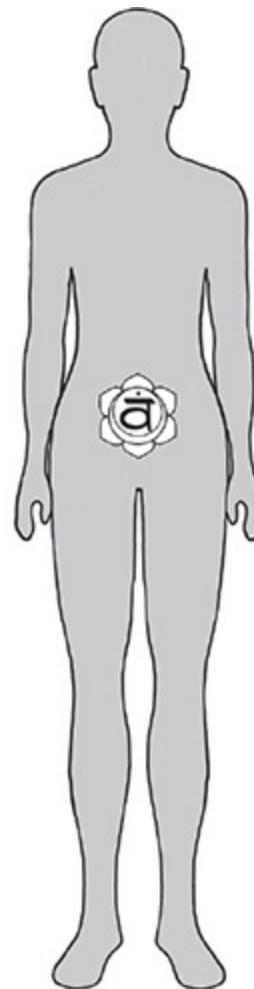


Fig. 2.1. Sacral Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

During Sacral Chakra development and programming, the limbic system, which is the mammalian part of the triune brain, takes precedence over the reptilian brain and is dominant during early childhood. The limbic brain records memories of experiences that were agreeable or disagreeable, giving rise to our rich emotional experience.

At the same time, there is huge growth and development in the neocortex (see [fig. 1.3](#)). In evolutionary terms, the neocortex is the final part of the triune brain to develop, after the reptilian and mammalian brains. It introduces the capacity for more abstract thinking. During childhood, while the neocortex has increasing influence, it does not rule our actions and choices, which are more emotionally based, ruled by the dominant limbic brain.

The Sacral Chakra, which is centered in the sacrum and the lower abdomen, is also influenced by the “gut brain.” This “brain,” which modern science has only relatively recently discovered, is a primitive enteric nervous system embedded throughout our digestive system, including the stomach, small and large intestines, pancreas, and gallbladder. During embryological development, the fetus grows first the gut brain, then the “heart brain” (another nervous system that we will explore in chapter 4), and last the head brain that we are much more familiar with.¹

Dr. Michael Gershon spent forty years researching the digestive system, and his book *The Second Brain* (1998) tells the story of this work, which is ongoing. The enteric nervous system contains more than five hundred million nerve cells embedded in the lining of the organs of the gut. This “gut brain” produces all of the classes of neurotransmitters found in the central nervous system and sends and receives nerve signals throughout the digestive organs. Normally the two brains influence each other, with messages passing in both directions. But the enteric brain can operate independently of the head brain. There are only one thousand to two thousand nerve fibers connecting the head brain to the hundreds of millions of nerve cells in the small intestine, and when these connections are severed, the enteric brain continues to function on its own, controlling the digestive function of the body.

The enteric nervous system is classified as part of the peripheral nervous system simply because anything peripheral to the head brain is considered to be the peripheral nervous system. But it differs from the sympathetic and parasympathetic divisions of the peripheral nervous system because of its capacity to act independently, as a brain in itself, autonomously running the digestive system. Signals between different regions of the gut are carried by not only nerve circuits but also hormones, as it has its own complex endocrine system.

The gut brain stretches throughout the region of all the lower chakras, influencing them all to some extent. However, the area of the body including the anus, rectum, and sexual organs is mainly controlled by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems connected to the reptilian brain, as is the main control of motility in the stomach. The small and large intestines are controlled by the enteric nervous system, and this is the lower abdominal area of the body where the Sacral Chakra is located.

The gut is involved in processing foreign material (usually food) that enters our bodies through the digestive tract. It has to assimilate what it considers good for us and reject anything that could harm us. It has to determine what to absorb and what to excrete. More than 80 percent of our immune cells are located in the gut. In times of acute stress, the enteric nervous system can initiate the production of sedating chemicals similar to those found in popular antidepressants like Valium, which calm down the central nervous system.² Additionally, the gut brain controls the production of more than 95 percent of the body's serotonin, the feelgood hormone. From a chakra perspective, these mechanisms link the gut brain to the pleasure-seeking and pain-avoiding influences of the Sacral Chakra. Eating a delicious meal can generate feelings of deep pleasure, but if the food doesn't agree with you, it can create equally powerful feelings of discomfort. We have the gut brain to thank for these responses.

Traditionally, the endocrine glands associated with the Sacral Chakra were thought to be either the gonads or the islets of Langerhans (cells of the pancreas that regulate blood sugar and pancreatic secretions). However, since the discovery that the enteric nervous system has its own extensive endocrine system, centered in the intestines, and involved in governing the production of pancreatic hormones, it now makes more sense to link the enteric nervous system to the Sacral Chakra, the gonads to the Base Chakra, and the adrenals to the Solar Plexus Chakra. With these correlations, the endocrine systems linked to each chakra are operating more directly in the regions of those chakras (see [fig. I.6](#)).

As modern science investigates our physiology in greater and greater depth, it continues to discover that our neurological centers are embedded throughout the torso, not just in our cranium. This gives credence to a theory of consciousness that involves the whole body. Although we do not know the exact relationship between consciousness and the physical body, we do know that the state of our mind influences the state of our body, and vice versa.

Digestion, both physically and psychologically, is central to the function of the Sacral Chakra, and taste is the sense linked to this chakra in the Tantric traditions. The Sacral Chakra represents an early developmental stage that is influenced by the primal enteric nervous system and the limbic system, a more primal part of the head brain. The gut brain, although

complex, functions in a way that is instinctual and unconscious. This correlates interestingly with the unconscious nature of childhood and the Sacral Chakra—unconscious, that is, in the sense that childhood is not a very self-aware or self-reflective time of our lives.

While I think it is valuable to see the correlations between the physical structures of the body and the consciousness of the related chakras, I would not like to identify consciousness with organs or nervous systems, whether they be the gut brain or the head brain. Many scientists assume that our mind is the same thing as our head brain. That model gives rise to the danger of equating emotions with chemicals and reducing consciousness to hormones and other physical components of the cells. Though these correlations throw light on the mystery of consciousness, they are correlations, not causations. We do not solve the mind-body problem by reducing the psychological to the physical. What we feel is not identical to chemicals, and what we think is not identical to nervous system activity.

Body Language

The Sacral Chakra is found in the lower abdomen, a part of the body that we don't give much of our attention to most of the time. Unless something dramatic, whether good or bad, is happening in our lower abdomen, we can be fairly oblivious to any messages it is giving out. The consciousness of the Sacral Chakra is largely unconscious, just as much of our childhood experience remains unconsciously embedded in our psyches.

However, if we have stomachache, the feelings in our abdomen completely override any other thoughts in our psyche! More positively, we can talk about having a “deep belly laugh,” that wonderful uncontrollable childlike laughter that takes over our whole abdomen in waves of pleasure. Sexual arousal is another powerful feeling we may experience in the lower abdomen (and below), and for this reason the Sacral Chakra has often been called the sexual center of the chakra system. More mundanely, it is in this part of our body that our gut brain lets us know when we need to empty our bladder or bowels.

We can be “deep down contented” or, alternatively, “down in the dumps” or “feeling low,” suggesting that those feelings are connected to our lower abdomen. We can have a “deep-seated” intuition, a “gut instinct,” a “gut feeling,” or a “gut reaction,” suggesting a response that is mediated not

by thought, a.k.a. the neocortex, but by something much more primal, namely the limbic system, along with the enteric nervous system.

For this chakra, as is the case for all the others, our very language shows us that every part of the body can be conscious in different and sometimes subtle ways. Understanding the links between each chakra and the part of the body it is located in gives us clues to understanding the somatic experiences we are having.

Psychological Level

At about three months of age, babies begin to make eye contact, smile, and respond to their primary caregivers. This is normally a deeply joyful experience of delight and pleasure, with the tentative beginnings of conscious relationship as the baby responds to the caregivers with facial expressions and sounds. The loving parent or caregiver will respond to these expressions and sounds, reflecting them back to the baby, beginning a nonverbal dialogue, a new step in their relationship.

This is the beginning of Sacral Chakra development. Now there are two chakras functioning. The Base Chakra remains dominant, but the Sacral Chakra is opening and a new level of consciousness is coming into being. This second chakra is where we develop our capacity for pleasure and delight through our relationship to the world. We are no longer simply focused on survival; having become a separate self at birth, we now grow through relationship and awareness of being a separate self. This awareness is still largely unconscious; we are not aware of being aware. Instead, we are developing our conscious feeling capacity through sensations and emotions and through our relationships with, and actions upon, the many aspects of the world—people, animals, plants, and everything!

Many of us have witnessed the curiosity and delight that happy older infants take in the world. They want to put everything they can into their mouth to suck, to lick, to feel against their sensitive lips, “tasting” the world. And while taste is the sense linked to this chakra, growing babies are also looking, listening, making sounds, and learning to move their bodies to expand the horizons for their insatiable sensual curiosity.

By six months to one year of age, most babies have found some way of moving around, crawling or bottom shuffling in their drive to explore the world around them. Many parents will remember the time when they suddenly had to clear everything within two feet of the floor that was potentially harmful to make that area a safe zone for an infant who had learned to move! Soon these babies will be taking their first steps, and with this expansion of their world, they are entering the transitional stage when the Sacral Chakra begins to challenge the dominance of the Base Chakra.

Transitioning to Sacral Chakra Dominance: Toddlerhood

Babies have little understanding of what is interior and what is exterior to them, but as they approach their first birthday, they begin to become conscious of their own differentiation from the world outside of themselves. Their motivation transitions from the drive for survival, mediated by the Base Chakra, to a powerful energetic drive to discover and enjoy the world, which is mediated by the Sacral Chakra. Having learned that they are separate from the world, they can now delight in relating to all the many aspects of it, through all the senses they can find to explore it: touching, smelling, tasting, looking, listening, vocalizing, and moving. In this transitional stage, there is often conflict between the new exciting experience of conscious discovery and the animal instinctual needs that demand to be met, leaving our toddler falling fast asleep in the middle of an activity or screaming with frustration because hunger or tiredness has interfered with play.

For babies, perhaps the most important differentiation lies in their relationship to their mother. They begin to see that she is not an all-embracing womb but a separate being who comes and goes, allowing them to become often painfully aware of their own separate self. With this awareness of separation, the greatest and most essential pleasure young children can experience is being loved and feeling that they are part of a loving family. In this way, the opening of our Sacral Chakra marks the beginning of our experience of conscious relationship.

We are all hardwired to seek pleasure. Our earliest learning comes through seeking out pleasurable experiences: of the senses, of physical activity, of being loved and belonging to a family, and of learning itself. It is in this stage of life that we begin to discover what is pleasurable and what is

painful, and the Sacral Chakra begins to be programmed according to these experiences. Sadly, not all children feel loved and cared for, and the programming of this chakra will reflect their experiences of this time.

Our emotional range expands enormously in this stage of development. The Sacral Chakra is where we consciously experience the powerful emotional nature of being human, where feelings arise spontaneously and unbidden. The baby's simple approach/avoid drive to dispel discomfort is no longer sufficient. Healthy toddlers are full of curiosity, enthusiasm, and natural creativity in their exploration of the world around them. Disappointment brings equally powerful feelings of frustration, rage, and sadness. Toddlers are easily overwhelmed by these powerful feelings because they don't understand them or have names for them. Caregivers can help by reflecting back their observations. Sometimes simply telling toddlers that they sound angry can be calming because it helps them understand what is happening to them.

The Sanskrit name for this chakra, Svadhishthana, means "home of the self." This is where our awareness of the separate individual self begins, the self differentiated from the environment that surrounds us. It is where our "inner child" resides—where we find most of our earliest conditioning, often unconsciously influencing our behavior. Tasting and digestion are central to the physical function of this chakra, with its links to the enteric nervous system and the digestive endocrine glands. This is the stage of development where we taste and digest the life we have been given, and our earliest experiences are programmed in the Sacral Chakra.

Sacral Chakra Dominance: Childhood to Puberty

By the time children are three years old, the Sacral Chakra has become dominant. These young children have now more or less successfully learned to integrate the demands of instinct, and the Base Chakra is running in the background. In a wellfunctioning family, they have developed a basic trust in life and now embrace the delights and difficulties of being in the world. They embrace a trusting acceptance of the authority of the primary caregivers, who mediate most of their learning about the world. This trust in authority is carried over into their school experience and into an acceptance of the cultural values and mores of the world they live in. This sows the

seeds of tribal consciousness, with “insiders” who are trusted and respected and “outsiders” who are strange and not to be trusted or treated so well.

Childhood covers a very large stretch of developmental life, and developmental psychologists such as Piaget break it down into several cognitive stages.³ The amount of learning absorbed by a child is awe-inspiring. They have to learn to process and interpret the information that their senses bring to them; to understand and name their emotions; to move and control their bodies; to understand language and use it to communicate; and to model the customs and conventions of their family and culture. Whole new vistas of learning open up. The motivation behind all this learning is the drive to seek happiness in its many forms. Learning about the world and how they fit into it can be a tremendous pleasure—if it is not undermined by traumatic messaging or experience.

THE PLEASURE CONTRACT

Childhood is a time of socialization in which parents more or less successfully show their children what is right and wrong and how to fit into the conventions of the culture in which they live. In a well-functioning family, much of this learning happens through parents and other trusted adults modeling appropriate behavior and positive relationship, so that children absorb the skills of navigating their world through imitation in an unconscious way. But even in the happiest families, children are also socialized through the giving and withholding of pleasure. The love of the caregivers is crucial for children’s happiness, so even a cross look can be sufficient for children to know that they have done something wrong.

In most families, children and adults engage in a “pleasure contract” in which children desire to please the adults and willingly become “good” because they want the pleasurable emotional rewards for goodness, the immeasurable gifts of love and belonging that are experienced in a positive relationship with their caregivers. Under the terms of this contract, they are lovingly embraced as members of the family and identify themselves with the family, accepting the authority of the parents. Later this loyalty is extended to their school, their country, and the culture of the “tribe” into which they are born. In this way, the familial pleasure contract forms the foundation for the very structure of human societies.

Of course, even in a positive environment there are differences between children, some being more willing than others to conform to expectations and submit to adult authority. This is a period of life when children need benevolent authority to teach the conventions of society, whether they be social conventions, language conventions, or mathematical and other conventions that will be learned at school. When all these experiences work well, children grow into adults who have an easy capacity for learning, positive relationship, and happiness. They have a secure sense of belonging to their family, school, and culture and possibly an unconscious belief in the beneficence of the universe. They feel centered in themselves, living in the present, enjoying the experience of being alive. However, there are innumerable ways in which this socialization process can go wrong.

It is standard practice in families and educational institutions to respond to good behavior with some form of pleasurable reward, which at its simplest could be praise. Conversely, bad behavior is usually met with disapproval, the withdrawal of pleasure, and possibly some sort of punishment. Nowadays our culture emphasizes the importance of rewarding good behavior, whereas in the past there was a greater emphasis on punishing bad behavior. When punishment is meted out, it is less severe; the cane and other forms of physical abuse used in earlier times have been replaced by nonphysical punishments. Nevertheless, punishment remains a standard tool in the socialization process. And if children experience an overemphasis on punishment—if the withholding of love and positive response is prolonged—great harm can be done to their developing psyches. Sometimes it can cause children to be motivated not by a desire for pleasure but by the wish to avoid pain, and this approach to life becomes embedded in the psyche.

There are a variety of ways in which the unconscious pleasure contract between children and their parents, teachers, and other authority figures becomes less than ideal. Even in essentially caring families, there will be times when the process of socialization demands that children learn to rein in their innate spontaneity and drive to explore and push boundaries. If, for any number of reasons, the caregivers are unable to give the ongoing love and attention that children need, or if they use extremely punitive socialization strategies, young children will have to find ways to adapt to this painful lack of love and happiness, which will affect the programming of the Sacral Chakra.

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

In 1964, Eric Berne, a psychotherapist who had studied under Erik Erikson, published *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. In the book, he outlined a new system of psychoanalysis, which he called transactional analysis, based on analyzing social interactions to determine a person's ego state in order to understand that person's behavior. The book became a bestseller, read by millions of people, bringing into the public domain an awareness of the importance of how we interact with each other.

Berne identified three basic ego states: parent, adult, and child. The child's essential nature is to be spontaneous and free, but as a result of socialization, the free child may adapt in one of two directions, becoming either a rebellious child or an overadapted child, or some combination of the two. In some situations, the child is able to maintain a high level of spontaneity and freedom while adjusting to socialization cooperatively, and some transactional analysts call this the natural child state.

Viewed from the perspective of the pleasure contract, an overadapted child, in response to not experiencing enough positive feedback, may try to please the caregivers more and more in the hope that positive responses will be returned. The child's longing for love and closeness, or at least the avoidance of painful reprisals, comes to dominate his or her behavior. In another situation, an overadapted child might become emotionally repressed, avoiding any expression of feeling lest it provoke an unpleasant response from the caregivers. The rebellious child would do the opposite, allowing his or her anger and frustration to dominate his or her behavior. The same child might react rebelliously in one situation and in an overadapted manner in another, depending on the different stimuli and contexts. For example, a child might act rebelliously toward one parent and in an overadapted way toward the other, or rebellious at home and overadapted at school.

Both reactions are adaptations to the process of socialization of the spontaneous free child. Most adults, reflecting on the patterns in their childhood behavior, can fit themselves somewhere on the spectrum from extremely overadapted to extremely rebellious.

The Sushumna, Pingala, and Ida channels can be seen to represent different aspects of the child in the transactional analysis model. The central Sushumna channel represents the spontaneous free child and the positively

socialized child, who has become socialized without significant loss of his or her natural expression and creativity. The Solar Pingala channel, on the right side of the body, represents the emotionally expressive, extrovert, and potentially rebellious adaptation, and the Lunar Ida channel, on the left side of the body, represents the more receptive, reflective, and potentially introverted overadaptation. (See [plate 9](#).)

Every child will express one or another of these aspects at different times, and so long as they are not extreme, the Solar and Lunar adaptations are normal expressions of the self. For example, some children seek attention by being comic and developing a “funny guy” personality, a positive expression of the Solar channel. Others become “Mommy’s little helper,” a positive expression of the Lunar channel. Both of these adaptations are constructive but can tip over into extremes. A very defiant child would be an example of an extreme imbalance toward the Solar Pingala channel, and a very repressed and overpleasing child would be extremely imbalanced on the Lunar Ida channel. In other words, the Pingala, Sushumna, and Ida channels can be seen as domains on a spectrum of possible behavior.

Throughout the chakra system, Pingala represents our need to express our unique individuality and Ida represents our need for reflection and receptivity to others. Though seemingly opposite, both needs are important for every individual, and how well we balance them and meet them will indicate how truly fulfilling our lives are. The process of maintaining that balance is dominated by Sacral Chakra consciousness. We begin to establish that balance very early in life, when we are too young to be in control of it, through the relationships we have with our parents and siblings. Those relational experiences and our individual personalities will influence the programming of our Sacral Chakra and whether it supports a balance or imbalance between the Sushumna, Ida, and Pingala channels.

Sacral Chakra Consciousness in Adulthood

*Do you remember the warmth of the sea,
And watching small fish in the coral beneath?
How we frolicked and swam till the stars shone above,*

*Drew our names in the sand for friendship and love?
The smell of fish frying drew us away,
And we walked hand in hand to the small beach café,
Clinking glasses and tasting cool wine on our lips,
And laughing so much the tears ran down our cheeks.
Then I reached out to touch you and feel your soft skin,
And you reached out to kiss me and made my world spin.*

The programming of our Sacral Chakra governs the expression of our inner child when we are adults. Every one of us has an inner child, although this part of the psyche can be so repressed that it may be inaccessible to our conscious awareness. We can see our inner child in our search for pleasure: We want to enjoy the simple sensuality of life—delicious food and drink, loving touch, great music, beautiful vistas. We want to be able to express ourselves spontaneously and joyfully. Our bodies want to move in ways that give us pleasure and satisfaction. We want to feel that we belong and are cared for by our partner, family, and “tribe.” The programming of the Sacral Chakra determines whether these pleasures will be more or less available to us.

Sacral Chakra programming is also fundamental to our ability to form healthy, loving relationships. When we are able to be playful with one another and to express vulnerability, we can invite emotional intimacy into a relationship. Both qualities are expressions of our inner child.

Sexuality is an important part of adult sensual pleasure, and it is an expression of the relational and pleasure-seeking needs of the Sacral Chakra. The Base Chakra governs our instinctual sexual drive, but the desire for sensual pleasure and intimacy lies in the domain of the Sacral Chakra. When we experience sexual desire (as opposed to heart-based feelings of love), the sensations are centered in the lower abdomen and the genitals, the region governed by the Sacral Chakra, and so sexuality has become one of the key themes popularly associated with this chakra. However, it is a sad reflection upon our modern interpretation of Hindu culture that the rich possibilities of pleasure and delight that are the domain of the Sacral Chakra have become reduced in adulthood to sexuality, which is only one, albeit an important one, of the many ways in which we can

experience sensual and emotional pleasure. I prefer to use *pleasure* rather than *sexuality* as the keyword for this chakra, because it opens the door to a much greater range of possibilities.

Negative Programming and Imbalances in the Sacral Chakra

Addictive behavior can be one outcome of negative programming of the Sacral Chakra, expressed during adulthood, whether the craving is for alcohol, drugs, food, sex, or some other object or activity. When the addictive motivation comes from a place of “this is the only thing that can give me any pleasure (or relief from my pain),” then it is the tragic solution for difficulties that occurred earlier in life and led to negative programming of this energy center.

In another example, negative programming of the Sacral Chakra might lead to an unhealthy codependent relationship. In this situation, two people stay together out of need or compulsion, rather than love and affection, often mirroring past difficult relationships from their childhood. An extreme example of this would be domestic abuse, with one partner acting out childhood anger, imbalanced on the Pingala channel, and the other partner tolerating this behavior and overadapting to the other’s needs, imbalanced on the Ida channel.

How we relate to our feelings is an indicator of our Ida-Pingala balance. Are we emotionally extroverted or introverted? Do we act out our feelings or repress them? Are we in touch with our needs for simple sensual, pleasurable experiences, for fun and laughter, and for close relationships and a sense of belonging to a partner or a group of friends or family? These questions are clues to understanding how we have adapted to our childhood experiences.

The Sacral Chakra, programmed by our experiences in our early years, is a very important part of our psychological makeup as adults. It governs our access to simple pleasure and happiness, and also to our deepest emotional wounds. Because Sacral Chakra consciousness is largely an unconscious part of our psychological makeup, we need to take time to get to know its positive and negative aspects. We need to consciously encourage the development of a happy, functioning inner child, a part of us that knows how to nourish ourselves and have fun, that is comfortable with accepting authority in certain situations and expressing our individuality in

others. [Nourishing our Sacral Chakra](#), as described beginning, is one way to do this.

Developmental Psychology and the Sacral Chakra

Childhood is a time of extraordinary development, and it has been studied in many different ways by developmental psychologists who have charted ego, cognitive, needs-based, moral, and other types of development during childhood. Wade has managed to track patterns in all these different strands of understanding, also bringing in neuroscientific research into her meta-study. In the last chapter we looked at Reactive Consciousness and began to explore Naive Consciousness, which we will continue with now.

NAIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

If the infant develops normally, Reactive consciousness increasingly gives way to differentiation arising from more interchange with the environment, early socialization, and growth of the central nervous system.

JENNY WADE, *CHANGES OF MIND*

In Wade's meta-analysis, the next stage of development is Naive Consciousness, which she suggests lasts from three months to about two years of age.⁴ In the model of the triune brain, the reptilian brain is still dominant, but the limbic system is beginning to become more engaged. This transition becomes evident in the more complex behaviors that we see at this stage. Action is geared more toward maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain or discomfort, as opposed to the purely "discomfort avoidance" of the Reactive Consciousness stage. The young child also begins to have body awareness, giving rise to differentiation of the self from the other, but that perception and imaging are processed not through the neocortex but through the lower brain centers, including the limbic system.

The beginning of this developmental stage corresponds to the opening of the Sacral Chakra, as described above, and the end of this stage corresponds to the latter part of the transitional stage, when the toddler is

moving from infant to child and the Sacral Chakra is becoming dominant. The Base Chakra is still largely dominant throughout the Naive Consciousness stage, but the Sacral Chakra is opening and gradually begins to compete with it.

EGOCENTRIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Wade calls the next stage of development Egocentric Consciousness.⁵ She points out that much developmental theory begins with the formation of a separate self, which is the cornerstone of Egocentric Consciousness, but also that many theorists consider this span to be not a stage at all but more of a transitional phase leading to the next stage of Conformist Consciousness. Neurologically, Egocentric Consciousness shows increasing influence from the limbic system, which allows the child to distinguish polar opposites such as good or bad and self or other, along with a much greater expression of feelings. This is the beginning of the formation of a differentiated mental ego, a conscious but fragile sense of being a separate self, which the child strives to hold on to.

The “terrible twos” is one of the popular expressions given to the Egocentric stage. It is characterized by self-centeredness, aggression, hedonism, and lack of impulse control and accompanied by a high level of anxiety. Temper tantrums are classically associated with this stage, which usually does not last very long, somewhere between two and six years in healthy children, but according to some theorists it can continue through childhood and into adolescence. However, there are examples of traditional communities in which children do not display the “terrible twos” stage of development and of parents in modern society who do not witness this stage in their children, which suggests that Egocentrism might be saying as much about the socializers as about the socialized.⁶ Looking at these two stages in relation to the chakra system, I would suggest that they can be understood in terms of the Ida and Pingala channels. Naive Consciousness is where we notice the beginning of responsiveness in a baby, at about three months, and it can be seen as a transitional stage on the relational Ida channel. Egocentric Consciousness marks the time when children begin to get a stronger sense of themselves as a separate self, and it can be seen as a transitional stage on the autonomous Pingala channel. This

conceptualization is similar to the manner in which Wade represents these developmental stages on her diagram, which I have shown in [plate 9](#).

CONFORMIST CONSCIOUSNESS

With this next stage in Wade's study, we move beyond the transition from the Base Chakra to the Sacral Chakra and enter the period of Sacral Chakra dominance. Conformist Consciousness marks a very different type of consciousness that develops as socialization settles in, somewhere in middle childhood through to adolescence.⁷ At this stage, children feel a need to conform and develop trust in and acceptance of authority. As with Egocentric Consciousness, this stage of consciousness exhibits dualistic thinking, in which everything is judged in polar opposites such as good or bad and right or wrong. One important polar opposite is the concept of an in-group, of which the child is a member, such as the family, school, or country, and an out-group, which is seen as strange and unfamiliar and therefore not to be trusted. This sounds similar to the tribal consciousness of the Sacral Chakra. This dualistic thinking shows that the limbic system is predominant in making judgments, even though there may now be a lot of neocortical activity in arriving at them.

In [plate 9](#), I have shown parallels between Wade's early developmental stages and the chakra system and also how the transactional analysis model can be represented on the chakra diagram. The terms Rebellious Child and Overadapted Child can sound very extreme, so be sure to note that the Solar and Lunar channels do not always represent imbalances. Both channels are vital to self-development, and it is only extreme versions of the Solar and Lunar expressions of the chakras that are imbalanced.

Psychic Level

At a psychic level, the Sacral Chakra governs clairsentience, the ability to feel another person's sensations and emotions. This psychic ability is very common and naturally flows from an empathic response to another person. Research into the infectious nature of emotions has shown that we are all clairsentient to some degree, picking up emotional messages from our social environment. At an extreme level, this explains the phenomenon of

crowd hysteria, which can occur in a positive way, such as at events like pop concerts and football matches, or in a negative way, such as at the fascist Nuremberg rallies in the 1930s.⁸

When the Sacral Chakra is too open, clairsentience can be overactive. For example, you might be sitting next to someone on a train or bus and start to feel depressed, and this can be because you are picking up the feelings of the person next to you. People who experience this level of clairsentience need to learn how to protect their psychic mechanism when they are in situations where they could pick up negative feelings from others. Unlike the psychological level of the chakras, in which, ideally, energy is flowing smoothly all the time, it can be helpful to close your chakras on the psychic level at certain times. This can be done by visualizing a protective covering over the chakras that stops them from receiving incoming information. Also you can visualize wearing a dark blue protective cloak (the traditional outer garment of a nurse) or, alternatively, a space suit!

Clairsentience can be especially useful for bodywork practitioners when they are working with a client. The information they receive can come in many different ways, but most commonly it is through picking up emotions and sensations. They may feel pain in their hand when they hold it over a painful spot in the client, or they may feel pain in their own body in the same spot where the client feels it. They may feel the emotions that are arising in their client, such as sadness or fear. Sometimes they will get information in a verbal, visual, or “just knowing” way, which indicates that they are working psychically with one of the upper chakras, rather than the clairsentience of the Sacral Chakra. All this psychic information is extremely useful in therapeutic work, but it is important for bodywork practitioners to know how to cleanse their energy system and how to close the psychic level of their chakras when they do not want to be receiving external influences. Simple methods of doing this include washing your hands after a session and imagining white light pouring through your body, from above the head, down through the whole body, into the legs and feet, and into the ground, carrying away any unwanted energetic traces that have been picked up in the session.

Another group of professionals who are often quite clairsentient are actors. Actors have to develop a highly sensitive and responsive emotional

resource in themselves in order to portray the various characters that they study. They also have to respond very sensitively to the roles played by their fellow actors. This requires developing a very powerful Sacral Chakra, and as the psychological level becomes stronger, the psychic level is likely to develop more strongly, too. Good actors transmit emotional content psychically to their audiences because their Sacral Chakra is so well developed. Audiences are able to feel deeply the feelings the actor is having, which enriches their own emotional experience.

Transference and Countertransference

Psychotherapists work with the concept of transference and countertransference in their work with clients, and countertransference has similarities to the concept of clairsentience. Transference happens when you unconsciously relate to a person in the same way in which you relate or have related to someone else from your life. For example, you might meet a new person who reminds you of someone from your past, and then you might unconsciously infer that the new person has traits similar to the person you knew previously. In a therapy context, transference can occur when a client's thoughts and feelings for an important person from his or her past, such as the mother or father, are transferred onto the therapist. The therapist might then try to make this unconscious material conscious as a way of helping the client understand him- or herself.

Countertransference is described as the therapist's inner reactions to what the client is expressing, both verbally and nonverbally. The therapist will examine his or her own response, consciously assessing how much of that response results from the client's transference, and what other causes may be present. For the therapist, one aspect of the response can be clairsentience, or the manner in which the therapist picks up the unexpressed feelings of his or her client. All this

is valuable therapeutic information but makes it important for the therapist to psychically cleanse his or her energy after working with a client.

Hand Chakras

As we discussed in the preceding chapter, the chakras at the center of the soles of the feet are where we receive energy from the earth. The chakras at the center of the palms of the hands are where we receive information and give out energy from our energy system, and also where we channel energy from the universal field of energy that permeates our world. Imagine each person as a prism, receiving from the universal field white spiritual energy that is then refracted into the seven colors of the rainbow spectrum, with each color linking to a chakra. Some combination of these chakra colors is transmitted out through the hand chakras to whatever we are doing, so our hands give out an energetic picture of our chakras. Depending on how well we are connected to the universal field of energy, the chakra colors will also be bathed in pure white spiritual light. If we are consciously meditating, healing, or sending a positive intention, we will channel more spiritual energy.

We've already looked at how bodywork practitioners can pick up information through their hands, which demonstrates that the hand chakras can receive as well as give out energy. Another example can be seen in the art of psychometry. Here, a psychic can hold an object, such as a piece of jewelry that belongs to a person they don't know, and receive information about that person.

Spiritual Level

As we've learned, the Sacral Chakra is the "home of the self" in the psychological sense of dominating the stage of life in which we begin to grow our individual psychological self. It is also the "home of the self" in the spiritual sense; from a Tantric perspective, it is the home of the being that has lived many previous lives, the "enduring self." The Sacral Chakra

holds the karmic patterns from our past lives, and these act as magnets for events in our current life. Issues from past lives will attract us to certain situations and people and, in turn, will attract certain situations and people to us. These people are often our close family members as well as other people we meet later in life. We may be drawn to them for good or bad karmic reasons. We may have painful lessons to learn from these people, or we may receive great gifts of love from them.

Some young children, up to about the age of four, appear to still have access to a transcendent consciousness of the enduring self in addition to the Sacral Chakra consciousness. In the previous chapter, I mentioned young children who could remember their births. There are also many reports of young children of all cultures and religions who remember their previous life.⁹ It is possible that we enter this world with a spiritual awareness that slowly erodes as neocortical development takes place.

Meditation and spiritual practice can cleanse negative karma from the Sacral Chakra in addition to healing negative programming from this lifetime. When aroused, the kundalini energy stored in the Base Chakra moves upward through the chakras, burning away karmic patterns and negative programming and bringing this unconscious material into consciousness. This can occur in a blissful and peaceful way, or it can be extremely distressing. The key to awakening kundalini in a gentle way is through energizing and nourishing the Heart Chakra, which then begins to open the deeper spiritual level of the chakras, where we can learn to heal our early wounding. When the Heart Chakra is flowing well, we rediscover our free inner child and become able to more fully enjoy spontaneity, playfulness, and all the simple pleasures of life.

Cultural Considerations

Just as each individual human being develops through the animal instinctual consciousness of the Base Chakra and then the tribal consciousness of the Sacral Chakra, so the human species has developed at an evolutionary level. Human consciousness evolved from animal consciousness, and the earliest human communities arose as we evolved into tribal consciousness. Many species of mammals also display tribal consciousness, which in humans is linked to the limbic system.

Today, although human societies, whether indigenous peoples or industrialized nations, have developed beyond Sacral Chakra consciousness, tribal consciousness still plays an important part in our cultural communities. It acts like a glue, binding groups of people together through shared traditions and conventions. These conventions are often linked to sensory experiences, such as traditional foods, music and dance, visual emblems such as flags, and smells such as incense.

The limbic brain operates from the perspective of polarities, such as “like or dislike,” “good or bad,” “for or against,” “insider or outsider,” and “right or wrong.” This sort of binary thinking is driven largely by emotional factors, by gut feelings, and by tribal consciousness—by the often unconscious values that were part of the programming of the Sacral Chakra during childhood.

We form tribal groups in all sorts of areas of our lives: families, friendship networks, towns and cities, nations, leisure-time groups, athletic teams and their supporters, work-based groups, religious organizations, ethnic groups, political parties, and on and on. All of these groups develop habits and conventions that bind them together in different ways, creating a tribal consciousness.

The need to feel like we belong to whichever groups we espouse deserves respect. Our inner child needs to feel safe and accepted as an insider of the various groups in our life. But there is a shadow side to this tribal consciousness. When the group is functioning well, the “insiders” have a relaxed, if perhaps healthfully competitive, attitude to the “outsiders,” the nonmembers of the group. But when the group is experiencing difficulties, it is easy for the insiders to cast the blame for the challenges they are facing inappropriately and often disproportionately on the outsiders.

Authoritarian religions have resulted in the most ruthless tribal consciousnesses. The Christian Crusades of the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries and the Roman Inquisition of the sixteenth century were examples of this, and there are many more examples for other major religions. We are experiencing something similar with extremist Muslim groups today. When the war is a holy war, and you are fighting for your God, the extreme self-righteousness of the project appears to be matched by the violence of it.

Becoming more conscious of that large part of our psyche that operates through the limbic system, with its powerful emotional foundation, carrying with it all the programming we received as children, is the way to integrate Sacral Chakra consciousness. If we find ourselves entangled in an emotional crisis, psychoanalysis and other therapies can help us explore some of the negative programming of our childhood and how that is influencing our present experience. We also need to be conscious of our positive programming so that we become aware of and consciously allow ourselves those experiences that give us real pleasure and happiness.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Happy Child, Sad Child

Stephen came to work with me when he was in his late forties. He was a goodlooking man with excellent posture and movement, as he had already done lots of Alexander work over the years. He was going through difficult times with his aging and depressed mother, and also in his relationship with his wife. He had heard about my work with the chakras and was interested in exploring Alexander-based work that also addressed his emotions and psychological problems.

After we had talked about what was troubling him, Stephen lay down on the table. I put my hands on him and began to sense what was happening in his chakras. The energy in his Base Chakra was strong and flowing well, but the area of his body around the Sacral Chakra felt numb and traumatized, lacking energetic flow. His Solar Plexus Chakra felt weak and agitated, and his Heart Chakra felt defended and cut off. In this first session, I decided to focus my attention on the lower chakras, particularly the Sacral Chakra. By the end of the session his lower abdomen was warmer and more alive, and his heart area was releasing a little, but there was a lot more work to do.

I talked to Stephen about the Sacral Chakra—about how it is programmed during childhood, and how it governs the part of our psyche that is motivated to seek happiness in all its many forms. I told him what I was picking up in this chakra and asked if he could tell me about his childhood.

Stephen's parents lived on a beautiful Greek island where the sun shone brightly for much of the year and the sea was within walking distance from his home. His mother was English and his father was Greek, and he grew up speaking Greek all the time. He spent much of his early childhood running around barefoot on the beach, swimming in the sea, and playing with his Greek friends. He was a happy child enjoying an idyllic childhood.

At eight years old, he was sent to boarding school in England. He exchanged a carefree life in paradise with family and friends for the gray, cold, austere environment of an English boys' boarding school, with its punitive and heart-chilling regimes. Even worse, he had to learn to speak English, so he was essentially a foreigner with no friends and very little contact with his family, going home only at Christmas and during the summer holidays. The experience was deeply traumatizing. He felt unhappy, lonely, and abandoned by his family. He had suffered from depression and lack of confidence ever since.

In addition to working with my hands to increase the energy flow in the Sacral Chakra and the lower abdomen, I asked Stephen to think of all his favorite tastes and smells. I asked him to think about his favorite movement and found that he loved to dance and swim and loved walking in the wilderness. He thought of pleasing experiences of touch, including cuddling his children and stroking his cat, and ways he liked to be touched, sounds that he enjoyed listening to, and sights that filled him with happiness. Then I encouraged him to appreciate the relationships that he valued with his family and his friends. As Stephen considered all these simple pleasurable experiences, his Sacral Chakra area began to come alive, as if it were glowing. I explained to him that these thoughts nourished his inner child and encouraged a freer flow of energy in

this chakra. I invited him to work with these ideas and also to find activities that would help his inner child become happier.

The next time I saw Stephen, I felt a better flow of energy in his Sacral Chakra. He had been walking in the Lake District and was feeling much better. There was still work to do on this chakra, but for this session, after a little time strengthening the overall flow of energy, I was able to devote my time to working with his Solar Plexus Chakra. Chakra healing therapy combines the process of releasing musculature that has tightened and hardened in response to emotional trauma with healing work that increases energy flow. Undoing the muscular armoring in this way can allow the client to undo the past trauma in a safe and supported way. Over the following weeks, we continued to strengthen the energy levels of the Sacral and Solar Plexus Chakras, and Stephen supported that work during the week by attention to the needs of his inner child.

A few weeks later he arrived at my office in a distraught state. His mother had had a heart attack and was seriously ill at the hospital. This tragedy triggered a lot of Stephen's own childhood traumas. When I put my hands on his Sacral Chakra, it was quite numb and cold, as it had been at the beginning of our work together. As I worked, I felt anger rising from this area of his body, which Stephen acknowledged. After a while the anger turned to fear and later to sadness as the energy began to return to this area. Together, we allowed these feelings to arise and subside, leaving him in a state of feeling very sad but calm.

In many ways this experience deepened the healing of this chakra, and our previous work of undoing the armoring had made this possible. Stephen began to understand the responses of his inner child to this dramatic change, and it threw more light on his own early experience. He began to understand that he had two inner children: the happy carefree child and the frightened, traumatized unhappy child. Working to nourish the Sacral Chakra had allowed the happy child to become stronger, but now Stephen was able to work with his more frightened, traumatized child. I suggested that he also work with John Bradshaw's practical manual Homecoming:

Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child (1990), which he found very helpful.

As his Sacral Chakra grew more reliably balanced and flowing, we turned our attention to the Solar Plexus Chakra, then the Heart Chakra and the chakras above it. Stephen continued to work with me for several years as well as working with other types of therapy. At first he came weekly, but later he would see me about once a month. He developed a strong flow of energy throughout his chakras, alongside successfully addressing many of his life issues. Looking back, he recalled that before he came to see me, he used to feel an ever-present thread of fear inside his body; it was his constant companion, motivating all his actions. He told me that he no longer felt this thread of fear, and as a result his life had opened up enormously.

Nourishing the Sacral Chakra

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

MARY OLIVER, “WILD GEESE”

In the busyness of our modern world it is easy to disregard the needs of the inner child, who likes to live in the moment and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Taking a little time to reconnect with that immature part of ourselves can be healing for mind and body, nourishing the Sacral Chakra and bringing more balance to our lives.



CONNECTING WITH YOUR INNER CHILD

Sit somewhere where you are able to feel peaceful and comfortable, with support for your back and both feet on the floor about one foot apart. If you prefer, you can lie down in one of the semi-supine positions (see [here](#)).

Bring your attention to your lower abdomen, the Sacral Chakra area, wherein resides that often unconscious part of your psyche

that developed in childhood, your inner child. In four-legged animals this area of the body is very protected, but as bipeds, we must let our soft underbelly face the world! Place both hands on your lower abdomen, below the navel. Try not to let your hands touch each other, so they can focus simply on the Sacral Chakra area of your body. Quietly observe how this soft, vulnerable part of you is feeling right now. Maybe it feels calm and contented, or maybe it feels disturbed and upset, or maybe it is difficult to sense anything much at all.

Think about your childhood and what kind of inner child, or inner children, grew out of that stage of your life. Maybe you have a happy flowing Sacral Chakra, or maybe it needs a lot of love and attention. You may find you can have a dialogue with your inner child and hear what the child wants to tell you. Tell your inner child that you want to take good care of him or her.

This is the chakra that governs our desire to relate to the world “out there” and to seek happiness and pleasure. The whole world is a potential source of pleasure, and as human beings we are hardwired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. This is the fundamental motivation of the child. You want to be happy. You want to feel loved and accepted. You take delight in all the pleasurable sensory experiences you can find as you explore the world around you. So now:

Remember your favorite scents—perhaps flowers, or the evergreen forest, or something else from nature.

Remember the smells of food that you really enjoy.

Remember the tastes of your favorite foods and drinks.

Remember the ways in which you like to move—walking, running, playing sports, dancing, swimming, stretching.

Reflect on your two-way sense of touch—ways that you enjoy feeling things, like stroking a cat or a dog, kneading bread, exploring with your hands and your body, and ways in which you like to be touched, like being hugged, stroked, or massaged.

Recall sounds that you like to hear—maybe sounds of the natural world, maybe music, maybe your own singing.

Remember sights that you like to “feast your eyes” upon—the natural world, art, architecture, or other visual delights.

Now turn your attention to the pleasure of relationships and think of the people in your life whom you feel close to and enjoy being with—family and friends, relationships that fill you with happiness, people who make you laugh, perhaps even pets with whom you have a close relationship.

Remember a time when you laughed uncontrollably, a deep belly laugh, or a time when you were in a really childlike, playful, fun-loving state of mind. Say to yourself, “I’m really grateful for my inner child, who keeps me in touch with the simple pleasures of this world.”

Now bring your attention back to your hands on your abdomen. Notice whether reflecting on these positive experiences has made your abdomen feel any different. Perhaps it is warmer or more buzzy and alive, or your hands may feel warmer and tingly in contact with this part of your body. Notice whether you feel any changes in sensation or emotion in other areas of your body.

Once you have spent a little time reflecting on all these areas of your life that can nourish and heal your inner child and the Sacral Chakra, take the time to write down in your journal some of the images or memories that arose. You might label this list of your favorite sensual pleasures your “Treats List.” Try to include entries for all of the senses, including the sense of movement. Find ways to give yourself some of these treats every day, and maybe an extra special one every week.

Then write a list of your positive relationships, perhaps as a mind map, with you at the center and all the important people whom you love and like linked to you, with those closest to you shown nearer to you and those who are less important but still positive friendships shown further away. You might label this map your “Friendship Family.” This map of your present-day “family,” with you at the center, can help you feel that you belong to this group of people, tied by feelings of warmth, closeness, and love.

Imagine a special day when you are going to give yourself all the pleasures that you can fit into one day. With the help of your “Treats List” and “Friendship Family,” work out what sort of things you would like to do and which people you would most like to do them with. Share these pleasures with your favorite people, thereby nurturing and nourishing your inner child.

Chakra Dominance in the Developmental Stages

As we’re learning, each of the lower chakras—the Base Chakra, Sacral Chakra, and Solar Plexus Chakra—is dominant during a particular stage of human development. This does not mean that the other nondominant chakras are inactive. During childhood, it is probable that all of the upper chakras will open at the psychological level. The Heart Chakra opens as a child experiences the deeper emotions of empathy and compassion or is deeply moved by beauty or love. The Throat Chakra opens when the creativity and self-expression of the child develops beyond the purely spontaneous level of the Sacral Chakra, and the Eye Chakra is functioning when higher thinking of either an imaginative or a rational nature is activated. But the opening of a chakra is not the same as the dominance of a chakra. Over the course of childhood, there will be times when one of the upper chakras is influencing the child’s actions and experience, but the dominant chakra will remain the Sacral Chakra, embedding the child in the family, governed by the emotional drives of the limbic system.



3

The Solar Plexus Chakra

Sanskrit name: Manipura

English translation: City of Jewels

Dominant stage: Young adulthood

Central themes: The inner champion and inner critic; practical thinking; self-worth center; identity consciousness

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON, *A RETURN TO LOVE*

In late childhood, with the arrival of puberty and adolescence, we see radical changes in the body. At the same time, we also see powerful changes in the developing psyche. Children's motivation, governed by the Sacral Chakra, leans toward maximizing pleasure, minimizing pain, and establishing family and tribal bonds. As adulthood approaches and the Solar Plexus Chakra gains dominance, adolescents turn more toward finding a sense of individual identity, separate from the family and tribe, through their actions and choices. What these choices are will vary considerably for each person and will be governed by the value system the adolescents are developing. Clearly this value system will be influenced, consciously and unconsciously, by the values of the family, social group, and culture to which the adolescents belong, but this is also a time when they might reject the values they have received through parents, school, and society in general. With growing self-awareness, they are beginning to think for themselves, for better or worse in the eyes of their authority figures, and not just in the reactive emotional way of a rebellious child, although it may appear like that at times! The teenage years are often a challenging time for both teenagers and their parents, for this is an enormous time of growth as the Solar Plexus Chakra competes for dominance with the Sacral Chakra.

Physical Level

The third chakra is centered at the T12/L1 juncture, where the lumbar spine meets the thoracic spine. It is associated with the solar plexus, the nerve plexus of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (see [fig. I.2](#)). It was named “solar” because the nerves of the plexus radiate out like the rays of the sun.

Solar Plexus Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	ॐ = Ram
<i>Position</i>	T12/L1
<i>Neurology</i>	Solar plexus Neo-cortex
<i>Endocrine Glands</i>	Adrenals
<i>Petals on Yantra</i>	10
<i>Sense</i>	Sight
<i>Color</i>	Yellow

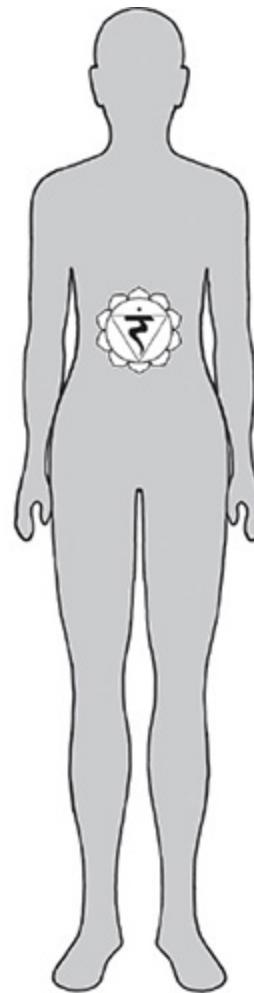


Fig. 3.1. Solar Plexus Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

The endocrine glands linked to this chakra are the adrenals, which govern our response to stress (see [fig. I.6](#)). In extreme situations, they generate what is known as the “fight or flight” response—though it might more accurately be called the “fight, flight, or freeze” response. When our sense of self-worth feels threatened, such as when we are criticized, we usually experience anxiety or tension in this area of the body, because the third chakra is where we begin to develop our sense of individual identity and self-worth as an adult.

The solar plexus is partially encircled by the diaphragm, the powerful primary respiratory muscle. When we feel under threat, this muscle often tightens (freezes) as we hold our breath, and it releases when we calm down

and begin breathing again. The diaphragm acts as a divider, separating the thoracic cavity above, containing the vital organs of the heart and lungs, from the abdominal cavity below, containing the organs of the digestive system. It also separates the lower chakras from the Heart Chakra and upper chakras.

Neuroscientists have discovered that, during adolescence, the stage in which the Solar Plexus Chakra is dominant, there is an increase in white matter, as opposed to gray matter, in the frontal lobes of the brain. White matter has more fatty tissue (myelin) around the nerve fibers, which acts as insulation and speeds up the transmission of electrical impulses between neurons. The prefrontal area of the frontal cortex is the most recently evolved part of the human brain. This area of the brain is involved with executive functions, such as planning, holding information in the mind, correcting errors, inhibiting emotions and actions, and changing habitual responses. It is much larger in humans than the same region in other primates. This suggests that the thinking function of the brain becomes faster and more efficient during adolescence.

When humans are first born, the brain undergoes what's called "exuberant" synaptogenesis—an explosion of growth in the synapses, the connections between neurons. At about the age of one, we see the onset of synaptic pruning—the elimination of extra or unused nerve connections. Researchers used to believe that all of this neural development took place within the first five years of life, and after that our brain structure remained relatively static. More recent research, however, has shown that synaptogenesis continues in the frontal cortex throughout childhood. A second round of exuberant growth occurs just before puberty, and a second round of synaptic pruning in adolescence.¹ This also contributes to the efficiency of the executive functions of the prefrontal cortex, indicating that with the onset of puberty and adolescence, we begin a process of enriching our capacity to think in complex ways, corresponding with the transition to Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness.

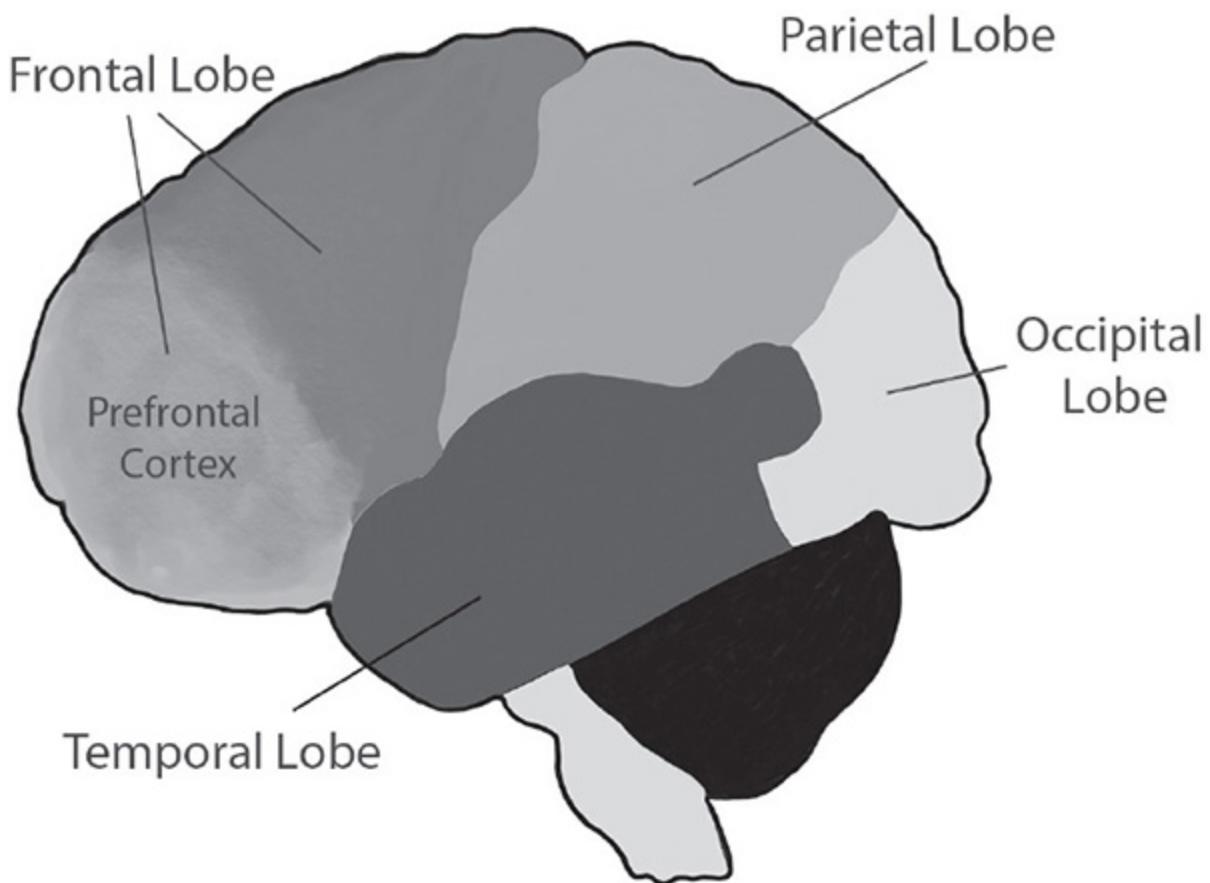


Fig. 3.2. The lobes of the brain

Another fairly recent area of neuroscientific research looked at the differences between the left and right brain in healthy subjects. In the late 1930s, Wilder Penfield and Herbert Jasper found that they could use small electric currents to stimulate discrete areas of the motor and sensory cortices of the brain in epileptic patients. This was the beginning of brain mapping, showing which area of the brain governs which area of the body, which led to the famous cortical homunculus (see [fig. 3.3](#)).² It also led to the discovery that each hemisphere's sensory and motor cortices are connected to the opposite sides of the body, which stimulated research into lateralization of the brain's function.

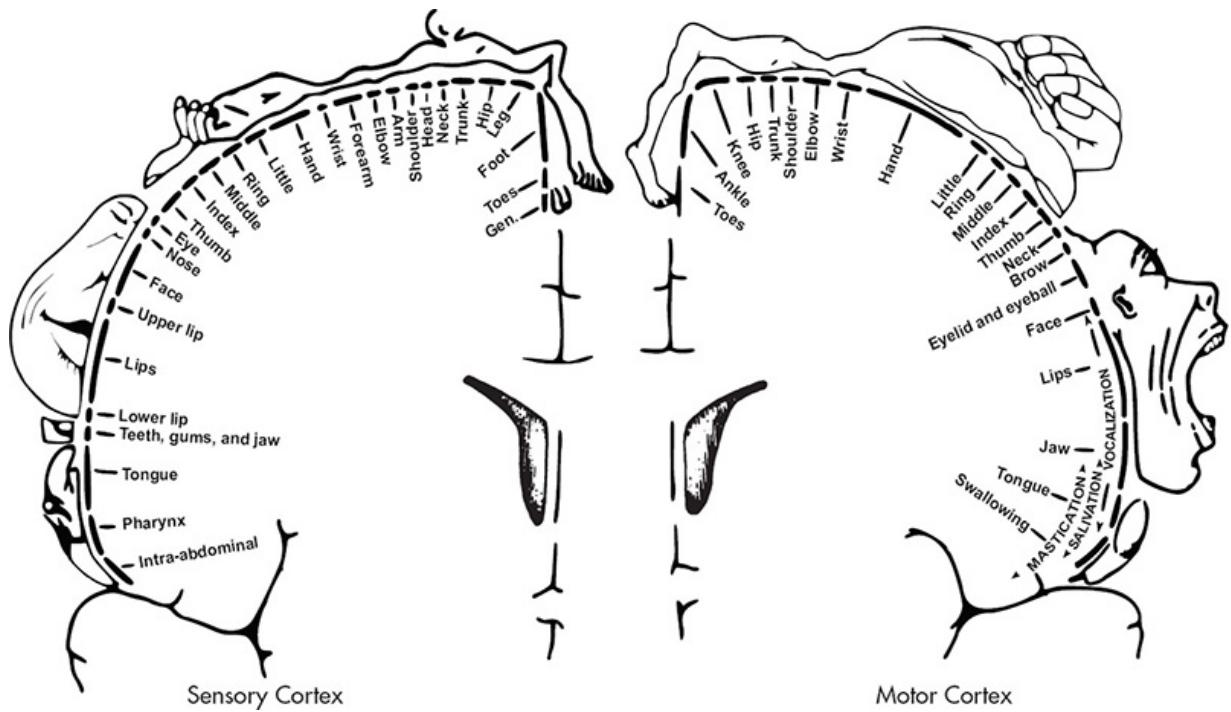


Fig. 3.3. Wilder Penfield's diagram of the motor and sensory homunculi

(Note: The motor cortex is part of the frontal lobe and the sensory cortex is part of the parietal lobe of the brain—see [fig. 3.2.](#))

With the development of positron emission tomography (PET) scans in the 1950s and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans in the 1970s, brain mapping became much more sophisticated. This brought greater understanding of left- and right-brain functions, although, as often happens with new areas of research, oversimplifications were promoted, such as attributing all reasoning and language capabilities to the left brain and all emotions and visual imaging to the right brain. Later research has shown that both the left and the right brain process language, emotions, reasoning, and visualization, but in rather different ways.

According to Iain McGilchrist, in his landmark book about the left and right hemispheres, *The Master and His Emissary* (2009), both hemispheres are equally complex but show different modes of attention and different ways of understanding the world. He offers a simple story in a short video to elucidate his thesis: Birds and other animals have left and right brains,

and McGilchrist asks us to imagine a bird searching for food on the ground, needing to pick out the seeds from the dirt and grit. It uses the right eye (left brain) for this narrow-focused attention, while scanning the sky and the environment with the left eye (right brain), watching out for whatever might be happening around it, good or bad, such as predators flying overhead or a potential mate approaching.³

Humans do not have their eyes on the sides of the head, as birds do. We use both eyes to look at the same object or scene and process this visual information with both hemispheres of the brain. But the type of processing that each hemisphere does is similar to the processing of the bird's two hemispheres, albeit more complicated! The right hemisphere attends with broad open sustained alertness, while the left hemisphere attends with narrow sharply focused attention. Leftbrain thinking is very literal, analytic, and detailed. It abstracts a little piece of outer reality and investigates it, creating a map or representation to clarify its understanding of it. Right-brain thinking operates in present time and is more aware of the larger context, in touch with the subjective experience of the body and the emotions, attending in a more relational, intuitive, and holistic way.

This means that we have two different ways of attending to our world. The word *attend* derives from the Latin *ad*, meaning “toward,” and *tendere*, meaning “to stretch.” The left hemisphere reaches out toward the world by grasping, both physically and mentally, while the right hemisphere reaches out toward the world in a cautious yet open-handed exploratory way, in present time, not knowing what will arise. McGilchrist concludes that while both brains are vital to the past and future development of humanity, the right brain should be the master and the left brain its servant or emissary (hence the title of the book). This is opposite to the popular view that the left brain should be dominant.

Jenny Wade argues that both hemispheres are equally complex and concludes that they are of equal importance. She also notes that there is biological evidence that hemispheric dominance is influenced by gender. More females are born with right-brain dominance and more males with left-brain dominance. This is not an absolute; some females will have left-brain dominance and some males right-brain dominance, and in some people the left and right brains have equal dominance.⁴ Hemispheric

dominance is also strongly influenced by cultural factors, in particular by educational values.



Fig. 3.4. The different types of attention of the left and right hemispheres of the brain

These neurological discoveries are interesting from the perspective of the chakras as a map of the psyche. With the Solar Plexus Chakra, the frontal cortex is becoming more dominant, which means that our consciousness is less embedded in the more emotional limbic system and the enteric nervous system, although these systems both still have great influence. In addition, Solar Plexus Chakra dominance begins with puberty, when a young person matures physically, at which time sex and gender issues become very important. And the frontal cortex is developing at the same time, affecting the left and right brains. In terms of the nadis,

hemispheric dominance can be viewed from the perspective of the Solar Pingala (traditionally masculine) and Lunar Ida (traditionally feminine) channels.

Body Language

The Solar Plexus Chakra is situated in the area of the upper abdomen, diaphragm, and lower chest. It is home to the stomach and some of the accessory organs of the digestive system, such as the pancreas, spleen, liver, and gallbladder. The language related to these organs is often very powerful. You might say that you “can’t stomach” something offensive or that it has “turned your stomach.” You can be “sick to your stomach” in more than just a physical way. Strong feelings are felt “in the pit of your stomach.” “Butterflies in your stomach” are usually caused by a rush of hormones from the adrenals, the endocrine glands associated with this chakra. An angry person may be described as “full of gall,” or you may ask, “How does he have the gall to be so rude?” Less common nowadays are phrases like “venting your spleen” when expressing anger or being “liverish” when you are grumpy and irritable.

We sometimes refer to this area of the body as our “guts,” but the meaning of the term here can be rather different from the deep-seated “gut intuition” of the Sacral Chakra. You can feel “gutted” or be “gutless,” or you can feel “gutsy” and act in a manner that “takes a lot of guts.” You can “bust a gut” or “slog your guts out.” These phrases suggest a type of courage, energy, and determination, or the lack of it, that fits with the consciousness of the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Language to do with breathing can also suggest Solar Plexus Chakra experience, especially when it is related to stress or excitement. Something exciting can “take your breath away.” Or you can be told “don’t hold your breath” in anticipation of something not so exciting or imminent. When stressed, you may need to “take a breather” or find some “breathing room,” and when something stressful is resolved, you can “breathe a sigh of relief” or “breathe freely” again—though calmer and more restful breathing may also relate to the Heart Chakra, as it is located in the center of the chest.

Psychological Level

The Solar Plexus Chakra opens during childhood, but it is during puberty that it begins to compete for dominance over the Sacral Chakra. This shift in chakra dominance corresponds to the shifts in the frontal cortex development. Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness has more emphasis on thinking and judging and less on the sensual, emotional, and pleasure-driven nature of the Sacral Chakra, although adolescents, with their maturing sexuality, can be drawn back into their lower chakras. Adolescents have a drive to individuate, to reflect on what kind of a person they want to be, which can be quite the opposite of the desire to please and belong to the family. Parents will sometimes describe their adolescent offspring as needing to be treated as a child one minute and as an independent adult the next, indicative of the huge transition from Sacral Chakra consciousness to Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. In the later teens and the twenties, the Solar Plexus Chakra can become dominant. The child is making the transition into an adult, and the Solar Plexus Chakra is becoming programmed by the way the young person interprets and responds to the challenges of this transition.

Although the Solar Plexus Chakra is now taking more of a center stage role, the Base Chakra and Sacral Chakra are still influencing and giving energy to the newly expanding chakra. Adolescents take on a multivalent personality as they move through the developmental stages represented by the chakras. Their inner animal (Base Chakra) and an inner child (Sacral Chakra) influence the development of the Solar Plexus Chakra. Another simple way of categorizing these shifts would be to see the development of the “body ego” as linked to the Base Chakra, the “emotional ego” linked to the Sacral Chakra, and the “mental ego” linked to the Solar Plexus Chakra. Trauma, wounding, and cultural influences during the stages governed by the lower chakras can create imbalances in a person’s overall energy structure and impact the way that person faces challenges during the transition to and programming of the next chakra.

Dominant Stage of the Solar Plexus Chakra: Young Adulthood

The Sanskrit name for the Solar Plexus Chakra, Manipura, is literally translated as “Jewel City” (and there is a state in northeast India with the name Manipur and that meaning). Figuratively, it suggests a “city full of jewels” or an “abundance of jewels.” Here, Hindu philosophy is presenting

us with the ideal of perfection for this chakra. With the development of the third chakra, we arrive at the pinnacle of ego development where, in an ideal situation, the young person is becoming a separate individual, with his or her own set of values and beliefs, no longer primarily identified with the family. The many facets of the unique personality glow with radiance and confidence, like beautiful gemstones, expressed physically in the prime of youth. The color linked to this chakra is yellow, and this is where the unique personality can shine out like the sun. This is the chakra that invites us to be a star, and many young people dream of becoming one!

Nevertheless, for many young people the transitional years can result in low self-esteem, and they can develop a negative sense of self. This may be due to difficult experiences during their adolescent years, such as family problems or social challenges, or to negative programming of the lower chakras interfering with the healthy development of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. Pride, confidence, and feelings of self-worth are the kind of positive emotional qualities of this chakra. When pride is threatened, it can lead to anger and hurt. Humiliation, guilt, and self-hatred are some of the negative emotions. These are the more complex emotions that surround issues of self-esteem and identity.

In modern terminology, the keyword given to this chakra is *power*, and it is popularly seen as governing a person's capacity to be powerful or successful in their lives. But power usually describes influence on an external situation. To paraphrase Shakespeare's well-known line, "Some are born powerful, some achieve power, and some have power thrust upon them." But do any of these powerful people actually *feel* powerful, on the inside? That, we do not know. In an exploration of the psyche, what's important is how we feel internally, and it is our sense of identity and self-worth, or lack of it, that is expressed through this chakra. The way in which we develop a sense of our adult identity and values can be very different for different people, and striving to be "powerful"—to have power over other people in the outside world—might be a value that is rejected by many in favor of more relational and empathic qualities.

A key feature of this chakra is that, as it comes into dominance, teenagers are beginning to separate from their family, becoming more self-aware and able to think for themselves, in order to allow their unique adult self to come into being. Corresponding with the changes in the frontal

cortex, the thinking and judging part of the psyche is becoming more predominant in the teenage years. This kind of thinking is practical, future-oriented, and centered on the self. It is more complex than the emotionally driven binary thinking of Sacral Chakra consciousness. The driving force of this chakra is the deep need to feel like you are growing into the kind of adult you want to be, and it leads young people to evaluate what is worthwhile and develop their own value system, judging the ideas and behavior of themselves and others. Sight is the sense traditionally linked to this chakra, and it is where the young adult begins to see more clearly, less influenced by the emotions. This is a time when future-oriented behavior, such as planning and delayed gratification, challenges the pleasure-driven motivation of the younger self.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11, KING JAMES VERSION

Transitions from one chakra stage to the next are challenging. Ken Wilber writes about this in *Integral Psychology* (2000), where, like Wade, he compares many developmental theorists. For transitional stages, Wilber emphasizes the importance of transcending the lower stage but also integrating it, so that the key lessons of that stage are still available to us. In terms of the chakras, there is always the possibility of being unable to transcend the dominance of a lower chakra, but we can also have difficulty integrating the lower chakra once it is transcended. We could reject, rather than integrate, the lower chakra during these transitions, and indeed, rejecting “lower” behavior and thinking is often encouraged culturally. But integration is key. We need root support in every aspect of our lives. We need our inner child even in our adult consciousness. We need to know how to play, how to have fun and pleasurable experiences, and how to enjoy the present, as well as to consider future possibilities and what choices we need to make about them.

THE INNER CHAMPION AND THE INNER CRITIC

*On good days I shine
My light on you all,
Intelligent, attractive, witty, profound,
With great gifts to exploit
Through my chosen plan.
I will conquer the world,
I will take it by storm,
Become rich and famous,
For that's who I am.*

*But on bad days I stumble
And bury my face.
I am ugly and stupid and mean.
I have failed to succeed
On the path that I took.
I hide in dark alleys
Of my inner world,
A pariah, exiled
From the self I forsook.*

Every adult has some form of an inner voice that inwardly influences and comments on their actions and choices. In young adulthood, when we are considering our future and making personal choices about the kind of adult we want to become and the life we want to lead, this inner voice becomes very important in developing self-esteem and a sense of identity. As young people, we unconsciously absorb much of our value system from the experiences and judgments of people close to us through our early life. If those people are loving and supportive, then our inner voice is likely also to be supportive. Conversely, if the people who were close to us in our childhood were critical and unsupportive, then it is highly probable that as

young adults we will develop a harsh inner voice that undermines any attempts we make to develop a positive sense of identity and self-worth. For most adults, the inner voice is a mixture, sometimes critical and sometimes supportive.

A useful way of thinking about our inner voice is to imagine that the critical voice is an inner critic and the supportive voice is an inner champion. We need both of these advisors in our lives. Our critical inner voice gives us a sense of boundaries, and our supportive inner voice gives us a sense of freedom. But these inner advisors need to be in balance with each other. Unfortunately, many of us have an extremely harsh and destructive inner critic who is constantly on the attack, seeing the negative side of everything we do or experience. The inner critic best serves us when it functions as a critical friend, who is essentially on our side but warning us and guiding us according to our values. The inner champion is most helpful when it encourages us to become the best we can be, but without overextending ourselves or experiencing hubristic delusions of grandeur.

A healthy Solar Plexus Chakra would be one in which the inner critic and the inner champion are in balance and essentially supporting us in their different ways. It can be helpful to consider the inner critic and champion in relation to the two versions of the universal Golden Rule. “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you” is the positive voice of an inner champion who wants the best for you and for others. “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you” is the more cautious voice of an inner critic.

LIFE POSITIONS

Another way of looking at the inner voices of the Solar Plexus Chakra would be to use the transactional analysis concept of life positions developed by psychotherapist Eric Berne.⁵ He suggested that as children we unconsciously develop life scripts that influence our whole lives, and that these scripts include a foundational position, or perspective, about ourselves and others that explains our choices and behaviors. As adults, we generally settle into one of four basic life positions:

I'm OK, you're OK

I'm not OK, you're OK
I'm OK, you're not OK
I'm not OK, you're not OK

As children, we are likely to start out with “I’m not OK, you’re OK” as we become socialized by accepting the authority of parents and adults. As psychologically healthy adults, we develop into the first position, “I’m OK, you’re OK.” This position describes a healthy third chakra in which the inner champion and the inner critic are balanced. We have good self-esteem, but not at the expense of denigrating others, which would be the “I’m OK, you’re not OK” position.

In adulthood, the two “I’m not OK” positions signal an imbalance in our inner voices. Adults who believe, consciously or unconsciously, that they are not OK have low self-esteem and therefore a harsh inner critic and a fairly absent inner champion. The third position of “I’m not OK, you’re OK” could suggest that Sacral Chakra consciousness has dominated Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness, resulting in excessive respect for the authority of others. The fourth position of “I’m not OK, you’re not OK” could be seen in people who were abused physically or emotionally as children and as adults are possibly governed by a destructive addiction, resulting in a very negative sense of self, of others, and of life in general.

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

With the onset of puberty, huge changes take place as the child becomes sexually mature. For most humans, sexual function develops more actively into male and female aspects, and in a parallel way masculine (Solar Pingala) and feminine (Lunar Ida) differentiation is an aspect of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. In general, females tend to develop on the Ida channel and males on the Pingala channel, although this is not an absolute rule, and it is not clear to what extent this tendency results from cultural influences.

On the Solar Pingala channel, young people develop their sense of adult identity and self-worth by building their skills and achieving success, whether that is in the field of sports, academics, art, practical hands-on work, or other arenas. The Solar channel can support a competitive

approach to life. Competition can be healthy, of course, but it can also be expressed negatively, such as in the transactional analysis life position of “I’m OK, you’re not OK,” which would indicate a strong inner champion but a less active inner critic. From this position, it’s possible to exploit others, as they are seen as “losers” or inferior in some way. However, the Solar influence also encourages young people to build their self-esteem based on their achievements, which usually means having those achievements recognized by society. This need for external approval can act as a counterbalance to ruthless behavior.

Some young people develop their separate identity through the Solar channel with achievements that their family might label negatively, such as dropping out of school in order to travel, breaking rules and laws, or embracing different political, cultural, or religious views from those of their family. Breaking away from the control of family can lead to excessive risk taking. It is telling that young people under the age of twenty-five, especially men, have an increased risk of accidental death.

On the Lunar Ida channel, young people might find that their identity and self-esteem derive more from a desire to be liked and seeing themselves as a valuable member of a peer group, or through finding a boyfriend or girlfriend, than from any approval or disapproval from their family. They might be attracted to a career in one of the caretaking professions, such as health care, social work, or early education, or they may have a child at an early age, possibly developing a sense of self-worth through becoming a caring parent. These kinds of achievements, based on cooperation, empathy, and relational values, often get less recognition in our society.

An imbalance on this Lunar channel would be the life position “I’m not OK, you’re OK,” which could indicate a harsh inner critic and an absent inner champion. People in this position might put others’ needs in relationships above their own needs as an individual. Another imbalance might be that because the Lunar influence can make people want to be needed by others, they manipulate others in order to fulfill their own need to be needed, creating codependent relationships.

Young people can develop their sense of identity and self-esteem through the Solar Pingala channel, the Lunar Ida channel, or a combination of the two. Solar and Lunar influences need not be either/or alternatives. They can be understood on a spectrum of variation from the central channel

of Sushumna. It is entirely possible to develop a self-concept that includes a drive to be successful at achieving certain goals as well as developing relationships with friends and with a partner. In fact, that would be a more balanced approach to finding your individual sense of identity and self-worth. In adult life, balancing these two influences could be considered one of our greatest personal challenges! Both influences require the practical future-oriented thinking associated with the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Solar Plexus Chakra Consciousness in Adulthood

Because the Solar Plexus Chakra is dominant from puberty through to adulthood, the qualities of this consciousness that we have already discussed will apply to adulthood. We all have a sense of a separate self, a unique identity, whether this is a positive or negative construct. We all have an inner voice assessing our actions and influencing our choices about who we are and what we are doing with our lives. Sometimes that is the voice of our inner champion, defending and encouraging us, and sometimes it is the inner critic, judging our behavior. Ideally, as adults we will have a strong inner champion so that we believe in ourselves and an inner critic who is a critical friend rather than a harsh judge.

Negative Programming and Imbalances in the Solar Plexus Chakra

As adults, we need this self-oriented, practical thinking to be functioning well, working out priorities, getting things done, and maintaining our self-esteem, whether we are operating primarily on the Solar Pingala or the Lunar Ida channel or balanced between the two. Similarly, the imbalances in this chakra are like those already discussed for the young adult. Lacking self-oriented practical thinking skills can make our lives very difficult, affecting our sense of self-worth. The energy of the Solar Plexus Chakra does not flow well if we have a harsh inner critic or take the life position that we are not OK. On the other hand, an extremely arrogant inner champion who considers itself invincible may be suffering from an overly prominent Solar Plexus Chakra, imbalanced on the Solar Pingala channel, and taking the life position “I’m OK, you’re not OK.” Being totally driven to achieve success with no concern for others, or alternatively, being driven

by the need to be needed by others, are imbalances on the Solar and Lunar channels of this chakra. Balance comes when our inner voice is saying “I’m OK, you’re OK.” This life position is the developmental learning objective of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness.

Developmental Psychology and the Solar Plexus Chakra

Sacral Chakra consciousness brings us to the stage of what Jenny Wade calls Conformist Consciousness, which is characterized by the child’s need to become socialized, to develop trust in authority figures, and to take on a tribal, “in-group” consciousness. Developmental psychologists vary in their theories about how consciousness develops next. Some theorists posit what Wade calls Achievement Consciousness as the next stage of development, and some posit, instead, what she calls Affiliative Consciousness. Some theorists argue that the developmental path splits after Conformist Consciousness so that development can occur along either of these two paths of consciousness.⁶ Wade’s model includes two parallel pathways at this stage, with Achievement Consciousness marked for left-brain dominance and Affiliative Consciousness marked for right-brain dominance, which fits well as a comparison with the Solar and Lunar channels of the chakra system.

Below is a summary of Wade’s exposition. Her meta-analysis is based on many researchers who were working mainly with adults, so there is not the same emphasis on adolescence as we have seen earlier in this chapter. We are now arriving at stages of consciousness that are prominent for many adults throughout their lives, not just during young adulthood.

ACHIEVEMENT CONSCIOUSNESS

Achievement Consciousness is characterized by logical, rational, linear thinking. It is focused on the future and its infinite possibilities and is goal-oriented. It processes information from the environment, as opposed to internal subjective information, so logic and rationality supersede the emotional and instinctual calls of the lower brains. People with dominant Achievement Consciousness hold themselves apart from an object of inquiry and can be emotionally detached. They often discredit religious or

spiritual beliefs because they have difficulty believing in anything that cannot be empirically proved.

Adults at the stage of Achievement Consciousness focus on personal achievement, individuality, and independence. They feel a drive to be successful and to have that success recognized through results that are respected, such as financial rewards or media recognition. Their value system is based on aspiration and winning, which inevitably implies that other people will lose. The “losers” are often seen as low achievers and therefore not deserving of the rewards of hard work and success. Achievement Consciousness can sometimes express a very ruthless and judgmental quality.

Achievement Consciousness is equivalent to Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness that is developed through the Solar channel (see [plate 9](#)). It is a dominant left-brain consciousness.

AFFILIATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Affiliative Consciousness looks for patterns and similarities rather than differences. It is intuitive, spatial, and holistic. It is more linked into the limbic system; subjective feelings and intuitive impressions have a greater influence on decision making. Unlike the detached, analytical observer of Achievement Consciousness, this is a more connected consciousness, combining feelings, thoughts, and intuitions.

Affiliative Consciousness focuses on social connectedness, empathy, and caring relationships, but with an increased self-awareness. It shifts from the Conformist Consciousness’s unequivocal acceptance of authority figures to an individual value system that makes choices based on the individual’s subjective experience and intuition as well as reflection.

People at this level of consciousness value harmony, intimacy, and a sense of community, while also respecting difference and diversity. They tend to value everyone equally, and they arrive at collective decisions through sharing experiences and finding consensus. In general, they value cooperation over individual enterprise and teamwork over authoritarian leadership. They desire to help others and to accept individual differences. Nevertheless, they are intolerant of groups with a different set of values to their own, such as people who are opposed to racial diversity or gender

equality. One manifestation of this intolerance is the phenomenon of “deplatforming,” where speakers with controversial views are boycotted or denied a platform to share their views. In this situation, the more Solar value of complete freedom of speech comes into conflict with the more Lunar value of disavowing hate speech.

Another difficulty that can arise with people in the stage of Affiliative Consciousness is that they can be unwilling to see problems in their relationships, avoiding conflict with a “peace at any price” approach to situations. Or they may tend to foster dependency in relationships in order to feel needed, or use some other kind of nonconfrontational manipulation to get their way. The empathy of Affiliative Consciousness can become a distorted form of self-centeredness. Affiliative Consciousness is equivalent to Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness that is developed through the Lunar channel (see [plate 9](#)). It is a dominant right-brain consciousness.

The chakra model is not quite so black-and-white or either/or as the models of developmental psychologists. Instead of two disparate pathways of development, it describes a spectrum, from extremely imbalanced on the Solar Pingala channel to extremely imbalanced on the Lunar Ida channel, with the central Sushumna channel representing balance, however difficult that may be to attain. From this perspective, consciousness develops in different ways in different people and even in different ways in one person at different times and in different situations. The chakra model fits well with neuroscientific findings showing that the left and right brains can have one-sided dominance, equal dominance, and even varying dominance depending on the situation.

In addition, not all adults develop either Achievement or Affiliative Consciousness. Wade notes that many adults remain in the developmentally more immature Conformist Consciousness, and some psychologists terminate their research at this stage or just after it.⁷ From a chakra perspective, this would mean that at some point, some young adults revert to Sacral Chakra dominance. The transitional period of the early teenage years would have presented them with the possibility of moving into Solar Plexus Chakra dominance, but for whatever reason, they were not able to achieve it. Perhaps this third chakra never established dominance because unconscious emotional drivers from the lower chakras were too powerful to

allow the mental skills of the neocortex to develop and take over from the mammalian brain. Breaking away from the influence and control of the family and culture can be extremely difficult in many situations. The transitions from one chakra to the next are challenging times and not guaranteed to be successful.

The Solar Plexus Chakra is the last developmental stage as we grow from infant to adult, although it is not, by any means, the end of adult consciousness development. Many developmental psychologists propose further stages in adult development, but from here onward, the parallels between these developmental stages and the chakras are more complex. The theoretical basis of developmental psychology suggests that it is only possible to move from one stage to the next after the requirements of the earlier stage have been met. This step-by-step development is certainly true for the lower chakras, but as we move to the Heart Chakra and the upper chakras, that is no longer the case. There is not an order of psychological development for the upper chakras in the same way that there is for the lower chakras. All of these chakras will have opened at the psychological level during childhood, and adult consciousness is a mixture of influences from all the different chakras, with some more prominent than others, depending on the kind of life we are leading.

Psychic Level

The Solar Plexus Chakra moves energy around the body and is the energetic control center of the chakra system. Just as it acts as the practical thinking aspect of the psyche, as the planner and decision maker, so this chakra is able to shift our energy and attention from one chakra to another like a psychic pump. For example, we may be agonizing over some situation in which our sense of self-worth has been attacked, either inwardly or outwardly. This is an issue of the third chakra. So we may decide to go for a walk in nature or take some other form of pleasurable exercise to take our mind off the problem. This would shift our energy from the third to the first and second chakras, grounding us and helping us get back into our body. Alternatively, we may decide that we will distract ourselves by reading a book. A pleasurable page-turning novel would shift our energy to our Sacral Chakra; a deeper thought-provoking book would shift our energy from

practical self-oriented thinking (third chakra) to philosophical higher thinking (sixth chakra). Another way to take our mind off the problem would be to do something creative, such as paint a picture or play the piano (fifth chakra), or we could decide to meditate (fourth chakra). But none of these can happen without the third chakra, our energy control center, making the decision to shift out of endless agonizing.

At the psychic level, the appropriate keyword for this chakra is *power*. It is a very powerful chakra in the sense that it organizes where we put our attention. It is the chakra that creates our “to-do list,” the practical thinking that goes into organizing our day. It makes the decision on whether we will keep on working or have some fun! We need a third chakra that is on our side, helping us live the kind of life we want to live.

Another way in which the Solar Plexus Chakra moves energy around is through psychic healing, when the healing energy of the heart is directed toward the person needing to heal, with the third and fourth chakras working together. I witnessed this phenomenon once when I was involved in an acting improvisation workshop. I was standing about four meters away from another actor. We were told to focus all of our attention and energy on the solar plexus area of the other’s body and to say just one line each. Her line was “I love you” and my line was “I hate you.” I began by summoning up a lot of anger, disgust, and judgment about my partner in order to get across my hatred, but as she continued to tell me that she loved me, my defenses broke down and I began to feel really hurt and sorry for myself and full of love for her. I was still only able to say my one line—“I hate you”—but I now said it in a sad pathetic way. Classic lovers’ tiff stuff ! What was interesting was that my partner noticed a massive change in her solar plexus as we worked. As my feelings changed from hate to love, she felt her solar plexus being flooded with heat and the heat spreading out all over her body. My third and fourth chakras were now working together to send out love to her third chakra, which she felt very strongly.

A less well-known ability is psychokinesis, in which a person is able to make objects move using only the mind.⁸ It is interesting to note that it is generally adolescents who demonstrate this ability, often unwittingly, suggesting that it is more likely to occur when Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness is becoming dominant.

We can also use the Solar Plexus Chakra to put up a psychic shield in situations that don't feel safe. Many of us do this unconsciously, scanning the environment and creating protection where necessary. For many people, crossing their arms over the Solar Plexus Chakra is an unconscious yet automatic response to threat. Being able to consciously erect psychic barriers is important for people who tend to be too open psychically. (In the previous chapter I suggested visualizations for protecting the chakras at the psychic level; see [here](#).)

Spiritual Level

The Solar Plexus Chakra becomes prominent for many people in their adult life. Many adults spend a lot of their time thinking about practicalities, according to their values and sense of self, working with either Achievement or Affiliative Consciousness, getting through their to-do list each day, and finding a little respite with pleasurable activities in the evenings or on weekends.

But when the Solar Plexus Chakra is dominant and the Heart Chakra is strongly flowing, then our whole experience of life begins to change, which we will be looking at in the next chapter. Now the Solar Plexus Chakra, rather than being the ruler of a person's life, becomes the servant of spirit, organizing the practical tasks of life to serve the calling of the higher centers of that person's being.

At the beginning of this chapter I quoted an excerpt from Marianne Williamson's book *A Return to Love*. When the Solar Plexus Chakra is functioning at the spiritual level, the complete passage becomes appropriate, portraying each of us as a "city of jewels" acting in service to spirit:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as

children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.⁹

Cultural Considerations

The ideology of industrial capitalism is dominated by the values of Achievement Consciousness, left-brain thinking, and the Solar channel of the third chakra. Aspiration and achievement, power and success, and fame and fortune are presented as highly esteemed goals in our education systems, our workplaces, the media, and the social fabric of modern societies. The unique individual is emphasized over the family or tribe.

An economic theory that contributed to modern society's espousal of the values of Achievement Consciousness was Herbert Spencer's theory of "survival of the fittest." This was Spencer's interpretation of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, which Darwin accepted. Darwin, however, also emphasized the importance of cooperation as a survival strategy in the natural world.

Under capitalism, in principle although less often in practice, anyone with initiative, competitive spirit, and determination could become successful. The individual achiever was glorified. The negative aspect of this ideology was that people who were less successful, especially the poor, were blamed for their poverty and seen as deserving of it, even when that poverty was largely the result of problems in the larger public arena, such as lack of work or inadequate pay.

This ideology is still the dominant cultural story in today's capitalist world and acts as a powerful influence on young people. It is embodied in our education systems, which encourage development through left-brain thinking and Achievement Consciousness. Many young people emerge from their education with left-brain dominance even if they began school with balanced or rightbrain dominance.¹⁰

However, the values of Affiliative Consciousness have also been espoused in the West for a long time. The desire to help others, to take care

of the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable, to be tolerant of differences between people while recognizing the importance of relationships and family—these values have long been respected, especially in democratic socialist countries such as in Scandinavia. It is possible to view our current-day politics as the clash of these two sets of values, with right-wing parties espousing Achievement Consciousness and left-wing parties espousing Affiliative Consciousness. In chakra terms, this would be a clash between the Solar Pingala and Lunar Ida channels of the Solar Plexus Chakra. Coincidentally, the choice of the terms “left wing” and “right wing” fits perfectly with the Lunar (Ida/left/feminine) and Solar (Pingala/right/masculine) channels.

I am not suggesting that every right-wing person has a dominant left brain and every left-wing person has a dominant right brain, because our choices about social values are more complex, influenced by the lower chakras and by adult experience. For example, I would imagine that most successful politicians are high achievers, probably with left-brain dominance, whatever their political views.

These two ideologies also have a gender bias. Traditionally, in a patriarchal society, the male is expected to follow the aspirational values of career and success of (Solar) Achievement Consciousness, while the female is encouraged to follow (Lunar) Affiliative Consciousness values of creating a home and family. These gender roles have only started to change relatively recently in the West, and they are still dominant in many countries. What does not change is that all of us, as individuals, have to find some way to meet our opposing drives for autonomy and for relationship, and this challenge is encapsulated through the Solar and Lunar channels of the chakra system.

Developmental psychology has its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and unsurprisingly, its pioneers and leading figures were all men. As one would expect from this gender-biased patriarchal society, they were immersed in the values of Achievement Consciousness even as they were in the process of defining it, and they saw the development of the separate rational self as the pinnacle of human development.

It wasn’t until the women’s movement of the 1970s that women researchers began to question not only this dominant ideology but the fact

that it had been structured into the theories of the male-led research programs. Carol Gilligan was one of the first to question the presuppositions of her male colleague and superior, Lawrence Kohlberg, whose theory of the stages of moral development had been researched using mainly male subjects.¹¹ In her nicely titled book *In a Different Voice* (1982), she describes her journey toward understanding a female path of development through relationship and connection, rather than independent achievement. She is one of several women who laid the groundwork for understanding the stage of Affiliative Consciousness. These theorists argued that there is a strong cultural bias toward rational, analytical left-brain thinking and a denigration of intuitive, holistic right-brain thinking.¹² And, as mentioned earlier, scientific research has shown that more females are born with right-brain dominance and more males with left-brain dominance.

In *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist argues that, because of the dominance in the West of left-brain analytic consciousness, which focuses narrowly on particular aspects of reality, humanity is heading toward a global environmental crisis that could lead to its own destruction. There is an urgent need to reestablish the importance of right-brain holistic thinking, which is able to see the big global picture. In reference to the title of his book, McGilchrist believes that the left brain should act as the servant of the more holistic-thinking right brain but instead has gotten itself into a place of cultural dominance, which will inevitably lead to crisis, as it is caught in a positive feedback loop of its own small logical parameters.

Similarly, but from a completely different perspective, Anne Baring, in her mistressly work *The Dream of the Cosmos* (2013), charts the historical rise and fall of the Feminine and of goddess worship through many millennia. She calls for a return to the sacred Feminine to avoid being faced with our own destruction:

The effects on the world of the loss of the Feminine, the loss of soul, are incalculable. Instinctive knowledge of the holy unity of things, reverence for the interconnection of all aspects of life, trust in the power of the imagination and the faculty of intuition—all this as a way of relating to life through participation rather than through dominance and control, has almost been lost. We can see the effects

of this loss of soul everywhere today, not only in the devastation and pollution of vast swathes of the Earth, but in the unhappy, impoverished and hopeless existence that people endure in the hideous and ever-expanding suburbs of our cities, in the increase of diseases like cancer, diabetes and mental illness—particularly depression. The old are neglected and even ill-treated in a culture more interested in achieving targets than caring for people. The young are offered nothing to aspire to beyond the material goals promoted by the media. Women are degraded by having their bodies exploited to sell every kind of commodity. The human heart cries out for the return of beauty, for a place of sanctuary, for community and relationship, where the inner life is seen to be as important as the outer and where a unifying sacred order to life on this planet is recognised and honoured.¹³

Joseph Chilton Pearce addresses his own concerns about the future of life on Earth by attacking one of the dominant cultural values of Achievement Consciousness, namely ambition:

The axiom that *ambition*, the burning desire to “get ahead,” to be somebody, to amount to something, is the most natural and desirable of all traits a person can have, particularly our young. This so-called ambition, honored as the greatest of values and virtues, is a demonic cancer eating at the heart of life, Earth, and the human spirit.¹⁴

All these writers discuss the environmental crisis that will occur if the human race continues to sleepwalk toward catastrophic global warming. In chapter 1, I suggested that our collective ungroundedness contributes to this somnambulism, but here is another complementary factor: a culturally driven imbalance in our Solar and Lunar channels under a societal delusion of the “natural” human order. These authors, in their very different ways, are calling for a rebalancing of the Solar and Lunar channels on a mass scale.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Dancing toward the Inner Champion

Flamenco dancing is a delight to watch. A good flamenco dancer exudes an exuberant self-confidence that we, the audience, absorb. The whole dance has a quality of proud self-assurance and glorification of what it is to be a human being in motion. Imagine the classical flamenco stance. It is one of the best artistic examples of an expanded solar plexus area, demonstrating a robustly confident third chakra, a tribute to the “city of jewels,” the Sanskrit name for this chakra. We delight in watching this spectacle of self-glorification because it is something we all long for. We would all love to feel that good about ourselves!



Fig. 3.5. Flamenco dancer

Philip was training to be a flamenco dancer. He came to me for Alexander Technique lessons because his dance practice was causing him to suffer from back pain and sleeplessness. He was tightening in the back to create an expanded look at the front of his body, and this was causing his pain. Tightening his back was also energetically cutting him off from his legs and his lower chakras, making him become ungrounded, which in turn caused sleeplessness.

Together, we looked at videos of professional flamenco dancers. Many of them seemed to be tightening the back in the same way as Philip, but he found one dancer who maintained a look of length in the back while being beautifully expanded in the front. This image helped him rethink his dancing.

Working with this visual suggestion and with the principles of the Alexander Technique, it didn't take Philip long to find a way of dancing that didn't disconnect his lower body, and his pain and sleeplessness went away. But he wasn't satisfied because he still felt that he had not achieved the confident quality of expression he aspired to in his dancing. His performance was being subtly sabotaged by the way he was expressing himself.

At this point I suggested that we work with chakra therapy. We had already discussed how he could ground himself to prevent an energetic disconnection from his legs, and this was strengthening his Base Chakra. Philip was naturally playful and had a resilient Sacral Chakra, which he found easy to nourish with the suggestions I made. The main focus of the chakra work was on nourishing and strengthening the Solar Plexus Chakra, both through my energetic healing work and through self-awareness exercises like the ones in the following section. These exercises helped Philip build a strong inner champion. The result transformed his performance. He exuded confidence in his dancing and looked brilliant.

He also had a major realization about himself. He had been attracted to flamenco dancing because he wanted to feel the powerful confidence that flamenco dancers display. Without realizing it, he wanted to have a more self-assured Solar Plexus Chakra, a strong inner champion, and hoped that the dance would achieve this for him. Well, in a roundabout way, it did!

Nourishing the Solar Plexus Chakra

The Solar Plexus Chakra is situated in the area of the upper abdomen, and it is associated with the adrenal endocrine glands, which govern our responses to stress. We are most aware of this part of our body when we feel stressed or when we are having difficulty “stomaching” something. We may experience shortness of breath or feel tension in the stomach area. This may be the result of the diaphragm tightening, which will interfere with our digestive processes. It is a symptom of the adrenals’ “fight, flight, or freeze” response.

Working as a body practitioner, I’ve noticed that when they are stressed, people respond differently, physically speaking, in this area of the body. Some people will feel very held by a tight diaphragm (freeze response). Other people who are feeling very vulnerable will be quite collapsed and hollow in this area, and their response to the stress will be a desire to escape (flight response). In still others, the upper abdominal area feels as though it has a strong protective balloon surrounding it, and their response to the stress will be more about how they are going to overcome it (fight response).

It is easier to notice the physical experience of this chakra during a time of stress, but it also responds to more positive experiences, such as when we feel the thrill of having achieved something difficult. When we are “bursting with pride,” for example, this area feels like it is actually expanding, rising up into the chest.



FINDING YOUR STRONG INNER CHAMPION

Find somewhere quiet and peaceful where you can sit comfortably or lie down in one of the semi-supine positions (see [here](#)).

Place one hand on your lower abdomen and one hand on your upper abdomen in the solar plexus area. Your hands are now in contact with your inner child in the Sacral Chakra and your “inner young adult” in the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Begin by spending a few moments thinking about your feet, legs, and pelvic area. Visualize the energy flowing up through your feet chakras, up your legs, and into your pelvis, nourishing the Base Chakra in the pelvic floor, the instinctual animal part of your psyche.

Remind yourself of the ways in which you can nourish your inner animal, as suggested in chapter 1.

Then let the energy flow up into your abdomen and think of the ways in which you can nourish your inner child in the Sacral Chakra, as suggested in chapter 2. Energetically, the Base and Sacral Chakras support the Solar Plexus Chakra, so it can help to give them a few moments of kind attention before you think of the energy moving up into your upper abdomen. Notice any sensations, feelings, or thoughts arising in your body as you give attention to the Base and Sacral Chakras.

Now visualize the energy rising up to the solar plexus area of your body, getting a sense of whether it feels very expanded, firm and held, or quite hollow. Think about how confident you feel generally. In what areas of life do you feel strong and capable, and in what areas of life do you feel weak and vulnerable?

Think about all the things in your life that you own: possibly a house and a car, and all the things that are inside that house or car, like the furniture, books, electronics, pictures and decorations, the clothes you wear, and all the other many things that you have created or acquired as part of your life and your identity.

Pick out some of the things that you feel particularly pleased to own. Perhaps it's some items of clothing or jewelry, your sound system or other electronic equipment, your books, your plants, a piece of furniture, or that kitchen appliance. Cast your mind over all these possessions and allow yourself to feel really pleased that they are in your life. Congratulate yourself on having acquired them. Notice whether thinking positively in this way is having any effect on the feelings and sensations in your body, and whether you notice changes where your hands are in contact with your upper and lower abdomen.

Turn your attention to your relationships, and allow yourself to feel really pleased about all the people in your life whom you value: your friends, your partner, your children, and/or other family members. Appreciate yourself for having grown and maintained all the good relationships in your life. Include any pets with whom you

feel that you have a positive relationship. Once again, notice any sensations, feelings, and thoughts arising as you do this.

If, as you are moving through this exercise, you feel negative responses, critical thoughts, or uncomfortable feelings arising, don't fret. What is important is that you are becoming more self-aware about your inner voices, so congratulate yourself for that!

Now remember some of the things you have done in your life that you feel very pleased about, from when you were quite young to the present time, things that make you feel proud of yourself. These can be achievements, like passing exams, learning skills, developing a career, and traveling, or they can be relationships, like building friendships that you value, finding a partner to share your life with, raising a family, or taking care of someone.

As you think about these things, visualize and send loving, healing energy from your hands into your second and third chakras, nourishing your energy system.

Add to these achievements the challenges you have overcome in your life—the times when life was difficult and you had to develop inner resources to endure them. Appreciate those resources that have enabled you to come out the other side of those difficult times.

Now think about your own positive personal qualities, and allow yourself to feel pleased and to appreciate the kind of person that you have become. See if you can find some psychological qualities that you admire in yourself. Then think of some physical qualities, too—ways in which you consider yourself attractive or strong.

Write a list in your journal of all the positive thoughts of self-appreciation you have created. This is the voice of your inner champion. Read through this list every day for a week and then from time to time after that, especially on days when you are having a difficult time.

For this exercise, don't include any of the critical thoughts that you might have had. This is the voice of your inner critic, which we will explore below.



LIFE STORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INNER CHAMPION

Another way to use the list of positive judgments about yourself that you came up with in the previous exercise is to write the story of your life from the perspective of your inner champion. The inner champion sees only the positive in everything that has happened in your life, so even the most difficult experiences will be explained in ways that emphasize the positive, such as what you have learned from these experiences or how alternatives to those experiences would have been much less positive. For example, a client who had been using drugs in her late teens, when asked to view this period of her life from the perspective of the inner champion, told me if she hadn't taken drugs she would probably have taken her own life. From that perspective, her drug abuse was lifesaving, especially because she later overcame her addiction. Find a way of interpreting all your actions from a positive perspective and write this positive story in your journal.



DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE INNER CHAMPION AND THE INNER CRITIC

In the first exercise, in which you were encouraged to find the voice of your [inner champion](#) (starting), you probably noticed the voice of your inner critic jumping in to undermine you. This is pretty normal! Be aware of that inner critic and get to know it so that you can begin a dialogue between these two voices, one in which the inner critic doesn't always win.

One way to do this is to take a clean sheet of paper and two different-colored pens. Choose a color for the inner critic and one for the inner champion.

Now, from that first exercise, find one of your appreciative remarks that sets off a judgmental response from your inner critic. Write the positive remark on the sheet in the color of the inner champion and the judgmental response underneath it in the color of the inner critic. Then let your inner champion respond to your inner

critic, defending you against the criticism, and if another judgmental remark surfaces, write that down. Allow the dialogue between these two inner voices to continue until your inner critic is listening to your inner champion and giving you permission to appreciate yourself more. Find phrases that calm your inner critic. One of my favorites is “I did my best and that’s good enough.”

IDA/PINGALA BREATHING

This is an ancient yoga exercise from one of the Tantric traditions. It encourages the Lunar Ida and Solar Pingala channels to come into balance. If this exercise feels stressful or difficult in any way, just stop doing it and breathe normally again.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position and get into a calm and relaxed state. Notice the breath entering and leaving your body. Feel it passing through your nose and throat and into your chest area, the gentle expansion of your chest and abdomen as it fills your lungs, the gentle contraction as it leaves, and the pause before another in-breath begins. As much as possible, just witness your sensitive animal body breathing you, in its own natural rhythms.

When we breathe through our nose, usually one nostril dominates, and which nostril is dominant can change at different times of the day and night. When that dominance moves from one nostril to the other, both nostrils breathe together for a while. Now, as you breathe, notice which nostril is dominant, and keep your awareness on that nostril breathing you for the next five breaths.

Set your intention to move from the dominant nostril to the nondominant one. See whether you are able to change the dominance just by intending it, and allow yourself to breathe through the newly dominant nostril for five breaths. Now see if you can breathe through both nostrils at the same time for five breaths. Explore the differences between these three different ways of breathing. You can increase or decrease the number of breaths, as you desire, before you change nostrils.

If you are unable to make the change from one nostril to the other just by your intention, do the exercise with a pillow on your

chest so you can rest your arms on the pillow while using your hand to gently block one nostril, as needed, to allow the other nostril to become dominant.

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ACT TWO

The Heart Chakra

Gateway to the Spiritual Realm



4

The Heart Chakra

Sanskrit name: Anahata

English translation: Unwounded; Unstruck

Central themes: The inner healer; love and acceptance; “being” center; witness consciousness

Higher expression of the Base Chakra

*as
my heart
the world
opens
melting
our
gaze*

The Heart Chakra is a game changer. Situated at the center of the body and the center of the chakra system, it plays a pivotal role in the unfolding of

each life because it is the gateway into the spiritual realm and the deeper spiritual levels of all the chakras.

The Sanskrit name for the Heart Chakra, Anahata, translates as “unwounded” or “unstruck.” If the Heart Chakra is not flowing well, we experience the world mainly from the egocentric and wounded perspectives of the lower chakras, or the small self. But when the Heart Chakra is flowing well, it offers us another perspective on ourselves and on the world, through which we can begin the process of healing the wounds and traumas of our past and discover a deeper, truer, more spiritual part of ourselves.

Higher Expressions

The Heart Chakra and the upper chakras are all higher expressions of the lower chakras (see [plate 10](#)).

- The Heart Chakra, the gateway to the spiritual realm, is a higher expression of the Base Chakra, the gateway to the earth realm.
 - The Throat Chakra is a higher expression of the Sacral Chakra; here, the fun-loving, spontaneous creativity of the child (Sacral Chakra) is refined into the creative self-expression of the adult (Throat Chakra).
 - The Eye Chakra is a higher expression of the Solar Plexus Chakra; here, practical self-oriented thinking (Solar Plexus Chakra) evolves to more conceptual thinking (Eye Chakra).
 - The Crown Chakra is a higher expression of the Heart Chakra and the gateway to the divine realm, where we have the potential to discover our divine essence.
-

Rumi was an Islamic poet, so the chakras were not part of his tradition, yet his poetry can be seen as a beautiful expression of the Heart Chakra. In

the lines below, he could be describing the transition from third to fourth chakra consciousness:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.
I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
Doesn't make any sense.*

FROM RUMI, “A GREAT WAGON,” TRANSLATED BY COLEMAN BARKS

When we move reliably into the life position of “I’m OK, you’re OK” (from among the life positions we discussed in the preceding chapter; see [here](#)), the next step is into the field beyond right and wrong, where the Heart Chakra flows more strongly. We can begin to witness ourselves and others in a compassionate, nonjudgmental, unwounded way. The boundaries of the separate self soften, and we feel more connected to other people and to the world around us. This is the experience of transitioning to the Heart Chakra.

The name Anahata has another more esoteric interpretation. Sir John Woodroffe described “unstruck” as the sound we hear when something is not struck.¹ All the sounds of life are caused by the interplay (striking) of two or more objects. The sound not made by any two things striking together is that of primal energy, of which the universe itself is a manifestation. This explanation of the meaning of Anahata echoes the Zen koan (meditative riddle) that asks, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

Georg Feuerstein (1947–2012), a respected researcher into India’s spiritual heritage, commented on this meaning of the Heart Chakra:

When the heart center is activated, it is possible to hear the subtle inner sound called *nāda*, which is “unstruck” because it is not

produced by any mechanical means and is not propelled through space but is a fundamental omnipresent vibration—the sound *om*. This idea has its parallel in the Gnostic notion of the “music of the spheres,” first mentioned by Pythagoras.²

Connecting to our unwounded self and experiencing the spiritual nature of ourselves and the universe are two sides of the same coin and two sides of the meaning of Anahata.

Physical Level

As we’ve seen, during adolescence, there are significant changes in the efficiency of the frontal cortex, which is the most recently evolved part of the human triune brain. By the time we are in our twenties, the triune brain is fully functioning, and it continues to develop and adapt to changes throughout our lives.³ Given the right opportunities, it is capable of lifelong learning, and these opportunities abound as we develop Heart Chakra consciousness and the consciousness of the upper chakras.

Heart Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	ॐ = Yam
<i>Position</i>	T6/T7
<i>Neurology</i>	Pulmonary and Cardiac plexus Heart brain
<i>Endocrine Glands</i>	Heart Thymus
<i>Petals</i>	12
<i>Sense</i>	Touch
<i>Color</i>	Green

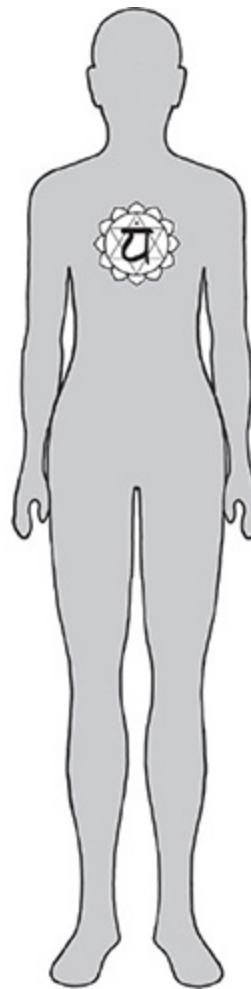


Fig. 4.1. Heart Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

The Heart Chakra is positioned at the outermost point or node of the primary curve of the thoracic spine (see [fig. I.2](#)). It is at the center of the pulmonary and cardiac nerve plexus. It is traditionally associated with the thymus gland, which plays an important role in our immune system and therefore, like the Heart Chakra, in our potential for healing. The thymus gland is active only until puberty and then starts to shrink, having produced all the T cells we will need for the rest of our lives. Its role in our immune system is to protect us from autoimmune diseases, when the body attacks itself. Self-healing is therefore the essential function of the thymus gland, the physical correlate of the psychological and spiritual self-healing of the Heart Chakra.

However, the heart itself is known to release several hormones; in fact, in 1983, the heart was reclassified as an endocrine gland. One of the hormones secreted by the heart is oxytocin, commonly known as the “love” or “bonding” hormone, with concentrations as high in the heart as in the brain. So the heart itself can also be seen as the endocrine gland connected to this chakra (see [fig. I.6](#)).⁴

All the chakras are energy centers where the physical, psychological, psychic, and spiritual interact. With the Heart Chakra, the distinctions between these fields become more blurred. There are many stories about the effect of heart transplants upon the personality of the receiver of the donated heart. Some fascinating examples include an unmusical man who became interested in classical music upon receiving the heart of a violinist, an unathletic man who became athletic upon receiving the heart of a film stuntman, and a man with no previous interest in literature who began writing poetry upon receiving the heart of a literary person.⁵ This alone suggests that the heart is more than purely physical and that it is not as easy to separate mind and body as our language might lead us to believe.

Further research suggests that the heart coordinates and influences many of the body’s systems and therefore is central to determining the micro and macro environments of the body. Much of this work has been carried out by the HeartMath Institute of California, which was set up in 1991 as a nonprofit organization committed to researching and gathering research on the heart-mind connection and to providing practical resources that enable people to enhance their heart-centered well-being. Researchers at the HeartMath Institute have established that over 60 percent of heart cells are neural cells, not muscle cells, as had been previously thought. These cells are identical to neural cells in the brain, with axonal and dendritic connections, neurotransmitters like those found in the brain, and ganglia that connect to other organs in the body and to the muscular system. The heart is, in essence, a brain of about forty thousand neurons, and one of its central functions is to receive and transmit information from all over the body in order to maintain optimum harmonious functioning of the whole system. Its other major role is to be in constant neural communication with the “head” brain, and indeed, the heart sends more information to the brain than it receives from it.⁶

HeartMath researchers have also shown that the electrical field generated by the heart is about sixty times greater in amplitude than that of the head brain and can be detected, by electrocardiogram (ECG), anywhere on the surface of the body. The heart's magnetic field is about a hundred times greater than that of the brain and can be detected up to three feet away from the body.⁷

This sort of information shows us that we are measurably much greater than our visible physical body. It would seem that science is beginning to map some of the layers of the human aura, and I believe that there are many more discoveries of this nature still to come.

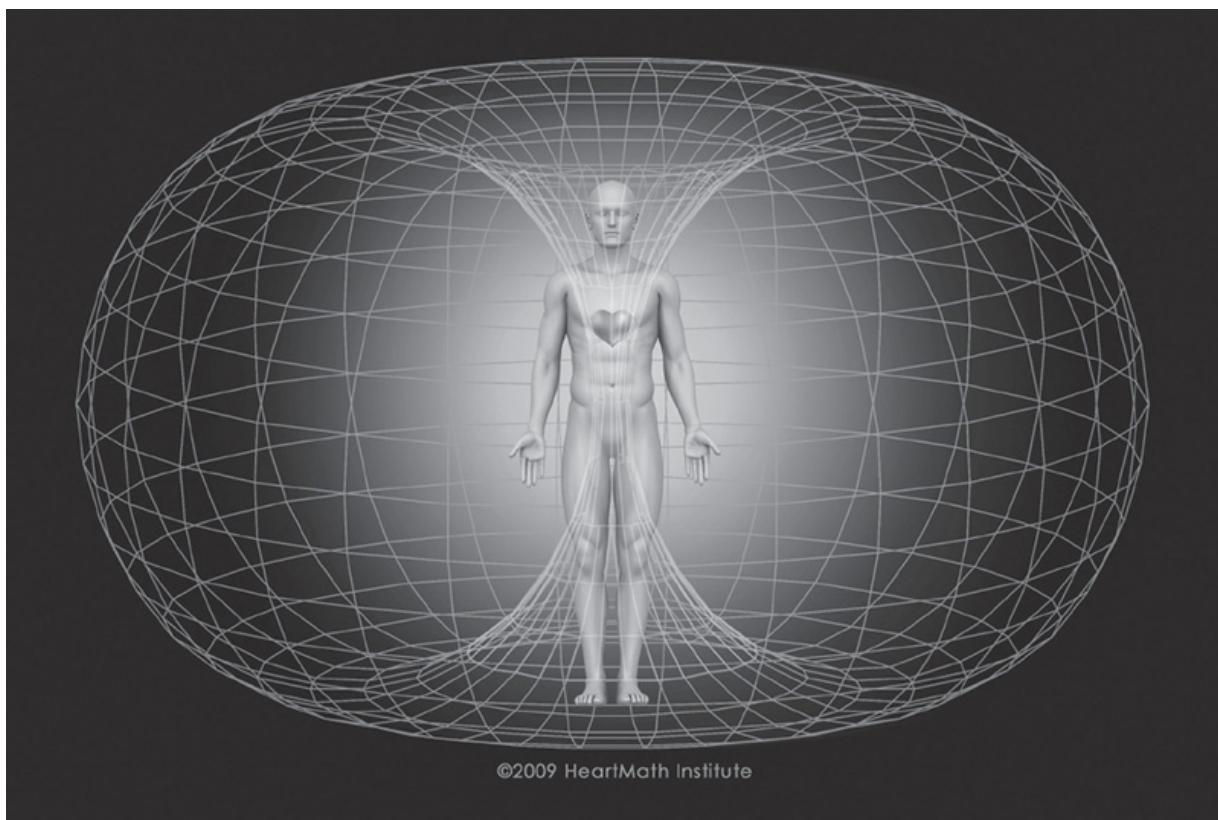


Fig. 4.2. Electromagnetic field around the heart

Image courtesy of the HeartMath Institute (heartmath.org).

The heart gives out very different signals depending upon the emotional state we are in, and these signals influence every cell in the body, affecting breathing, blood pressure, digestion, immune response, and many other

bodily functions. The heart seems to be the intelligent coordinating center of the entire psychophysical human being.

Even when we are at rest, the heart does not beat evenly but constantly varies its pace, speeding up or slowing down. The variation can be hard to notice because it occurs at the scale of milliseconds, but modern technology allows us to measure it. Heart rate variability (HRV) is a measure of the difference in the time interval between heartbeats. You can evaluate HRV by looking at the wavelike form it takes when graphed. When we are experiencing negative emotions, HRV waves are irregular and uneven, but when we are experiencing positive emotions, those waves become regular. In the body, coherent HRV waves have been shown to lead to psychophysical coherence. In this state, all of the body's systems work in harmony with the heart's rhythm. The nervous system becomes more balanced between sympathetic and parasympathetic branches, and the two hemispheres of the brain operate with more alpha brainwave rhythms, denoting calm, improved cognition, and mental clarity. In other words, when we are able to sustain positive emotions such as love, appreciation, and gratitude, our entire being becomes more coherent.

Heart Rhythms

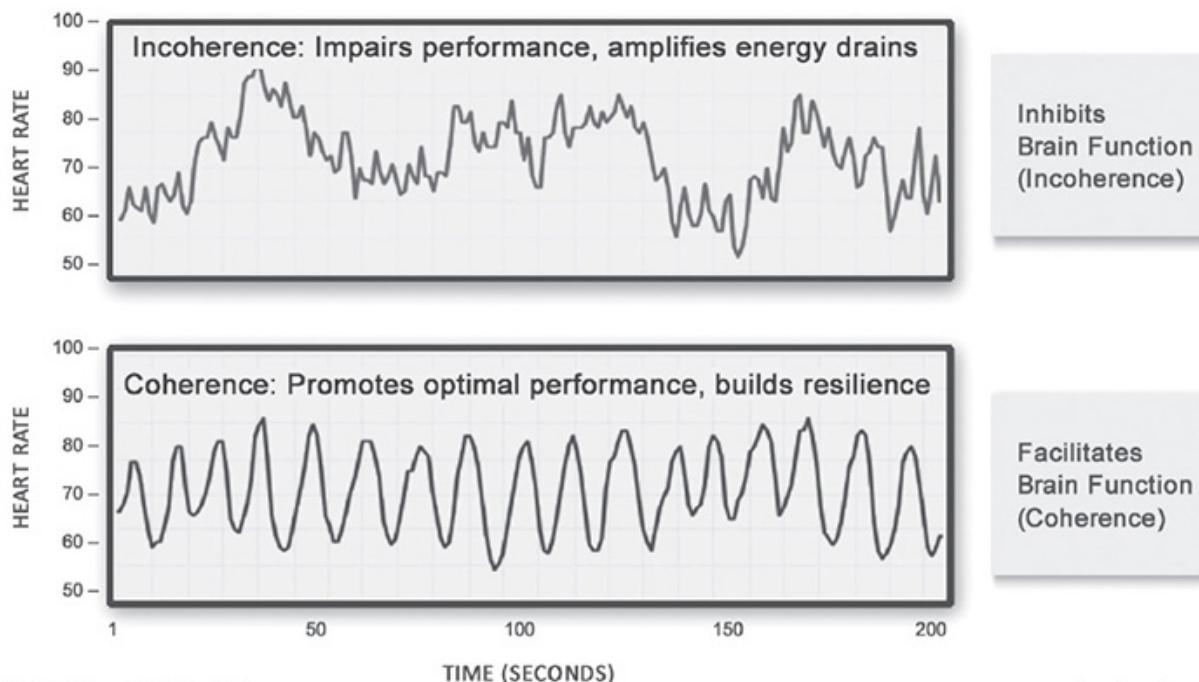


Fig. 4.3. Coherence and incoherence in HRV waves

Image courtesy of the HeartMath Institute (heartmath.org).

Another extraordinary finding by HeartMath is that the rhythm of the heart resonates within the same frequency bands as Earth's magnetic field. It would seem that our hearts not only coordinate the whole body but also act in coordination with the whole planet. Moreover, Earth itself resonates with electromagnetic emissions from the sun, as do all the other planets in the solar system. This suggests that when our heart rhythms are coherent, we are in harmony with the whole solar system and possibly the universe!⁸

These scientific discoveries lend weight to the teachings about the role of the heart in many spiritual traditions. As science delves deeper into the mysteries of our internal universe, our bodies, our minds, and our souls, it begins to make visible the invisible. Looking at the depictions of the electromagnetic field of the heart, we seem to get a glimpse of our own consciousness spreading out into the space-time universe around us, harmonizing with the fields of the earth, the sun, and the planets. The intuitive wisdom of many ancient traditions begins to make sense in a more logical and scientific way.

The ancient Egyptians and Greeks believed that the heart was a thinking organ, the seat of the soul, and of much more importance than the brain. Perhaps these early philosophers understood the role of the heart better than our modern culture does.

The heart is the perfection of the whole organism. Therefore the principles of the power of perception and the soul's ability to nourish itself must lie in the heart.

ARISTOTLE

Body Language

In modern times, the heart has been seen as the organ associated with love. Most of us would describe the physical experience of loving feelings as an

expansion and opening in the chest area surrounding the heart, and if we lose love in some way, we can experience physical heartache.

We have many expressions in our language suggesting that the heart is more than a physical organ. We talk about “following our heart” or being “true to our heart”; our heart can be filled with hope or we can lose heart. Our hearts can leap or they can sink. We can go to the heart of the matter and speak from the heart in a heart-to-heart conversation. We can be warm-hearted, cold-hearted, lighthearted, heavy-hearted, or heartless. We can communicate with heartfelt words. Experiences can warm our heart, make our heart sing, put our heart at rest, or break our heart. The language we use about the heart reveals its deep emotional significance and importance to our deeper sense of self.

Because the Heart Chakra sits at the center of the chest, it seems natural that language about breathing can also relate to Heart Chakra experience, but in a different way from the excitable breathing that we connect to Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. Most spiritual traditions correlate breathing with taking in and giving out spiritual energy (hence the words inspiration, “breathing in,” and expiration, “breathing out”). The Heart Chakra opens the door to spiritual experience and invites spirit, in the form of the breath, to fill us. We use phrases like “taking a deep breath” and “breathing new life into,” or we describe an experience as “a breath of fresh air,” which evokes the more relaxed, centered energy of the Heart Chakra.

You know that our breathing is the inhaling and exhaling of air. The organ that serves for this is the lungs that lie round the heart, so that the air passing through them thereby envelops the heart. Thus breathing is a natural way to the heart. And so, having collected your mind within you, lead it into the channel of breathing through which air reaches the heart and, together with this inhaled air, force your mind to descend into the heart and to remain there.

NICEPHORUS BLEMMYDES (THIRTEENTH-CENTURY MONK)

Psychological Level

In the first chakra, the motivation is to survive; in the second, it's to explore the world, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain; in the third, it's to develop a sense of identity and self-worth through our values and choices. Put very simply, the three lower chakras represent the development of the separate individual, based on the needs of security, pleasure, and self-identity. In Heart Chakra consciousness, these needs drop away, and what arises is a desire to simply be, living in the present moment, with awareness and a sense of connection to all of life.

The Heart Chakra is the realm of deeper emotions. We all associate love with the heart, but love is a complex concept that can be experienced through several chakras in different ways. In the first chakra, love is the instinctual drive to attach to the mother or caregiver. In the second chakra, love is experienced as the pleasure of intimacy, of being loved and of belonging, and in the third chakra, the object of our love is an expression of our identity and self-worth—for example, the partner whom we can respect and be proud of, because they fulfill our concept of what a partner should be. All these aspects of experience are involved in loving relationships, but they are different from the unconditional love of the Heart Chakra.

The love felt by parents for their newborn child is one of the most natural ways in which we experience our heart energy expanding. The newborn's first instinctual action after birth is to find and suckle the mother's nipple. The breasts lying on either side of the heart and giving succor to a baby is the archetypal enactment of the unconditional love of Heart Chakra energy. Indeed, the whole experience of caring for a child can develop the Heart Chakra in a steadfast and dependable way.

There are many other loving paths to expanding Heart Chakra consciousness: the love felt for a spouse in a happy and enduring partnership; the love of children for parents whom they truly value and appreciate; the love between close friends; the tenderness felt for a beloved pet. Other deeply felt emotions can also develop Heart Chakra consciousness, such as when we feel moved by beauty, be it a piece of music, art, or the beauty of the natural world. The experience of awe that we might feel upon entering a beautiful building, such as a cathedral, mosque, temple, or palace, energizes the Heart Chakra. When we feel moved by poetic wisdom, we nourish our Heart Chakra. Being moved by the beauty of nature is a common heart-expanding experience. For many of

us, getting out into the natural world strengthens our feeling of connection with all of life. Perhaps in these wilder parts of Earth it is easier for us to harmonize with the planet's magnetic field and develop a coherent heart rhythm, which seems to be the scientific equivalent of a strongly flowing Heart Chakra. This chakra is associated with the color green. In meditative visualizations, we use the color green to nourish and strengthen the Heart Chakra. Perhaps not coincidentally, immersing ourselves in the beautiful greens of our natural environment can be very healing, allowing our Heart Chakra to flow more freely.

Other positive emotions, such as happiness, gratitude, and appreciation, are signs of a flowing Heart Chakra. Happiness here is not the same as the exciting pleasure sought by the Sacral Chakra. The Dalai Lama describes pleasure as a transitory experience caused by external events. He describes happiness as a more internal emotion, like peace of mind, which comes from warm-heartedness.⁹ The calm inner peace or happiness of the Heart Chakra can be present even when we are dealing with difficult external events. Other heart qualities include hope, trust, and kind feelings. *Kind* comes from the Old English root *kin*, which means family. Heart Chakra consciousness involves the sense of being kin with all other living beings, part of the global family, and part of the global consciousness. It expresses a desire to take care of Earth, the mother of this family, and all her offspring. The pleasure of giving and loving is part of the experience of a flowing Heart Chakra. The boundaries between giving and receiving become blurred because there is such happiness in being able to give that it feels like receiving.

When the Heart Chakra begins to flow strongly, sometimes it can cause us to cry, not for any particular reason, but because we feel deeply moved in some way. We may feel a sense of homecoming as we move into the more spiritual experience of Heart Chakra consciousness. We think of tears as letting go, letting something out of the body. But tears can also let something in. They can open us up to love and compassion for ourselves and others. They can bring us back to the deeper sense of who we are; they can bring us into our “being” nature and pause the preoccupation with “doing” that dominates so much of modern life.

The Heart Chakra also opens us up to deep sadness and compassion when we are faced with life’s tragedies. It is often for this reason that many

of us keep our hearts tightly protected; we do not want to be in touch with the painful aspects of being human. We are frightened of feeling too deeply, and this fear stems the flow through the Heart Chakra.

With Heart Chakra consciousness, we begin to develop a compassionate witness, a part of our psyche that is able to view ourselves and others in a nonjudgmental way, and this in itself acts as a healing force. Maintaining an open heart in the face of “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” as Shakespeare put it, requires discipline and practice. This inner work traditionally lies in the realm of spiritual development, but a belief in God or in religion is not essential for developing Heart Chakra consciousness, and today there is a burgeoning field of practical techniques that can develop heart-centered consciousness.

Psychotherapists and healers often use compassionate witnessing in therapeutic sessions. In the 1940s, for example, Carl Rogers developed a client-centered therapy in which the therapist is required to hold clients in unconditional positive regard.¹⁰ This technique allows clients to experience the therapist as an outer compassionate witness, enabling them to develop their own inner compassionate witness. In fact, much of psychotherapy is a process whereby the therapist, witnessing from the heart, helps clients witness their early life (first, second, and third chakras) from the nonjudgmental perspective of the Heart Chakra, which allows healing to occur. Self-acceptance is an important quality of the Heart Chakra, as is forgiveness for oneself and for others.

When I began training to be an Alexander Technique teacher, I discovered that the technique involves learning to witness oneself nonjudgmentally during simple physical movements. F. M. Alexander, the founder of this method, developed the concept of conscious “inhibition,” which he described as the ability to not respond to a stimulus, which is another way of describing witnessing. Alexander’s use of the word *inhibition* had a very different meaning from the more popular one, introduced by Sigmund Freud, meaning a form of active repression.

Alexander founded his technique on the principle of, as he put it, “learning to meet a stimulus that always puts you wrong and knowing how to deal with it.”¹¹ By helping them to increase their inhibitory capacity while developing their selfawareness during simple movements, he was (without using these words) encouraging his pupils to develop an inner

witness who does not react to negative stimuli. Unintentionally, Alexander brought perennial spiritual principles into his very practical work, as Aldous Huxley, who took lessons with Alexander, recognized:

Mind and body are organically one; and it is therefore inherently likely that, if we can learn the art of conscious inhibition of the physical level, it will help us to acquire and practice the same art on the emotional and intellectual levels. . . . So far as I am aware, the only system of physical education which fulfils all these conditions is the system developed by F. M. Alexander.¹²

Huxley went on to say:

Up to the present time only two solutions have been discovered to the problem of bridging the gap between idealistic theory and actual practice. The first, which is very ancient, is the mystic's technique of transcending personality in a progressive awareness of ultimate reality. The second, which is very recent, was discovered some 50 years ago by F. M. Alexander and may be described as a technique for the proper use of the self, a method for the creative conscious control of the whole psycho-physical organism.¹³

This aspect of the Alexander Technique has similarities with mindfulness training, a technique that essentially develops self-awareness through witnessing and has become very popular as a strategy in the treatment of many mental health conditions.¹⁴

The HeartMath Institute has developed several techniques to achieve a coherent heart rhythm through sustained positive emotions. These include biofeedback systems in which you can see your heart rate variability on a computer screen and learn to develop coherent rhythms.¹⁵ Other organizations have developed stereo audio tracks that encourage entrainment of the two hemispheres of the brain, thus inducing meditative states that influence the Heart Chakra. In this way, modern technology is providing interesting ways of supporting personal growth. And none of

these techniques requires a belief in God or religion, although there is sometimes a reference to spiritual development as one of the outcomes.

When we are operating from the Heart Chakra, we can be a compassionate witness to our own journey through life. We are able to appreciate the gifts we have received in this lifetime and the skills and wisdom we have developed on this journey. As well as appreciating the positives of our life, we can give loving kindness and attention to our wounded infant in the first chakra, our wounded child in the second chakra, and our wounded young adult in the third chakra. When our “buttons are pushed”—when something happens that makes us want to rant and rage, panic, or cry with hopelessness—the compassionate witness of the fourth chakra can kindly hold that immature part of us, accepting and understanding the negative feelings that are aroused but not reactively acting upon them, allowing us time to consider before responding. Then the Heart Chakra consciousness can move the self away from fear, anger, and sadness into gentle appreciation for the positive aspects of life that are still available to us. This allows us to recover more quickly from the psychological and biological impact of our negative feelings. As the Heart Chakra flows more fully, our feelings of love, acceptance, and appreciation are extended to both ourselves and others. The defensive mechanisms that we have developed through the lower chakras begin to soften and become more flexible. The Heart Chakra then invites us into the spiritual realm, where inner voices become quiet and we experience a deeper level of being and connection with life.

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

The Heart Chakra is at the center of the body, where it has the potential to balance the energies of the lower and upper chakras and also the left and right channels of the chakra system. The Solar Pingala channel on the right side of the body represents the autonomous expression of the self, and the Lunar Ida channel on the left side represents the relational experience of the self. When the Heart Chakra is flowing well, these two aspects tend to be better balanced because the world and the self become more connected. We feel love and acceptance of ourselves as an aspect of the world, and we feel love and acceptance of the world and of the “other” as an aspect of ourselves. The Heart Chakra is about our “being” nature in which the

autonomous and the relational sides of the self become more unified, and we become more and more in touch with our true self as the Heart Chakra expands and deepens, taking us into the deeper levels of this chakra.

Imbalances on the Lunar channel can cause us to feel overconcerned with others, to the neglect of our own self. Imbalances on the Solar channel can cause us to focus too much on care for ourselves, being less compassionate about the concerns of others. But with Heart Chakra consciousness, imbalances are not extreme, nor do they make us ruthless or manipulative in the way that imbalances with Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness can.

Imbalances on the central Sushumna channel can cause us to focus too strongly, albeit compassionately, on the woundedness of the lower chakras and the problems of life. This can easily throw us into a self-absorbed woundedness in which the gentle reflective Heart Chakra consciousness becomes undermined by the more insistent energies of the lower chakras, leading to a negative outlook on life. The compassion of the Heart Chakra needs to be balanced with the chakra's sense of gratitude for lessons learned and wisdom gained.

Alternatively, we could exhibit imbalance by focusing too much on the upper chakras and losing touch with reality. Obsessive artists (fifth chakra) and eccentric academics (sixth chakra) are benign examples of this. Imbalance at a purely Heart Chakra level can be expressed in an overly positive "Pollyanna" attitude that leads to complacency about dealing with problems and a lack of practicality, often described as "flakiness."

We must learn to balance the Heart Chakra consciousness of loving acceptance with the discrimination of the Solar Plexus Chakra and the Eye Chakra. It would be difficult for anyone to operate from pure Heart Chakra consciousness all the time. Perhaps if we lived up on a mountain in a cave on our own, we could rest permanently in our being nature. But daily life requires that we make choices, and choices depend on judgments. The story of Jesus Christ, the spiritual teacher who preached love above all else, angrily overturning the tables of the bankers (the money changers) in the temple, reminds us of the importance of balancing our love and acceptance with our judgments about what is right and wrong. Heart Chakra consciousness influences the values we have developed in the Solar Plexus Chakra, bringing a loving global perspective to them. Ideally, the two

chakras need to work together. For example, when kind and loving parents are cross with their child, they may express anger, but underneath that, they still accept the beauty and vulnerability of this young human being whom they love deeply, and this affects the way in which they communicate their displeasure.

In adults, chakra consciousness is multifaceted, made up of all the chakras functioning together. Some will be more prominent than others. We still have personalities that have developed through the lower chakras, with imbalances that influence our consciousness. The Heart Chakra may be prominent in our consciousness at one moment, and the next moment one of the lower chakras or one of the upper chakras may be more prominent. We may be experiencing the peaceful happiness of Heart Chakra consciousness one moment and lose it the next, depending on how well we are staying in our witness consciousness. Maintaining a flowing Heart Chakra, balancing it with the needs of living in the modern world, is a lifetime's work!

Psychic Level

At the psychic level, the Heart Chakra confers an ability to identify and merge with another person. Boundaries between people dissolve. Healing energy is born here, and healing is the clearest example of working at a psychic level with the Heart Chakra. Healing can take many forms: listening and talking, hands-on work, auric work, or distance healing, for example. A caregiver for a sick person who feels genuine loving compassion toward their charge can be transmitting healing energy. Many nurses, teachers, social workers, therapists, and others operate with a compassionate and flowing Heart Chakra, which can have very powerful healing effects.

The Heart Chakra is where we feel affinity with others. This feeling intensifies at the psychic level. We can experience the whole being of another person—their thoughts, feelings, and sense of self. This ability is far more intense than the clairsentience of the Sacral Chakra; here we identify with the other person, rather than just picking up their feelings. At an energetic level, we become one. You may know of a happily married couple growing to look like each other or even of people who look like their

dogs! Over time, a lack of ego boundaries with the beloved other begins to manifest in physical form.

The HeartMath Institute has shown that the magnetic field generated by our hearts can influence the magnetic fields of individuals around us. These magnetic signals are related to our emotional state—that is, whether we are feeling positive or negative. This research gives potential evidence for the psychic phenomena of both the clairsentience of the Sacral Chakra and also the capacity to transmit the healing energy of the heart, depending on what emotions are being expressed and thus what kind of magnetic signals we may be sending out.¹⁶

Animals, too, emit a magnetic field that influences other animals, including people! Many people believe they have experienced healing from their pets. Cats, dogs, horses, and many other creatures have been taken by their owners into hospices, hospitals, day care centers, and prisons to bring emotional healing to people who are suffering.¹⁷

One of my most powerful experiences of Heart Chakra transmission of healing energy was with a kestrel. I was walking on the famous white cliffs near Dover with a friend who was also an Alexander Technique teacher. The cliff was in two sections: a lower section stretching down beneath us to the sea and, a few meters inland from our path, a higher cliff rising up into the sky. Above this high cliff we saw several kestrels hovering and hunting on this beautiful spring day.

As we walked along, we noticed a kestrel perched on a low ledge of the higher cliff. From time to time it flopped down to our level, presumably hunting for food, and then returned to a low perch on the cliff. We both felt that this kestrel was not as strong or as well as the ones hovering high above us, and so we decided to send it some healing energy. We stood quietly sending loving and healing energy flowing out from our hearts, gently surrounding and penetrating this kestrel, and to our delight, after a few minutes the kestrel took off and flew up to the top of the cliff, joining the other hunting birds. We felt very pleased with ourselves and happily continued on our walk.

A few minutes later, my friend looked back and then told me to turn around and look back too. There on the path was the kestrel, only a few meters away from us. We felt sure that, as well as expressing its thanks, the bird was asking for a second helping of our healing energy, which we gladly

gave until it flew off up to the heights again. It followed us from above for the rest of our walk!

Research carried out by the HeartMath Institute demonstrates that in addition to healing potential, the heart has precognitive capacities. In one experiment, subjects looked at a computer screen while connected to both ECG and EEG equipment measuring electromagnetic activity of heart and brain. The researcher overseeing the experiment is able to see the ECG and EEG measurements, but he cannot see the research subject. The research subject presses a button and ten seconds later a randomly selected picture is shown on the screen. Some pictures are pleasant and some very unpleasant. The experiment showed that the heart registers a response four to seven seconds before the picture appears on the screen, even before the random selection takes place. With positive pictures, this precognitive response manifested as a relaxed, balanced response in the heart rhythms; with negative pictures, the precognitive response stimulated an alert reaction, a mild form of the “fight or flight” response. The brain responds similarly, a fraction of a second after the heart, although the subject remains unaware of these biological responses until the picture actually appears on the screen a few seconds later.¹⁸ This seems to suggest that the heart works psychically anticipating future events and informing the brain before the future events arrive. In other words, the huge magnetic field of the heart reaches out not only in space but also in time. And even without knowing it, we are all operating psychically from the heart.

Hand Chakras

Healers are often described as having healing hands. In the Hindu tradition touch is the sense linked to the Heart Chakra, and healing touch brings us into a deeper connection to ourselves and to our “being” nature. The qualities of all the chakras can be transmitted through the hands, but for healing to occur the dominant energy needs to be that of the Heart Chakra. Then the hands can offer nourishment and healing to all the chakras. Healers and other hands-on practitioners will often take a moment to intentionally generate a sense of “unconditional positive regard” for their clients before commencing hands-on work. This enables the healing energy of the Heart Chakra to work its miracles.

Spiritual Level

[The Heart Chakra] is the transforming crucible through which all energy must pass when going from one world to the other. That is, the spiritual energy must pass through the fire of the heart to be transformed into the lower physical energies, and the physical energies . . . must pass through the transformative fire of the heart to become spiritual energies.

BARBARA BRENNAN, *HANDS OF LIGHT*

At the spiritual level, the Heart Chakra is the gateway into the spiritual realm (see [plate 6](#)), initiating our development as spiritual beings. It serves as the entry point into the spiritual level of all the chakras, unlocking our potential to have a deeper experience of the world.

The Heart Chakra has a profound influence on the rest of the chakras. It can throw its compassionate light on the lower chakras and enable the healing of old wounds, and as the entry point into the spiritual level of the chakras, it opens the door to creative inspiration. When the Heart Chakra is flowing consciously at the spiritual level, spiritual energy entering the chakra system through the Crown Chakra increases, and this particularly affects the activity of the upper chakras. If the Heart Chakra is not in a reliably flowing state, the upper chakras will still be working, possibly very powerfully, but they will operate at the psychological level, not the deeper spiritual level.

Many spiritual traditions emphasize the importance of the heart as a gateway into higher states of being. In the Christian tradition, Jesus offered his followers the truly heart-based commandment “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” which embraces the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy—for ourselves as well as for others.

In the Buddhist tradition, the gateway for entry into heart energy is the discipline of mindfulness. Before the energies of the heart can develop, we must become attentive to what is going on inside ourselves. This mindfulness is developed through meditation practice in which practitioners are attentive to their bodily states, their sensations and emotions, and the thoughts and images that arise as they sit in meditation. As they develop

their skill in meditation, they become able to apply this technique to daily activities. The experience of witnessing body and mind allows us to understand that we are more than body and mind. If we can witness bodily states and sensations, then we are more than just a body. If we can witness psychological feelings and thoughts, then we are more than just a mind. Who or what is doing the witnessing? By learning not to identify with mind and body, we become more and more able to release negative emotions, such as fear or anger, accepting that they arise but allowing them to dissipate without linking in to old habits of negative circuitry in the mind, which would cause them to escalate and expand. By identifying with our inner witness, rather than our feelings and thoughts, we calm the negative circuitry that causes us so much suffering. By developing awareness of our witnessing, we enter the spiritual level of the Heart Chakra.

To develop and expand our heart energy, we can then practice the four heart qualities of Buddhism, called the Four Sublime Attitudes or the Four Aspects of Love: compassion, sympathetic joy, loving kindness, and equanimity.¹⁹ Compassion is our ability to feel sadness and grief with another person's pain and unhappiness. But it must be balanced by sympathetic joy, our capacity to genuinely share another's good fortune and happiness. In the same way, loving kindness, the benevolence and good will that we can extend to all living beings, must be balanced with equanimity, the capacity to accept calmly whatever life presents to us, good or bad, as we learn to grow our hearts and souls in every situation in life. Practicing these four heart qualities together within a framework of mindfulness expands the aura or, in more scientific terms, creates a coherent field environment, and this gives us the potential to experience the spiritual world directly.

Heart Chakra consciousness can become imbalanced if any of the Four Sublime Attitudes of the heart are imbalanced. Compassion for others (Lunar) needs to be balanced by compassion for the self (Solar). Sympathetic joy in the good fortune of others (Lunar) needs to be balanced with appreciation of ourselves and our own blessings (Solar). Loving kindness needs to be extended toward ourselves as well as to others, and the same holds true for equanimity. People who overemphasize compassion can become depressed unless they learn to balance that compassion with equanimity (see [plate 9](#)). People who extend loving kindness only toward

others and not toward themselves risk burnout. Sometimes this kind of imbalance indicates people who are essentially operating on the Lunar channel of the Solar Plexus Chakra—they are kind to others because they need other people to like them in order to maintain a sense of self-worth.

Equanimity can be the most difficult quality to accept and develop. Rumi lightly points the way:

*Friends, this body is a guest house.
Every morning a new guest comes running in.
Treat him not as a burden, but kindly,
For at any moment he might be gone forever.
Throughout the day new thoughts enter your breast.
Treat each thought like a guest.
A thought of sorrow prepares the way for new joy.
It scatters the yellow leaves from the branch of the
heart,
So that the new green leaves may grow.
It uproots the old pleasure,
So that a new delight may step gracefully from the
Beyond.
If the clouds and the lightning did not show their
violence,
The vine would be parched dry by the smiles of the sun.
Good fortune and ill become guests in your heart;
Like planets they rotate from house to house.*

ADAPTED FROM RUMI'S "GUEST HOUSE," TRANSLATED BY
JAMES WHELAN

The word *Tantra* means “system” or “doctrine,” although the word also means “to weave,” and ancient Tantric traditions involved many different types of spiritual practices in their varied systems of weaving the chakras into a spiritual unity. These practices included rituals, visualization,

chanting, and movements such as yoga postures. Some Tantric sects engaged in ritual sexual practices designed to activate the powerful kundalini energy coiled in the Base Chakra, the essential sexual life force energy.²⁰ For the Tantric partners, transcending orgasm allowed the kundalini energy to rise up through the chakras, purifying them each in turn, drawn by the deeply spiritual love energy of the Heart Chakra. The kundalini would then move through the upper chakras to the pure divine energy of the Crown Chakra, transforming and spiritualizing the two participants. The Heart Chakra, with its capacity for unconditional love of self and other, is what makes this transformation possible.

The Kabbalah's mystical diagram, the Tree of Life, has ten centers, called *sephirot*, meaning "emanations," and three columns (see [fig. I.7](#)). In some interpretations of this system, the Tree of Life is mapped onto the body and seen as a path of spiritual development that has similarities to the path of development through the chakras and the three nadis (Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna). Though there are similarities between the Tree of Life and the chakra system, there are also many differences, one being that the Tree of Life is a sacred diagram of the universe that can be applied to many different situations, whereas the chakras are understood to be actual energy centers in the body, from which the map of the chakras is drawn.

In another parallelism between these two esoteric philosophies, the Kabbalah system recognizes different worlds that interpenetrate each other. In some interpretations, they are called the physical, psychological, spiritual, and divine worlds.²¹ These worlds are similar to the three realms of the chakra system, especially if you take into account that the earth realm of the chakra system combines the physical and psychological worlds of the Kabbalah.

On the Tree of Life, the central sephirah is called Tiferet, which means "beauty," and when mapped onto the body it is equivalent to the Heart Chakra. Tiferet is said to be the entry point into the spiritual world of Kabbalah, just as the Heart Chakra is the entry point into the spiritual realm of the chakras. Tiferet can be described as a double-sided mirror, reflecting downward, compassionately witnessing the lower self, and reflecting upward, receiving the wisdom and inspiration from the truer self of the spiritual and divine worlds. In a similar way, we recognize the double gaze of the Heart Chakra. We can look compassionately downward to our

wounded self, but we also need to listen to the call of our higher self. For the latter, we can turn to the entreaty of a simple Christian hymn: “Lift up your hearts! We lift them, Lord, to Thee.”

At the spiritual level of the Heart Chakra, when we look upward, we experience a sense of connection and communion with the higher creative self of the upper chakras. The downward flow of energy from the Crown Chakra increases as the Heart Chakra expands, bringing intuition and inspiration more powerfully into the upper chakras, which then function at the deeper spiritual level, giving us the potential for blissful emotions, states of grace, and ultimately the possibility of becoming aware of the divine energy of the Crown Chakra.

The developmental psychologist Abraham Maslow called these blissful emotional states “peak experiences,” a term that has since entered our common language. In a peak experience, we feel completely harmonious and unified, flowing effortlessly with what is happening. Peak experiences can happen in many situations, such as during sport, creative work, giving birth, making love, or spiritual practice. From a chakra perspective, they are an example of the Heart Chakra moving into psychic and spiritual levels, and sometimes involving the upper chakras, too.

As the Heart Chakra flows more deeply, all the lower chakras start to function at a deeper spiritual level. The inner animal of the Base Chakra is honored as the body becomes seen as the temple of the soul. The inner child of the Sacral Chakra is able to playfully delight in the simple pleasures of life. The Solar Plexus Chakra, with its practical thinking and discriminating skills, becomes the practical servant of spirit, embracing the loving values of the Heart Chakra and listening to the wisdom of the inspired upper chakras.

The spiritual level of the Heart Chakra is where we experience a deepening of the awareness of our true self. We feel blissfully at one with the world and in harmony with the abundant beneficent energy of the universe. Living from our Heart Chakra, we feel deeply the state of well-being encapsulated in the words of the English mystic Anchoress Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–1416) in *Revelations of Divine Love*, “but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner (of) thing shall be well.”²²

Developmental Psychology and the Heart Chakra

From the perspective of the chakras, developmental psychology becomes very interesting beginning with the Heart Chakra and moving upward through the Throat Chakra, Eye Chakra, and Crown Chakra. At these levels, consciousness is not solely a psychological phenomenon but also a psychic and spiritual one, especially when peak experiences are involved. For this reason, for the Heart Chakra and the upper chakras, we'll talk about parallels between the chakra system and developmental psychology not as part of the discussion of the psychological level, as we did for the three lower chakras, but as a freestanding discussion following our investigation of all the levels.

Authentic Consciousness

With the dual paths that Jenny Wade has suggested for Achievement and Affiliative Consciousness, the two stages that are associated with the Solar Plexus Chakra (see [here](#)), it is possible for a person at the stage of Achievement Consciousness to move to Affiliative Consciousness, and vice versa, with the hemisphere of the brain that expresses dominance switching from one side to the other. Alternatively, a person can move directly from either Achievement or Affiliative Consciousness to Authentic Consciousness, bringing the nondominant hemisphere of the brain into balance in this transition.

Authentic Consciousness involves whole-brain thinking, in which both hemispheres have measurably similar EEG patterns. Many developmental theorists consider this level of consciousness to be the final stage of psychological development, although some have posited further stages. Wade points out that research into these higher stages of consciousness is less precise than in the lower stages because only a very small percentage of people achieve Authentic Consciousness or higher stages. They are beyond the general level of the culture, and so research populations are very small.²³

Authentic Consciousness has parallels with Heart Chakra consciousness, such as being self-aware and empathic toward oneself and others, able to express appreciation and detach from negative emotions more easily, fully embracing being human with all its ups and downs.

But it also describes the consciousness of the Throat and Eye Chakras by expressing qualities such as a commitment to self-development for its own sake, devoting oneself to discovering and fulfilling one's life's purpose, and an ability to combine intuitive, holistic, and symbolic thinking with rational, linear, analytic thinking. When the Heart Chakra is flowing well, these upper chakras flourish, which dramatically affects consciousness, and this flourishing seems to be what Wade is describing as Authentic Consciousness.

Abraham Maslow called this stage self-actualization, and it is usually categorized as the final stage in his hierarchy of needs, although later he added a higher stage called self-transcendence²⁴ (see [plate 7](#)). Maslow believed that it is possible to have peak experiences at any stage of development, but that they become more common at the self-actualization stage.

We'll talk about the correlations between Authentic Consciousness and the Throat and Eye Chakras in our discussions of those chakras in chapters 5 and 6. For a full list of the qualities that Wade associates with Authentic Consciousness, see [here](#).

Cultural Considerations

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace . . .

JOHN LENNON, “IMAGINE”

In our scientific world, we acknowledge the evolution of Earth and all of its forms of life. Increasingly, we also acknowledge the evolution of human consciousness and human society. Just as the world has developed physically, so the human mind has developed in consciousness, and as it develops, it creates different social environments to support that development. In chapter 3, I suggested that today the West is dominated by the ideology of Achievement Consciousness, which is on the Solar Pingala channel of the Solar Plexus Chakra. This ideology is challenged by the ideology of Affiliative Consciousness on the Lunar Ida channel of the Solar

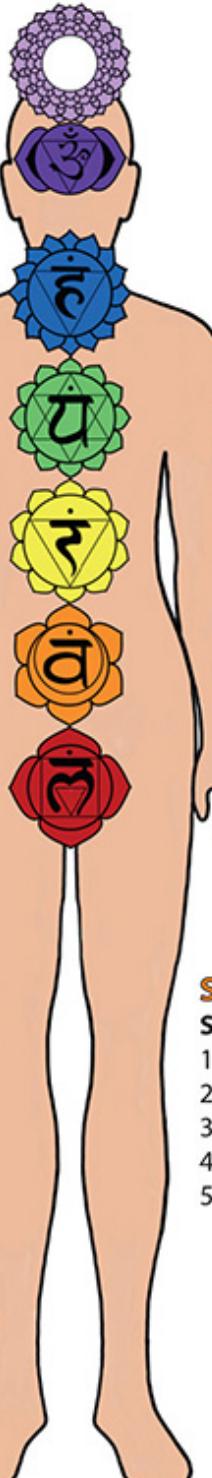
Plexus Chakra, and these competing mind-sets create the adversarial politics of our time, with the left and right wings of the political spectrum vying for votes from the populace.

Chakra Yantras

Crown Chakra

Sahasrara = Thousandfold

1. Pineal gland
2. Maturity
3. The whole self
4. Knowing
5. Receives spiritual energy
Gateway to Divine Realm



Eye or Brow Chakra

Ajna = Perceive; Command

1. Top of spine (AO joint)
2. Maturity
3. The creative thinker
View of life
4. Clairvoyance
5. Inspirational thinking
Manifesting intention

Throat Chakra

Vishuddha = Purified; Virtuous

- 1 C7/T1
2. Maturity
3. The creative performer
Communication; self-expression
4. Clairaudience; telepathy
5. Uncovering the true self
Finding one's true calling

Solar Plexus Chakra

Manipura = City of Jewels

1. T12/L1
2. Young adulthood
3. The inner champion and inner critic
Practical thinking; self-worth
4. Moves energy; psychic protection
5. Servant of spirit

Base or Root Chakra

Muladhara = Root Support

1. Tip of coccyx
2. Conception, birth, infancy
3. The inner animal; survival
4. Grounding
5. Receives Earth energy
Gateway to Earth Realm

Heart Chakra

Anahata = Unwounded

1. T6/T7
2. Maturity
3. The inner healer
Love and acceptance
4. Healing; loss of boundaries
5. Witnessing
Gateway to Spiritual Realm

Sacral Chakra

Svadhisthana = Home of the Self

1. Top of sacrum (S1)
2. Childhood
3. The inner child; pleasure center
4. Clairsentience
5. Karmic patterns

1 = Location 2 = Stage of Life 3 = Psychological Level 4 = Psychic Level 5 = Spiritual Level

Plate 1. Chakra yantras with correspondences at different levels of effect



Plate 2. The colors of the chakras and aura, as used in guided visualization

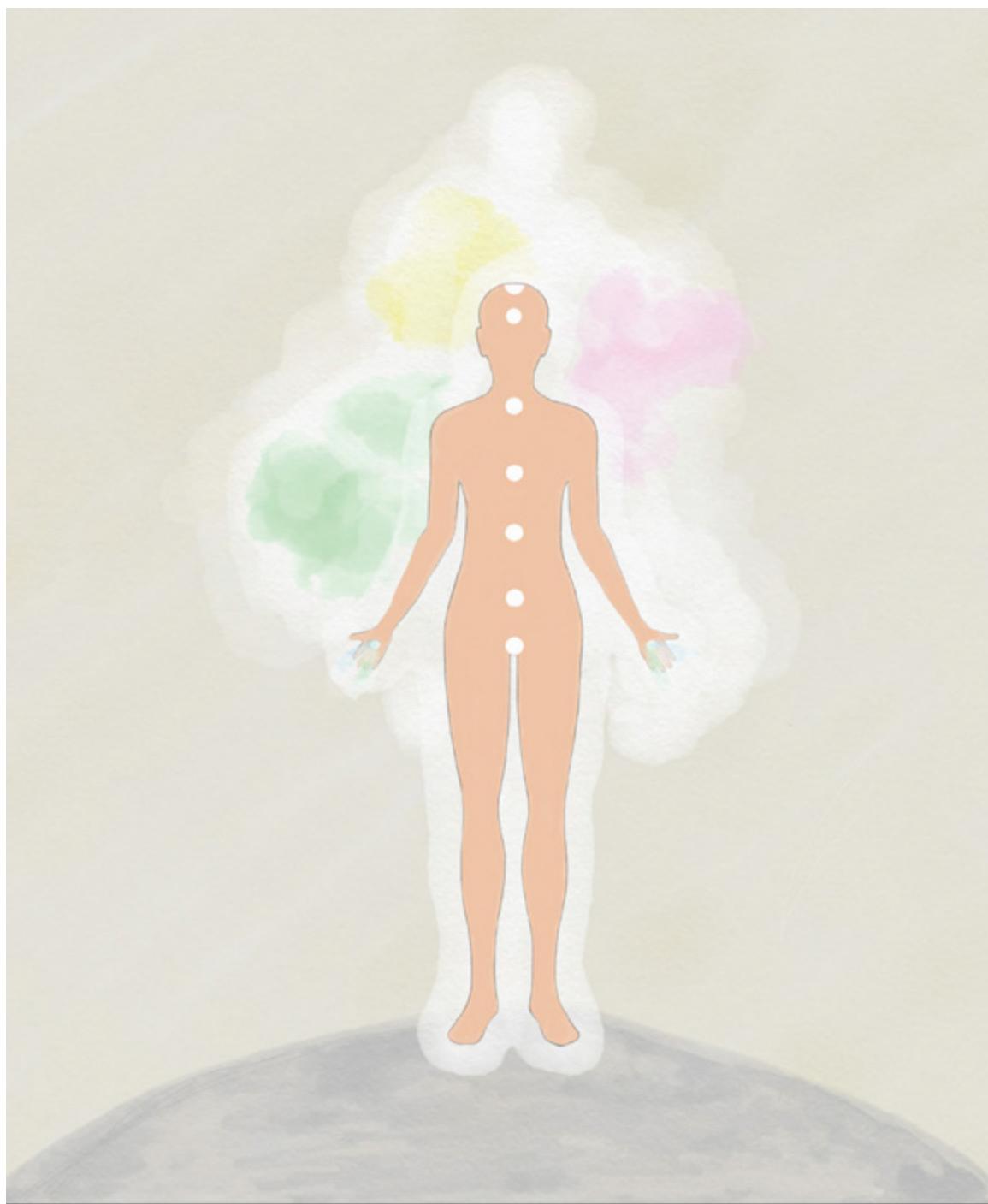


Plate 3. Example of an aura as seen by a clairvoyant

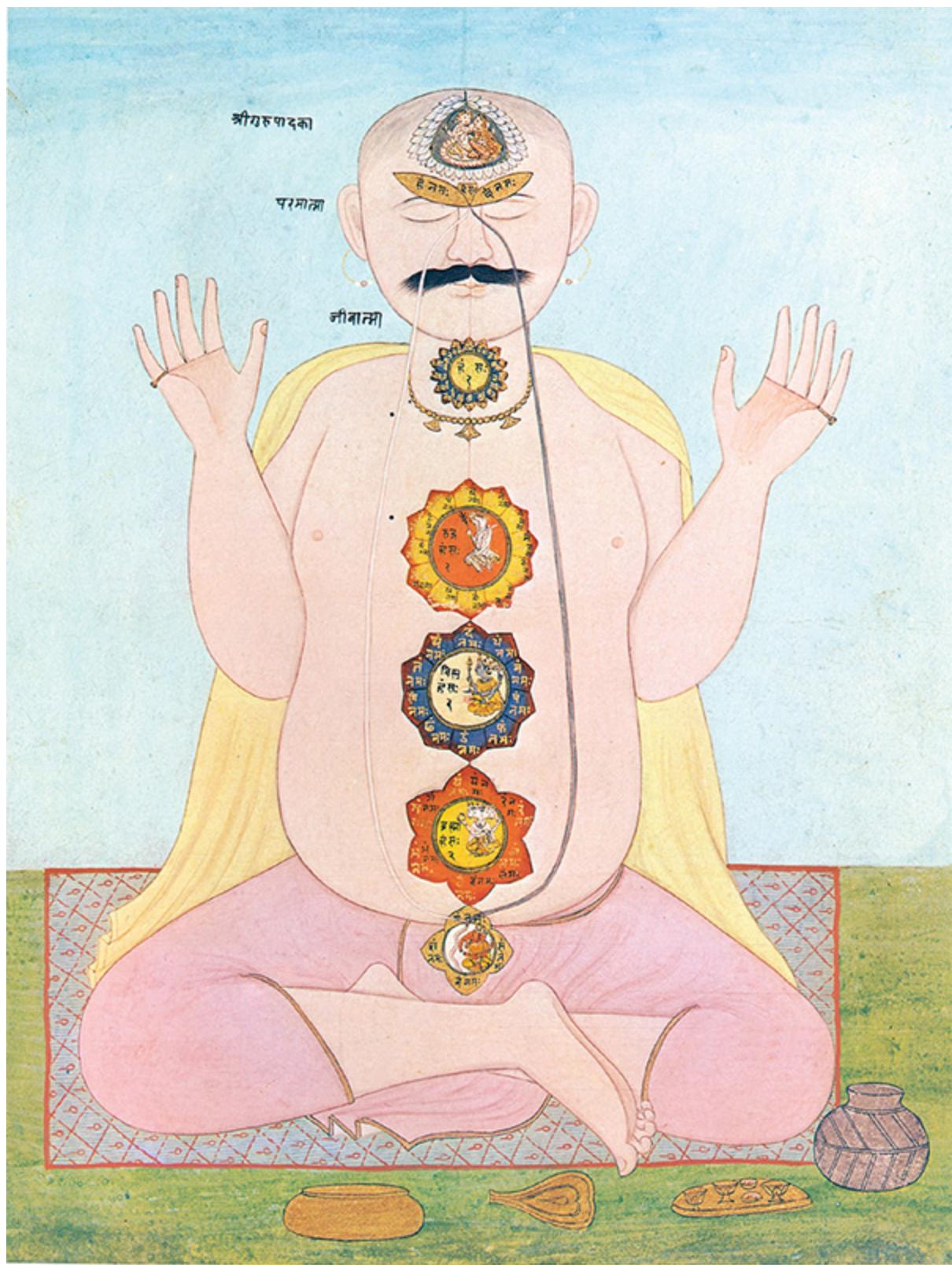
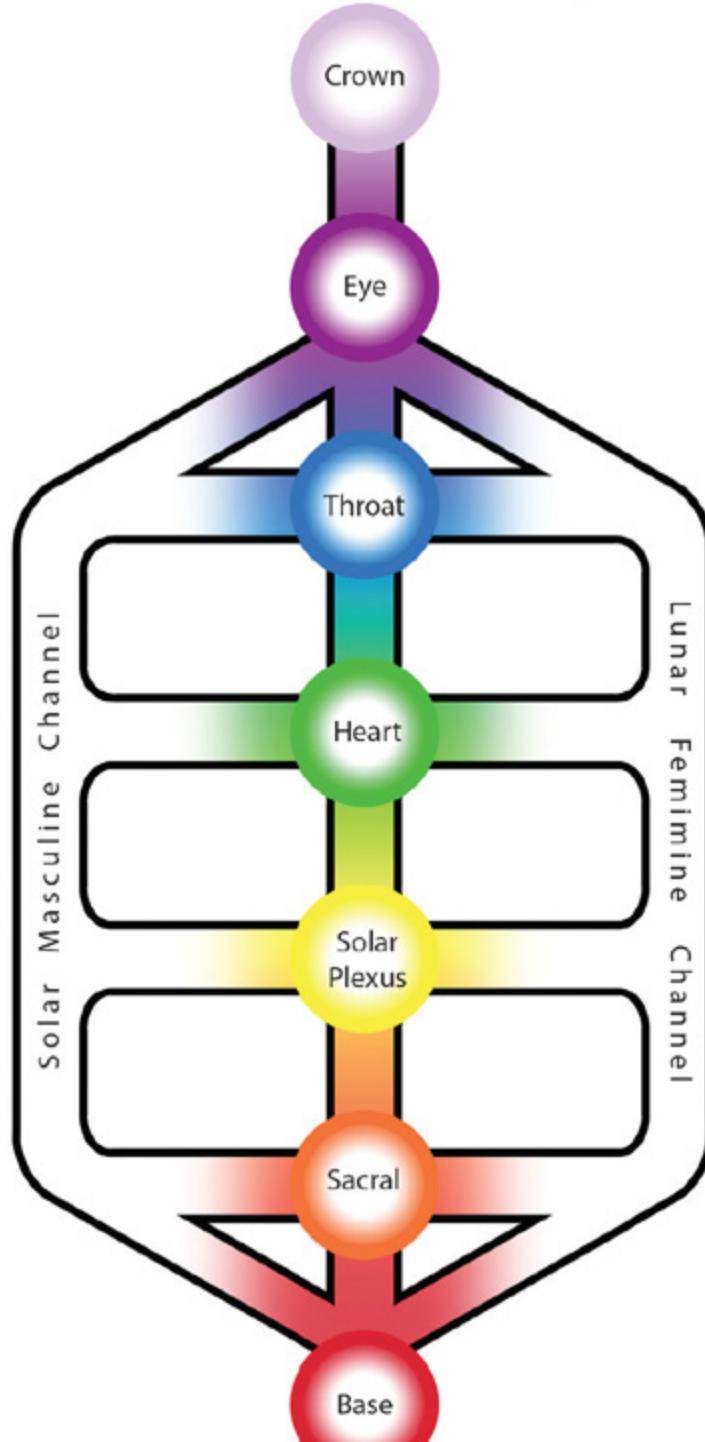


Plate 4. System of chakras and nadis, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India, circa 1820

Photo: John Webb from *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy* by Philip Rawson (Thames & Hudson, 1973).

Masculine Shiva Formless Energy



Feminine Shakti Manifesting Energy

Plate 5. Masculine-feminine as vertical-horizontal polarities in the chakra system



Plate 6. The three realms and the chakra gateways (the earth realm in red, the spiritual realm in green, and the divine realm in violet)

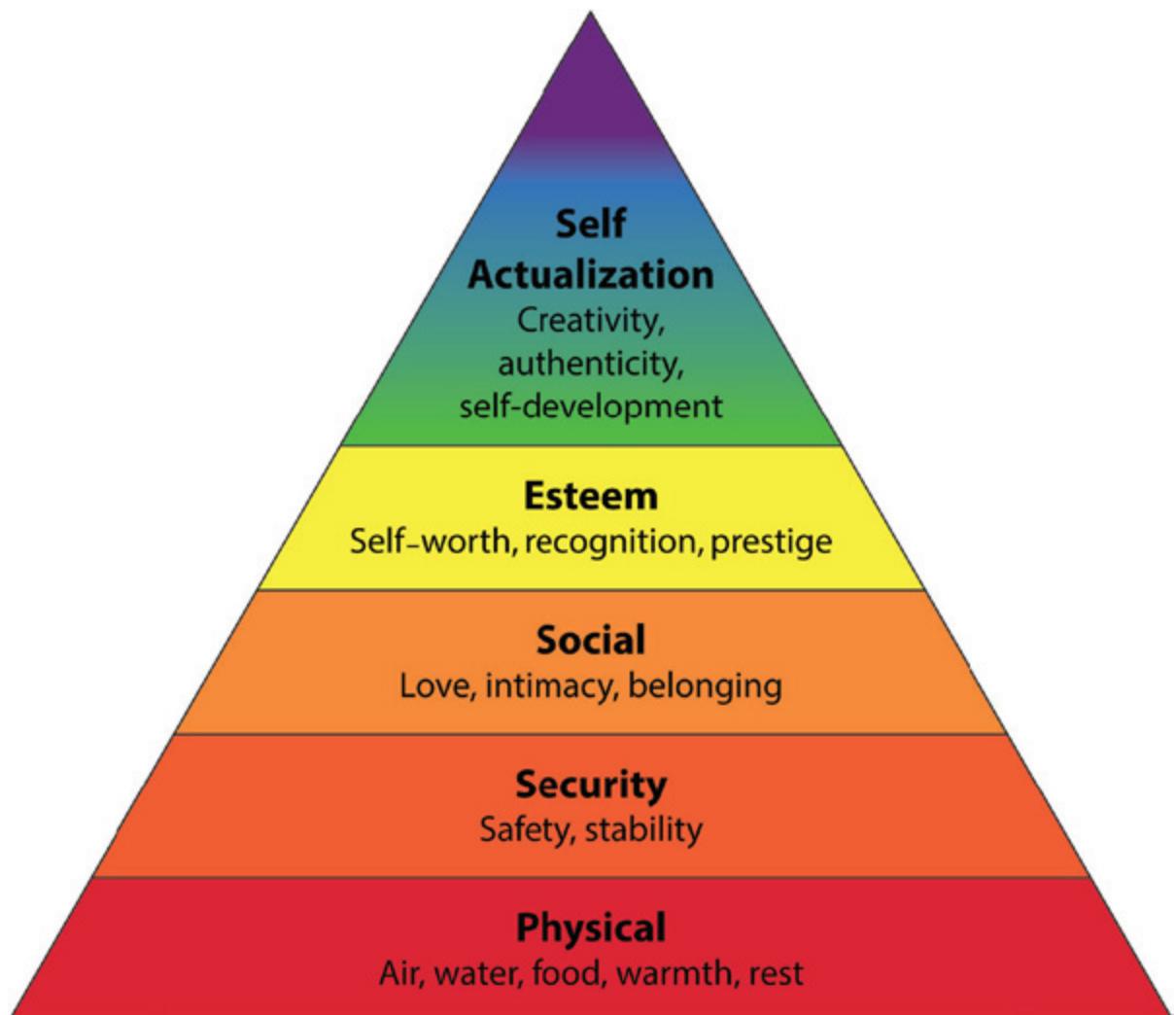


Plate 7. Maslow's hierarchy of needs: the colors of the chakra system showing correspondences with Maslow's stages

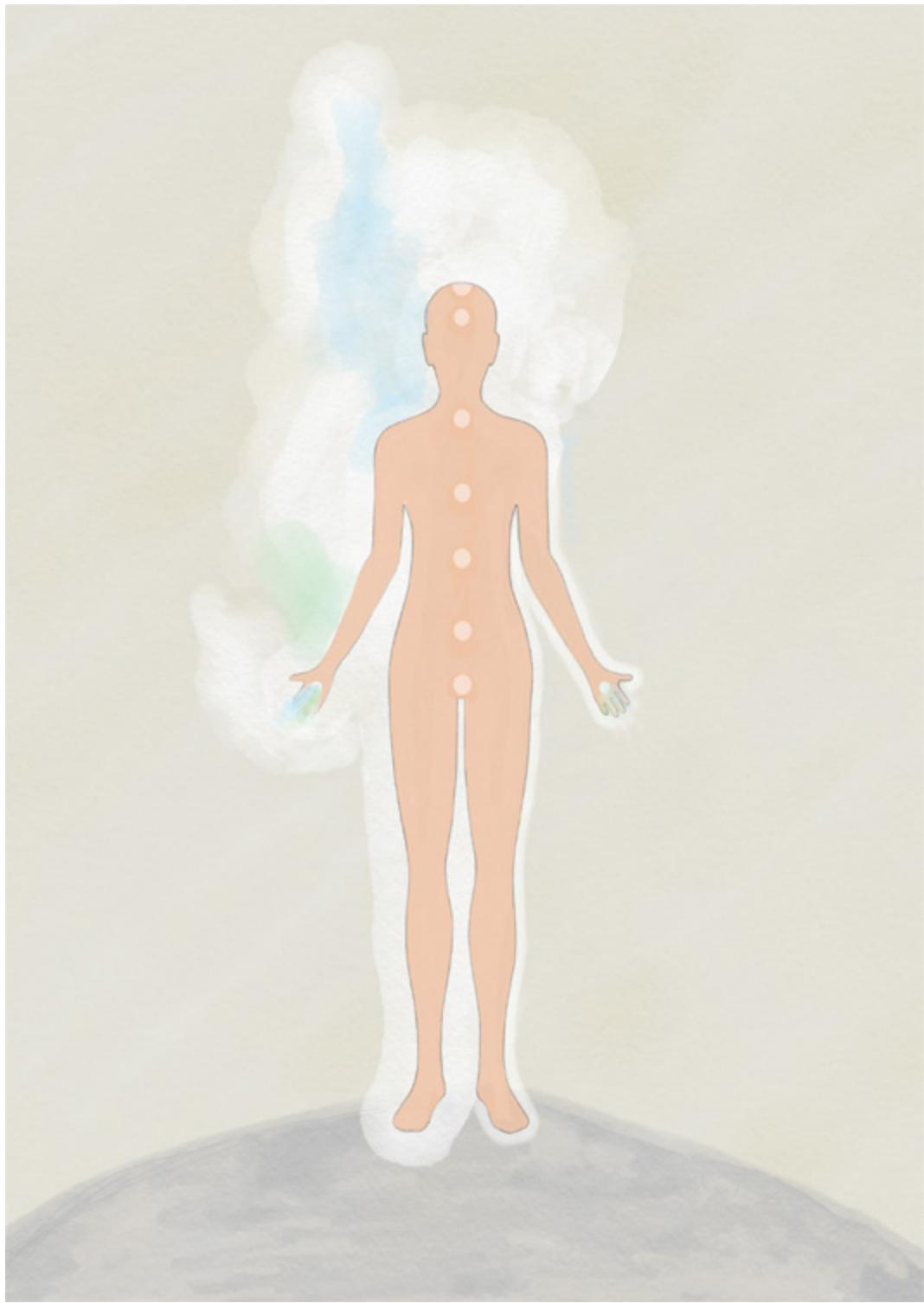


Plate 8. Distorted aura showing an example of partial ungroundedness

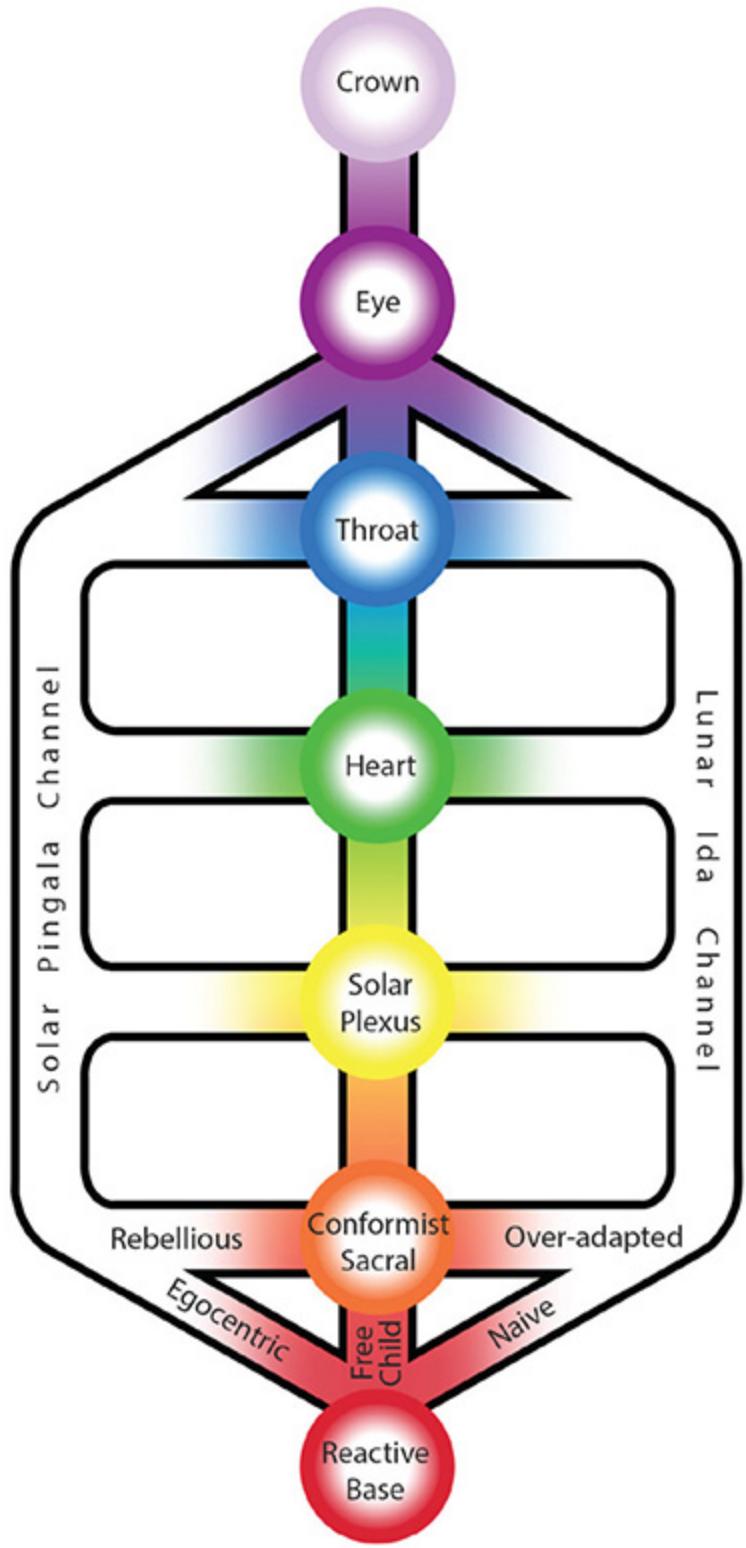


Plate 9. Wade's stages of development linked to Base, Sacral, and Solar Plexus Chakras; child states of

transactional analysis linked to Sacral Chakra; Solar and Lunar influences linked to Heart, Throat, and Eye Chakras

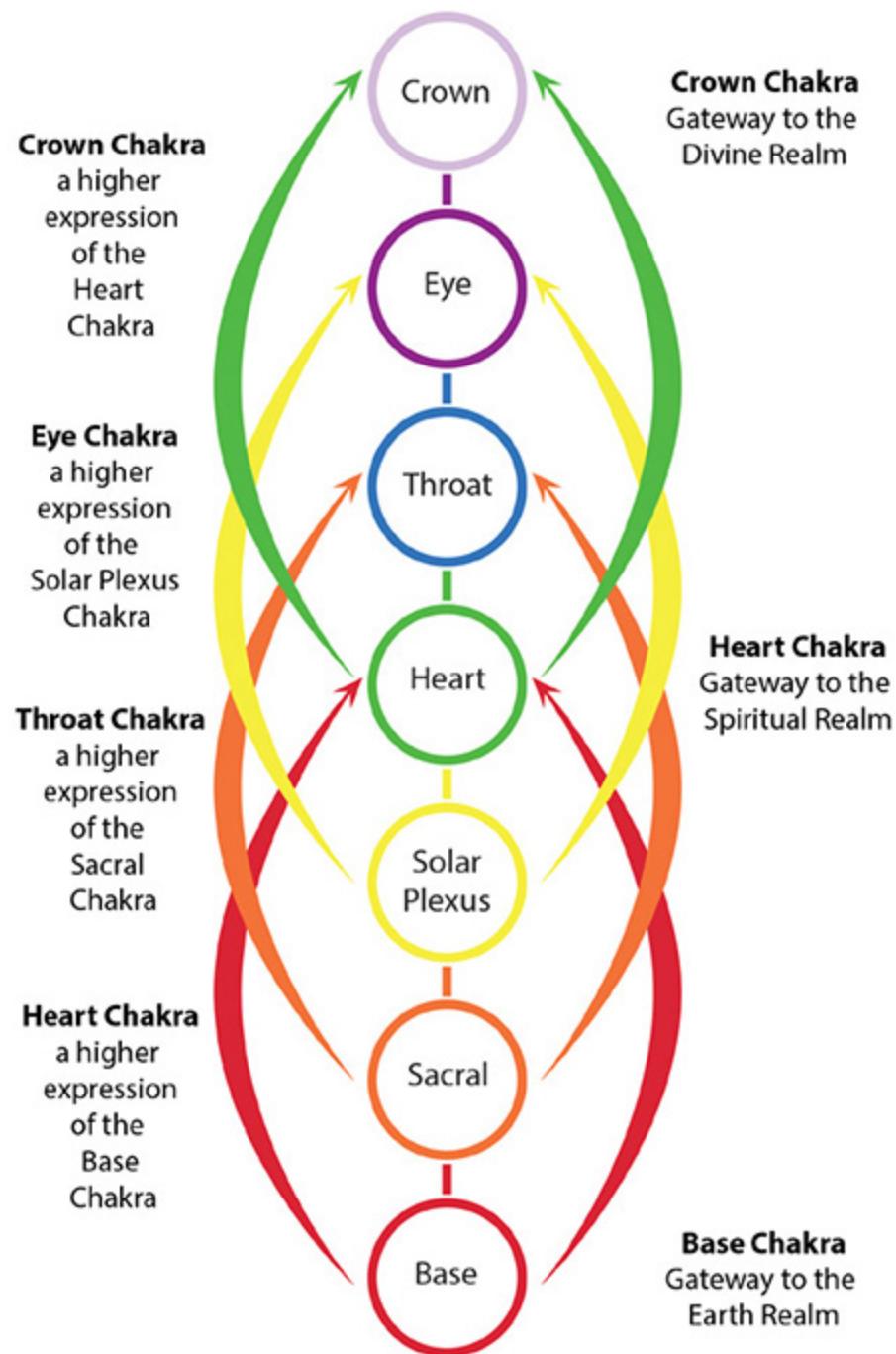


Plate 10. Upper chakras as higher expressions of the lower chakras



Plate 11. Throat Chakra as seen by a clairvoyant

From *The Chakras* by C. W. Leadbeater (Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), plate 4. This image was reproduced by permission of Quest Books, the imprint of the Theosophical Publishing House (Questbooks.com).

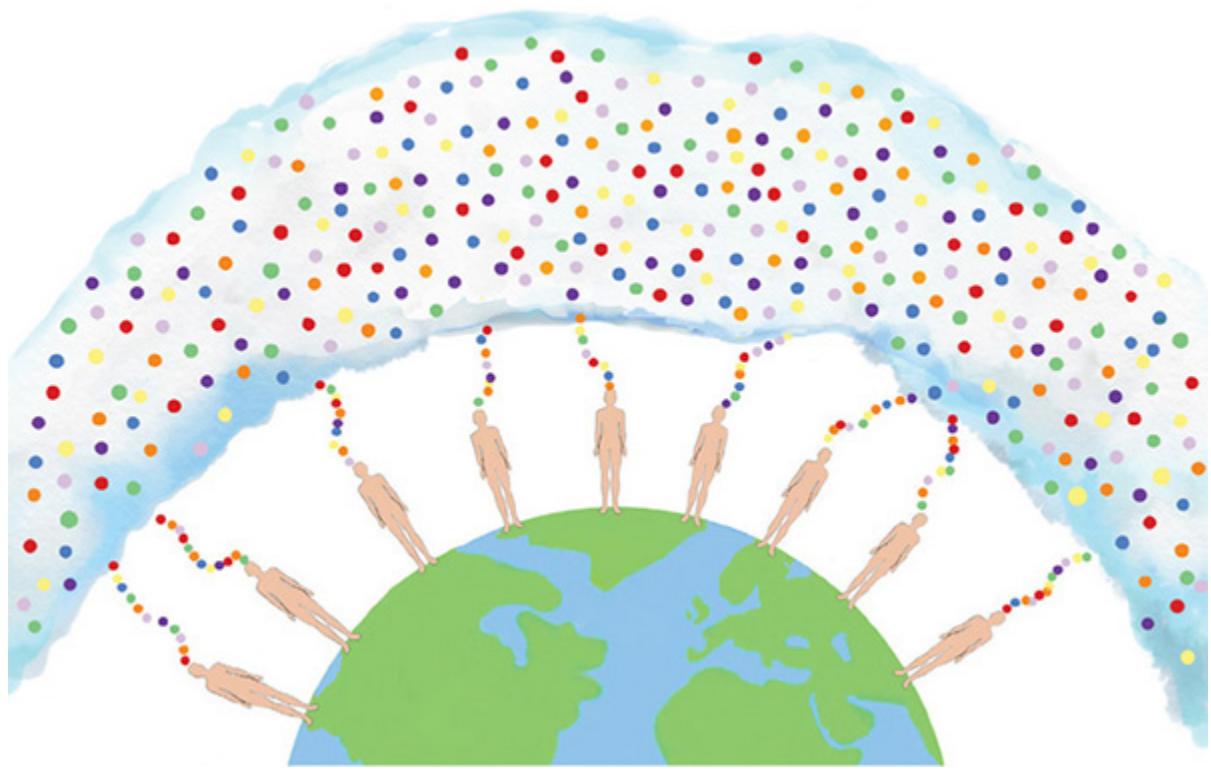


Plate 12. The Universal Mind



Plate 13. Sri Yantra

Silkscreen print by Daniel Conrad under the direction of
Harish Johari.

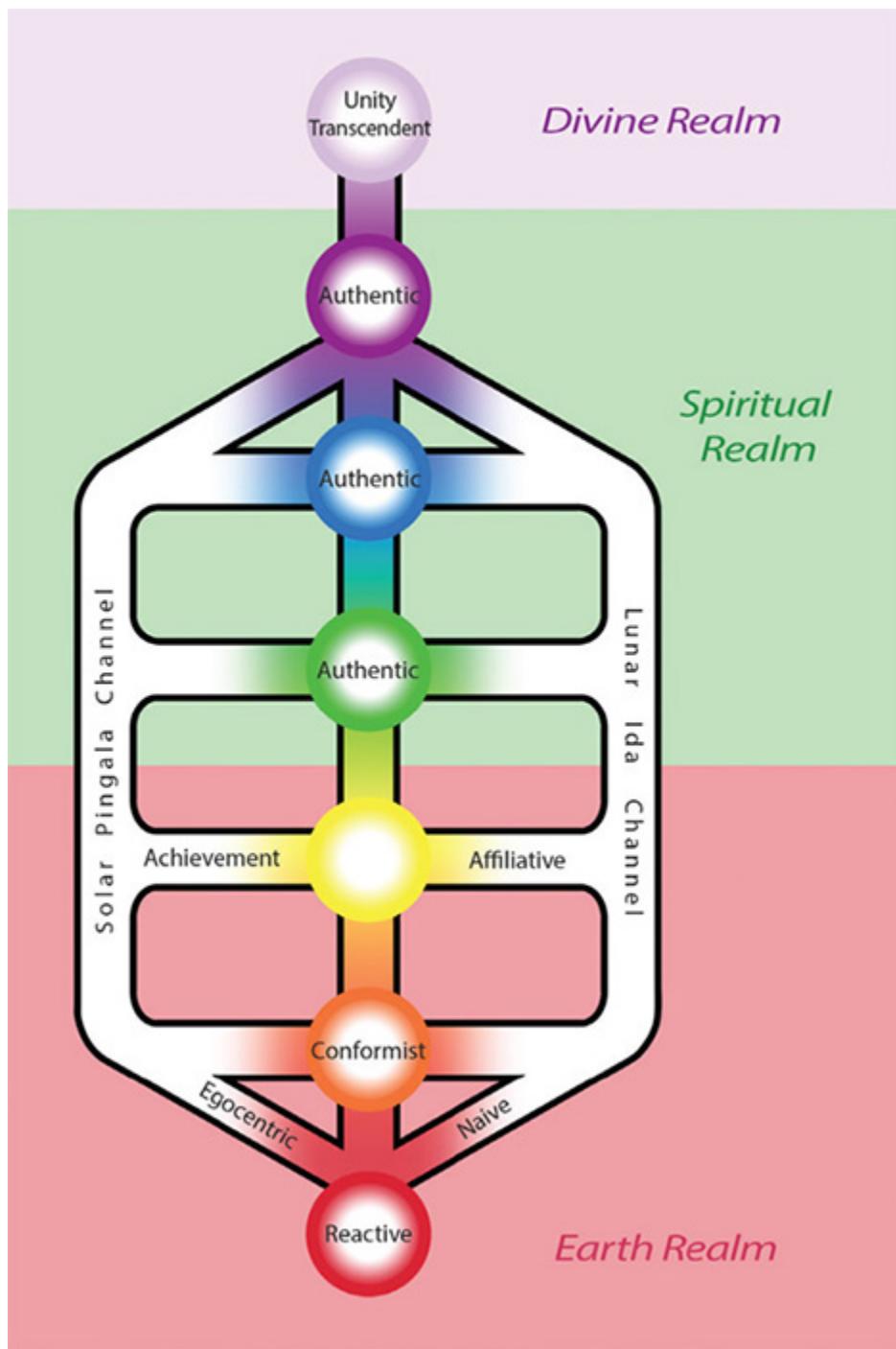


Plate 14. Wade's stages of consciousness shown on the map of the chakras

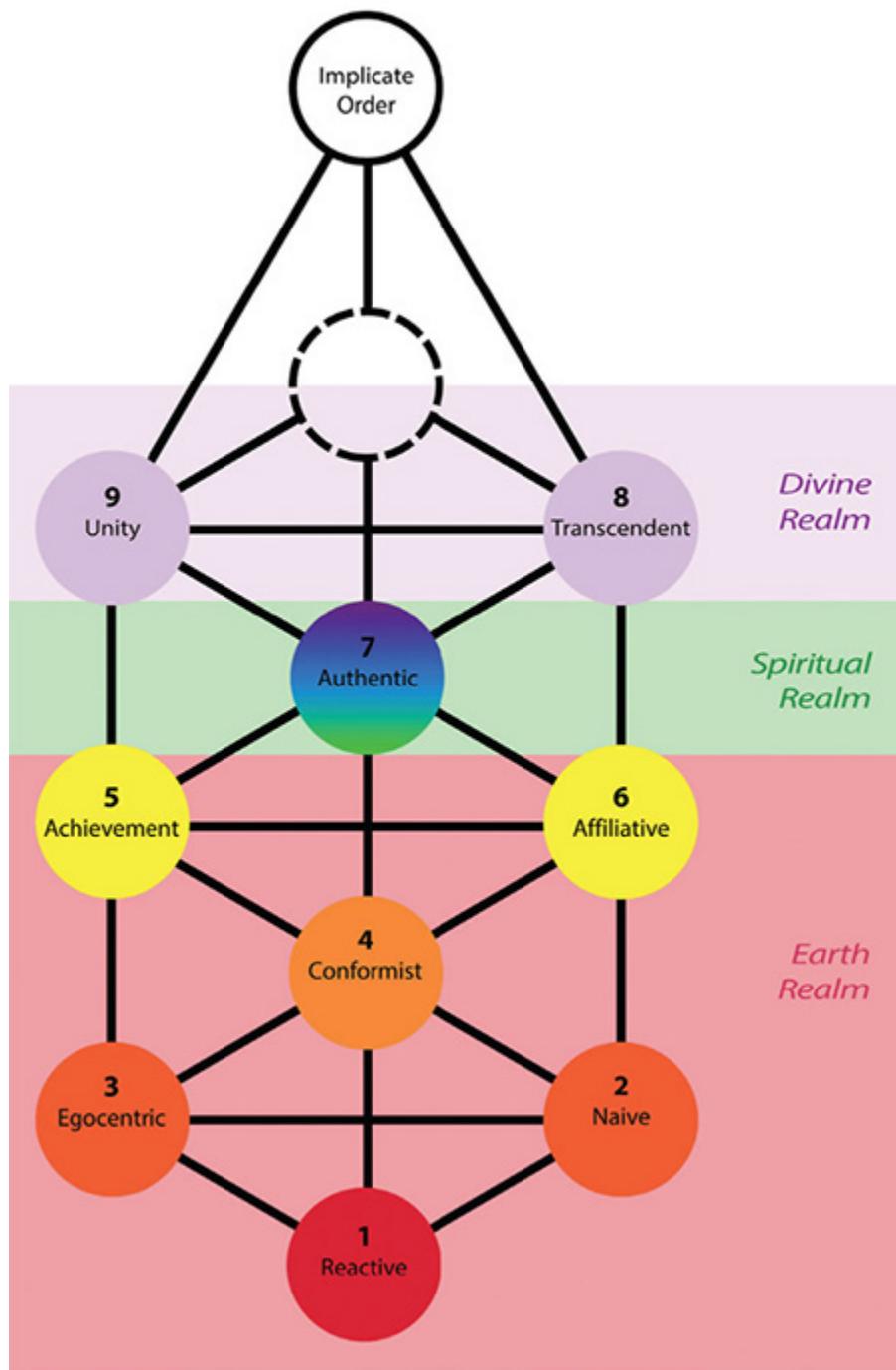


Plate 15. The colors of the chakra system shown on the diagram of Wade's stages of consciousness

If humanity as a whole was able to evolve its current consciousness, the adversarial politics of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness would find balance in Heart Chakra consciousness. Caring for all members of society

through free education and welfare would be balanced by encouraging individual talents and skills, allowing each person's unique creativity to flourish. Future-oriented progressive thinking would be balanced by past-oriented conservative thinking. In this way we would transcend the oppositional individualism of the Solar Plexus Chakra while integrating its positive values. Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently expressed this idea:

Communism forgets that life is individual. Capitalism forgets that life is social. And the kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of capitalism, but in a higher synthesis. It is found in a higher synthesis that combines the truths of both.²⁵

King spoke these words as part of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In the 1970s the women's movement was forming a new sisterhood, advocating greater equality for women. Both movements were taking steps toward greater Heart Chakra consciousness.

There have been other cultural trends suggesting that some parts of modern society are slowly moving toward Heart Chakra consciousness. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Western esoteric movement brought Eastern spiritual ideology into our scientific culture, and new seeds of our spiritual connectedness were sown. During the 1960s, the hippie movement preached and tried to live a philosophy of love, encapsulated in the famous slogan "make love, not war." John Lennon's song "Imagine," quoted above, was one of the iconic creations of an artistic and social movement toward a more heart-based society, led by the rise of pop music, with songs such as the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love." At the same time, growing revelations about human-induced climate change led to the initiation of an environmental movement, with an emphasis on our connection with the Earth and our need to take care of it.²⁶ These Heart Chakra ideas of loving connection with each other, with Earth and all its creatures, were then echoed by the New Age movement of the later twentieth century and are still one of the influences in society today.

Other new and transformative developments are still happening, and they are definitively not a part of the "spiritual fringe" of society. With the arrival of the World Wide Web and the new mobile technology that supports

it, we become less and less able to ignore our connection with the rest of the world. Global consciousness, which is the domain of the Heart Chakra, is being thrust upon us, inviting us to rethink some of our fundamental ideas about life and society. The internet makes it possible for every human being in the world to be connected into a network, and although this technology is not yet widespread in less developed countries, the realization of this potential comes closer every day. The “networked individual,” who has access to an infinite amount of information, who within seconds can interact through social media with other networked individuals on the other side of the globe, makes the spiritual claim that we are all connected gain substance in the physical world. These physical changes sow the seeds of a new understanding of humanity and an expansion of human consciousness.

Another surprising aspect of these technological developments is that many of them have been freely gifted to humanity, another sign of Heart Chakra development. Sir Timothy Berners-Lee, the creator of the World Wide Web, tweeted “This is for everyone” on stage at the opening ceremony for the 2012 Olympics in London, and that message was then spelled out by a display of lights spread throughout the audience. The internet spawned organizations like Wikipedia, which offers an encyclopedia created freely by humans for humans, and funded by donations. As consumers, we can very cheaply, if not freely, access abundant information about almost anything; we can forward information, without printing or posting, to anyone on our network; we can open up social media accounts and interact with colleagues, friends, and complete strangers. This is turning us all into global citizens and encouraging waves of global collaborative enterprise.

Of course, new technology always holds negative potential outcomes. For example, Google, Apple, Facebook, and other global internet giants are making millions but often not contributing fairly through taxation, and there are fears about the dangers of surveillance and mass manipulation as we innocently give these companies access to our data. Social media can allow false information, abuse, and acts of hatred and violence to be circulated—quite the opposite of Heart Chakra consciousness. Another alarming possibility is that while we are able to connect globally, more and more people are losing the face-to-face close connection with their partners and friends because they spend such a large part of their lives in front of a screen. The networked individual who spends many hours on social media

with “friends” from all over the world but fails to build close relationships at home is demonstrating an imbalanced consciousness, possibly driven by an addictive Sacral Chakra tendency or a drive to prove him- or herself in the Solar Plexus Chakra. Heart Chakra consciousness involves integrating and caring for all aspects of the self. Our need for global reach must be balanced with our need for friendship and intimacy.

From a positive perspective, these new developments can be seen as opening the door to a global society, which encourages Heart Chakra consciousness. In this new global society, everyone in the world would receive the important necessities of life and have the time and resources to develop their individual creative gifts. The whole of humanity would learn to take care of themselves and the planet with all its biodiversity. We are only at the beginning of this potential transition, and it is marked by much conflict and crisis. The overriding global crisis is the environmental one of potentially catastrophic climate change. Unless the human race can act globally to counteract climate change, we are in danger of creating our own extinction.

Charles Eisenstein, in *The Ascent of Humanity* (2007), describes the historical situation we are living through as humanity moving from adolescence to adulthood. During childhood and adolescence, we play, explore, and develop our gifts. We receive from the Earth and from those who love and care for us. In adulthood, we have to learn to love in a different way. Instead of just receiving love, like children, we learn how to give love to another, to love and take care of others, and this is what we are being called to do in the current environmental and world crises. He traces the evolution of civilization and suggests that the human race could now be in the process of moving to a new global civilization, having, during humanity’s adolescence, developed all the skills we need to take care of each other and the planet.

Eisenstein’s depiction of humanity’s evolutionary transition describes the transition from the young adult’s Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness to mature Heart Chakra consciousness that we are living through today. Times of transition are always challenging, and while some people welcome the potential of the changes, others find the changes frightening and long for a return to the “good old days.” In chakra terms, this is the cry of the Sacral Chakra, wanting the security of family, culture, and tradition. Climate

change, terrorism, wars, mass migration, and global pandemics are having profound effects on traditional ways of life. From a societal perspective, there are real fears and dangers connected with abandoning everything to globalism. What the outcome of today's challenges will be is unknown. Will the human race evolve to global Heart Chakra consciousness, or will we revert to Sacral Chakra consciousness, erecting physical and mental fences in an attempt to keep out the global threats?

In many spiritual communities around the world, people are learning to live a more heart-based life, bringing into the world a different kind of spiritual consciousness than that of the traditional religions. One example is the Scottish community in Findhorn, which has more than five hundred people involved in realizing its vision:

The Findhorn Foundation is a dynamic experiment where everyday life is guided by the inner voice of spirit, where we work in co-creation with the intelligence of nature and take inspired action towards our vision of a better world. We share our learning and way of life in experiential workshops, conferences and events that take place within a thriving community and ecovillage.²⁷

A genuine transition to Heart Chakra consciousness requires that we learn how to globally cooperate to take care of our world, but it also requires us to integrate the collective lower chakra needs of humanity. Globalism must be balanced by localism. Our collective Heart Chakra needs to take care of our collective inner child, who wants the positive feelings of belonging to the local community, culture, and country. This collective identity is being severely challenged by the transitions we are going through, and unless we find ways of alleviating these problems, we may not make the transitions successfully. In a globalized world, if different cultural traditions are not valued, this would mean that the lower chakras are not integrated. On the other hand, with Heart Chakra consciousness, the globalized world would become a place where difference and the diversity of individuals and of communities, of culture, religion, and tradition, are respected and honored.

At the very least, we can “take heart” in knowing that the human race has the potential to evolve to Heart Chakra consciousness and leave behind

the ruthless power struggles and conflict that are expressions of lower chakra consciousness. With that possibility in mind, all we can do is contribute as best we can to that evolutionary process.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Healing a Broken Heart

Angela was a sensitive and artistic single mother in her thirties. She came to see me because her partner had ended their relationship three months ago, leaving her feeling devastated. She had cried every day since it had happened, and friends had told her that I might be able to help.

After we had gone through the essential questions about health and wellbeing that I ask all clients before we start work, Angela lay on my therapy table and I began putting hands on her feet and sensing the energy flows in her chakras. The first thing I was drawn to was her Solar Plexus Chakra, which in my notes I described as “screaming for help.” It felt as though a burning vortex of energy there was stopping the energy flow through the rest of the chakra system. There was very little energy flowing in the Base and Sacral Chakras or in the Heart Chakra and the upper chakras. This left her feeling very ungrounded and unresourced. As well as being heartbroken, Angela was suffering from the humiliation of being rejected; her sense of self-worth had been torn apart, and this was expressing itself energetically through the Solar Plexus Chakra. Before I could help her frozen Heart Chakra to reengage, I needed to help her Solar Plexus Chakra move out of its self-destructive downward spiral.

I put one hand underneath her back and one above, in the Solar Plexus area, and after a little while I could feel the hot, disturbed energy calming down. At the same time, I began

talking to Angela about how the consciousness related to this area of the body expresses one's sense of identity and self-worth. I asked her to think positive thoughts about herself (as outlined in the exercise devoted to finding your inner champion; see [here](#)). Slowly the energy in this chakra became calmer and cooler, flowing more comfortably, which increased the energy flow throughout her chakra system.

I then encouraged the energy flow from her third chakra downward to her first and second chakras and into her legs and feet, explaining the consciousness of these chakras as I did so. Some icy cold energy came flowing out of her Sacral Chakra, and then it warmed up and flowed more smoothly, creating a more flowing connection down through the lower chakras. This helped Angela feel more grounded and centered, which is important to establish before moving into the higher chakras.

Now I turned to her heartbroken Heart Chakra, working to connect it with the energy flow from the Solar Plexus Chakra. The Heart Chakra energy was very held and overprotected, so I worked to release it, explaining that this was her inner healer, who would bring compassion and love to her woundedness. As the Heart Chakra became a little more free and open, Angela began to sob and shake a little, which helped the release and allowed a calmer, more self-accepting energy to flow through her.

I ended the session with work in her aura to balance the changes that had occurred. Before she left, I suggested that she work with one or two of the exercises I outlined in the chakra therapy section of the Solar Plexus Chakra chapter (see [here](#).).

I saw Angela a week later, and she told me that she was feeling a little calmer and hadn't been crying quite so much as she had before. Her Solar Plexus Chakra was stronger, but there was still a lot of work to do to strengthen the whole chakra system. The next several sessions focused on healing the wounding of the three lower chakras and connecting

those energy flows to the inner healer in the Heart Chakra. As well as the current trauma of losing her partner, we looked at the childhood wounds she might still be carrying and then at ways she could nourish the Base and Sacral Chakras. Angela began working with a therapist, which helped her understand and integrate her inner child, and that in turn supported the energy work that I was doing. As Angela learned to accept and appreciate her multifaceted consciousness, caring for her inner animal, nourishing her inner child, and strengthening her inner champion, the Heart Chakra naturally expanded and flowed more strongly.

When the Heart Chakra becomes stronger and the lower chakras begin to heal and flow more freely, a person's energy undergoes a big shift. It then becomes possible to turn the gaze of the Heart Chakra upward to the upper chakras. When this happened for Angela, her creative energies began to reawaken. By the tenth session she was feeling happier and ready to move on with her life. She had started writing poems and songs and thinking of ways in which she could express herself more fully. Her energy system was now flowing well, and she had the self-awareness and resources to help herself stay in a grounded and balanced state.

Nourishing the Heart Chakra

The exercises in earlier chapters, which were designed to nourish the lower chakras, have all involved the Heart Chakra because in them we have been witnessing our multifaceted self. The Heart Chakra, our inner healer, is at the center of all therapeutic work.

GRATITUDE EXERCISE

You can use this guided meditation to nourish all the lower chakras and the Heart Chakra. Some of this meditation draws from earlier chakra-nourishing exercises; so that you don't have to flip back and forth in the book as you move through this meditation, the language from those earlier exercises repeats here.

To begin, sit somewhere where you are able to feel peaceful and comfortable, with support for your back and both feet on the floor about one foot apart. If you prefer, you can lie down in one of the semi-supine positions (see [here](#)).

If you need to read this book in order to follow the instructions, rest the book on a cushion on your thighs and read the words below very slowly, pausing to follow the suggestions. Or you can record yourself reading the instructions so that you can play them back for yourself to guide the meditation. Or perhaps you will even memorize the suggestions for each chakra.

Base Chakra

Feel the weight of your body dropping down toward the floor. Notice the points of contact between your body and the chair or floor. Think of the earth supporting you.

Give your attention to the sensations arising in your body. Begin with your feet, becoming more aware of how each foot is feeling. Then slowly move your attention up into your legs and your pelvic floor, and then up into your abdomen and chest and shoulders and from there down into your arms and hands. Notice all the feelings arising as you do this.

Now let your attention gently move up into your neck and head, noticing any sensations in your neck, jaw, face, and ears and the back and crown of your head. Try not to judge any sensations or emotions you are feeling; simply accept them as this moment's reality.

Notice the breath entering and leaving your body. Feel it passing through your nose and throat and into your chest. Feel the gentle expansion of your chest and abdomen as your breath fills your lungs, and the gentle contraction as it leaves. Notice the pause and the stillness before the next in-breath. Don't force your breathing in any way. As much as possible, just witness your sensitive animal body breathing you, in its own natural rhythms.

See if you can feel the pulsing of your heartbeat. Think of all those instinctual processes that are part of Base Chakra functioning—the physical animal that is keeping you alive all the time, digesting food, cleansing your body, feeding it oxygen.

Return your attention to your feet, legs, and pelvic floor, where the Base Chakra is situated, at the tip of the coccyx at the base of the spine.

Think of ways in which you can ground yourself. Imagine walking slowly, paying attention to your feet, maybe walking on the earth in a beautiful natural environment or barefoot on cool, dewy grass. Imagine that your feet are dangling in a cool stream or in a soothing basin of warm water, or that you are having a gentle foot massage. Allow these visualizations to help you get in touch with your physical animal.

Say to yourself, “I’m really grateful for the inner animal that is keeping me alive all the time.”

Sacral Chakra

Bring your attention to your lower abdomen, the location of the Sacral Chakra, and think of ways in which you can nourish your inner child.

Remember your favorite scents—perhaps flowers, or the evergreen forest, or something else from nature.

Remember the smells of food that you really enjoy.

Remember the tastes of your favorite foods and drinks.

Remember the ways in which you like to move—walking, running, playing sports, dancing, swimming, stretching.

Reflect on your two-way sense of touch—ways that you enjoy feeling things, like stroking a cat or a dog, kneading bread, and exploring with your hands and your body, and ways in which you like to be touched, like being hugged, stroked, or massaged.

Recall sounds that you like to hear—maybe sounds of the natural world, maybe music, maybe your own singing.

Remember sights that you like to “feast your eyes” upon—the natural world, art, architecture, or other visual delights.

Now turn your attention to the pleasure of relationships and think of the people in your life whom you feel close to and enjoy being with—family and friends, relationships that fill you with happiness, people who make you laugh, perhaps even pets with whom you have a close relationship.

Remember a time when you laughed uncontrollably, a deep belly laugh, or a time when you were in a really childlike, playful, fun-loving state of mind.

Say to yourself, “I’m really grateful for my inner child, who keeps me in touch with the simple pleasures of this world.”

Solar Plexus Chakra

Bring your attention to your upper abdomen, to the Solar Plexus Chakra. Here lies your inner young adult who began the creation of your adult identity. Remind yourself of all your accomplishments that you feel really proud of, starting with when you were a child and going through your life, whether those are achievements, actions, or relationships that you have valued in your life.

Think of all the things you own: the things you’ve made or bought or received because of being the unique person that you are. Allow yourself to feel really grateful that you have these possessions.

Think of the challenges you’ve overcome during your life or are now in the process of overcoming and appreciate yourself for what you have managed to deal with.

Now think of some personal qualities that you like about yourself. Choose both psychological and physical qualities that you feel good about.

Imagine your solar plexus shining like a sun. Feel all the nerve endings in the solar plexus radiating out like the rays of the sun.

Say to yourself, “I’m really grateful for my inner champion, who helps me build my sense of value and self-esteem.”



Heart Chakra

Let your attention move to the center of your chest, to the Heart Chakra, where all this gratitude comes from—gratitude for the inner animal, the inner child, and the inner young adult, all held in the unconditional love and acceptance of the Heart Chakra.

Think of times when you have experienced the beauty of the world: the beautiful natural world, beautiful works of art, beautiful buildings, beautiful music, and so on. Witnessing beauty allows the Heart Chakra to flow more strongly and to feel love—love for the natural world, for plants and animals, and for people. Think of the love you feel for a partner, a friend, a child, or a pet. Think of the love and gratitude you feel for so much of our beautiful world.

Feel your love and appreciation flowing out from your Heart Chakra to all the many things that you love. Then feel that love returning to your Heart Chakra as all those beautiful people and places send out their love and appreciation to you.

Say to yourself, “I am grateful for my ability to love and appreciate the beauty in this world.”

As the Heart Chakra flow of energy increases, it allows more of the spiritual energy from the Crown Chakra to flow downward through all the chakras, which increases the energy available to our whole chakra system.

Bring your attention back to your breath. As we've seen, breathing in, or inspiration, can be seen as the taking in of spirit and exhalation, or expiration, as the letting out of spirit. Our breath can be seen as the medium through which we receive the spiritual energy and love of the universe and give it back to the world modified by the flows of our chakras. With this in mind, bring your awareness to the breath entering your body through your nose and throat and into your expanding chest, where it surrounds the heart and the Heart Chakra. Think of this breath as spiritual energy, and imagine the Heart Chakra as a beautiful green light source glowing in the center of your chest, receiving the love of the universe and giving love out, expanding the auric field around your body as it fills with love and spiritual energy.

As you breathe in, say to yourself, “Love from the world.” As you breathe out, say, “Love to the world.”

Continue to witness your breath for as long as you wish. When you are ready to stop, remind yourself that you have a body by rubbing your arms and legs and wriggling about a little before you get up.



JOURNAL

Write in your journal all the things you appreciate in your life. Or, if you prefer, you could make a collage or paint or find some other creative medium in which to express your gratitude. You may wish to put the list or artwork somewhere where you can see it regularly, which will help you reconnect with your Heart Chakra consciousness.



QUICK HEART CHAKRA RECONNECTION

Use this exercise whenever you are feeling the need to reconnect with your Heart Chakra consciousness.

Focus your attention in the area of the heart. Notice your breath flowing in and out of your chest, nourishing your Heart Chakra, and stay aware of your breathing for five breaths.

Hold in your mind an image of a person, an animal, a place, or anything that you appreciate and feel loving toward. Send your love energy from your Heart Chakra out to that person or object for your next five breaths.

Now imagine that loving energy turning around and coming back to you, nourishing your Heart Chakra. Continue in this manner; as you breathe out, send your love energy out, and as you breathe in, allow that love energy to fill your Heart Chakra and your whole being.

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ACT THREE

The Upper Chakras

Higher Expressions of the Lower
Chakras



5

The Throat Chakra

Sanskrit name: Vishuddha

English translation: Purified; Virtuous

Central themes: The creative performer; communication; self-expression; uncovering the true self; finding one's true calling

Higher expression of the Sacral Chakra

*I hear the sounds (coming straight from your mouth)
Warble clack gurgle hiss cooing yak burble,
High and low, soft and loud,
A laugh.*

*I laugh, too.
I know just what you mean.*

*My turn, and the sounds start
Surging out of me, almost unbidden.
Where do they come from?*

*Clicks, squeals, moans, and sighs,
Murmur crow shush jabber aah hum buzz witter,
Articulate great thoughts.
I watch you nodding.*

*Until you don't
But burst in noisily, high sounds of challenge,
While I listen and ponder
The wonders of two-way conversation.*

The Throat Chakra is popularly seen as the chakra of communication and self-expression. It can be easy to forget the extraordinary nature of our human capacity to communicate. Language may have developed as far back in the human family tree as the Neanderthals, and possibly with *Homo erectus* or even earlier ancestors, although scientists disagree on dates.¹ Charles Darwin suggested that humans may have sung and gestured before they spoke. In *The Descent of Man* (1872), he wrote:

I cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures. When we treat of sexual selection we shall see that primeval man, or rather some early progenitor of man, probably first used his voice in producing true musical cadences, that is in singing as do some of the gibbon-apes of the present day: and we may conclude from a widely-spread analogy, that this power would have been especially exerted during the courtship of the sexes,—would have expressed various emotions, such as love, jealousy, triumph,—and would have served as a challenge to rivals. It is, therefore, probable that the imitation of musical cries by articulate sounds may have given rise to words expressive of various complex emotions.²

Theorists agree that, originally, early humans made sounds and gestures to communicate their feelings, just like other animals, which we still do

today when we experience intense emotion. The sound quality of the voice and the body language that accompanies speech are still vitally important parts of the way we communicate. The first words we created were onomatopoeic—that is, words that imitate natural sounds, such as *cuckoo*, *swish*, and *boom*. We began by naming the world of things, actions, and feelings, then later learned to name the world of concepts.

It can be difficult to remember that human language is, at heart, a system of noises to express our thoughts and feelings. Over thousands of years, those noises have increased our human capacity to think to such an extent that, today, the complexity of our thinking and communicating has developed exponentially. In almost every sentence we utter, we express ourselves by creating new permutations of some of the many words in our vocabulary. Communicating is a highly creative act. We don't simply repeat ourselves, although we do all have stock phrases that we trip out in our less creative moments! Moreover, we no longer need those sounds and gestures in order to communicate, as is evidenced by this very book! Much of our communication has become soundless. Nowadays some of our creative zoologists are teaching chimpanzees to communicate through sign language, which nicely brings the developmental story full circle.

Physical Level

The Throat Chakra is centered in the spine at the C7/T1 juncture, where the primary curve of the thoracic spine meets the secondary curve of the neck (see [fig. I.2](#)). It is associated with the pharyngeal nerve plexus and the thyroid gland, which is situated in the throat underneath the larynx (see [fig. I.6](#)). The thyroid governs energy levels and our ability to metabolize food. Deficient thyroid function is one of the main causes of intellectual disability and chronic fatigue, although it can be successfully treated with modern medicine. Its physical function links it to the psychological function of the Throat Chakra, which is the chakra of self-expression and communication. When these capacities are working well, we are intellectually alive and energetic.

The Throat Chakra is situated at the base of the neck, a delicate part of the body connecting the torso and the head. Because we express our whole self through the Throat Chakra, it involves not only the head brain but all

the neural centers of the body. That “whole self ” can be experienced through the quality of our voice and gesture, which may be resonant and powerful, or weak and dull, or some other possibility from the infinite range of qualities of expression. Our voice and body communicate who we are; they are an expression of our personality and state of being. We know this from the way in which we can often recognize people we know from a distance, just from the shape and movements of their body. Similarly, without any visual clues, we can often identify people we know simply from their voice, and we can recognize from their voice, from its tone and quality, whether they are feeling well and positive or unhappy in some way. Actors spend years exploring the potential range and variability of the voice and body so that they can capture these delicate nuances of expression and thus convey the essence of character through the way they vocalize and use their bodies.

Throat Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	ॐ = Ham
<i>Position</i>	C7/T1
<i>Neurology</i>	Pharyngeal plexus
<i>Endocrine Gland</i>	Thyroid
<i>Petals</i>	16
<i>Sense</i>	Sound
<i>Color</i>	Blue



Fig. 5.1. Throat Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

A lot of neuroscientific research and debate is devoted to human communication and creative expression, and we have much more to understand scientifically and philosophically about these human aptitudes.³ They represent some of our highest potentialities and are at the cutting edge of human evolution.

Body Language

The Throat Chakra governs the throat, mouth, and ears, our principal organs of communication. Words are the province of both the Throat Chakra and the Eye Chakra. The spoken word is governed by the Throat Chakra, while “word as thought” is governed by the Eye Chakra. Listening is essential to both chakras, and so language about the ears can relate to either the chakra.

In language, we often associate the throat area and its functions with speaking and listening. We may say that we can’t “swallow” this piece of information, or alternatively, we “swallow it whole” without “chewing it over”! If we have something difficult to say, we may be encouraged to “spit it out,” and when we have “stuck our neck out,” it suggests that we have communicated in a potentially challenging way. We may describe the person who says too much as having a “big mouth” and the person who listens enthusiastically as “all ears.”

Sometimes a body metaphor seems to suggest a combination of the Heart and Throat Chakras, such as when we “get something off our chest.” Here, we communicate something difficult, and the phrasing alludes to the more emotional quality of needing to speak our truth (fifth chakra) in order to be at peace with ourselves (fourth chakra).

Psychological Level

A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special.

NELSON MANDELA

Just like our early human ancestors, young infants begin by making sounds that are reactions to their sensations and feelings. Even before that, when in the womb, they are listening to the sound of their mother's voice. A friend humorously suggested that the fetus learns to recognize the mother's voice when in the womb, in order to ignore it for the rest of their lives! After only a few weeks, babies are making sounds that are imitative of what they are hearing, and a loving caregiver will respond with similar gurgles and coos as the first communication begins. Making reactive sounds is the provenance of the Base Chakra, while imitating and learning language is part of Sacral Chakra development. When we are young children, we learn, through play and imitation, the vocabulary and rules of communication from our parents and teachers. Then we refine these skills throughout our lives as we develop our ability to express our unique selves in many different ways.

The Throat Chakra is a higher expression of the Sacral Chakra (see [plate 10](#)); here, the child's spontaneous creativity, alongside imitation and rule learning, becomes the more refined creative expression of the adult. Ideally, we do not lose our playfulness and spontaneity when we become adults, but this will depend on the state of our Sacral Chakra. A well-integrated inner child in the Sacral Chakra will encourage the self-expression and creativity of the adult.

The Throat Chakra, which opens during childhood, draws on all the chakras for its self-expression and therefore is influenced strongly by the programming of all the lower chakras. If the root support in our Base Chakra is strong and we feel safe in our body and in the world, we will convey that groundedness in our voice and body language and in the content of what we say and how we listen, but if the Base Chakra is weak and ungrounded, that is what we will convey. If our inner child (second chakra) is alive and well, this will be an aspect of our self-expression. Conversely, a wounded inner child will consciously or unconsciously express that woundedness; we might talk from the perspective of a victim, or if we protected our wounded inner child by becoming rebellious, then we might express ourselves overassertively. In the Solar Plexus Chakra, we begin to more consciously develop our values and belief system and express

ourselves from these standpoints. We express our sense of self-worth, or lack of it, in the form and content of our communication. A strong inner champion will support our creative self-expression, while a destructive inner critic will have a deleterious effect on it. Philip, the flamenco dancer from the case study in chapter 3, serves as a good example of a person learning to develop a strong inner champion in order to improve his self-expression. But remember, if our inner critic is absent, we may have difficulty refining our self-expression. The creative artist in every sphere needs an inner champion and an inner critical friend, inner voices that both encourage and discriminate.

Good flow in the Heart Chakra helps heal the lower chakras, and this dramatically affects the way we express ourselves. As we learn to love and accept ourselves more fully, we feel the need to express our deeper self and find our true voice. Vishuddha, the Sanskrit name for the Throat Chakra, means “purified,” which suggests the cleansing and refinement of self that we go through when the Heart Chakra flows more strongly.

In addition to expressing the lower chakras, the Throat Chakra also expresses the thoughts, images, and attitudes of the psychological level of the Eye Chakra, where our higher thinking occurs, where we conceptualize new ideas, whether they are linguistic, musical, visual, spatial, or some other area of creativity. Lecturers write their lecture using the higher thinking of the Eye Chakra and express it through the Throat Chakra with body language as well as voice. Painters conceptualize their images and ideas with the Eye Chakra and express them through the Throat Chakra, using their whole body, especially their eyes, arms, and hands, to paint. The composition of music is an Eye Chakra activity, while the skill of musical performance is the domain of the Throat Chakra. The Eye and Throat Chakras work together in this way in many creative activities, and the direction of flow, from the Crown Chakra down through the Eye Chakra to the Throat Chakra, can be inspirational, but not all of our self-expression is quite so “highbrow” (notice the body metaphor).

As the above examples show, self-expression is not limited to language and voice. The whole activity of our lives can be seen as a form of self-expression, and particularly those aspects of life in which we have developed individual skills and talents. Just as we express ourselves through language, so we express ourselves in many other creative ways, like art,

music, dancing, sports, and hundreds of other talents such as homemaking, DIY projects, cooking, and gardening.

The activities and sensory pleasures we enjoyed as children (Sacral Chakra) can often become sources of creative expression for us as adults in the higher level of Throat Chakra consciousness. Smelling and tasting can lead to a love of cooking, flower gardening, or perfumery. Movement can be expressed through dance and sport, and sound and sight through music and the many visual arts. Touch can be expressed through massage and other healing modalities, and also through making things.

Creative expression need not be limited to the fine arts. Many practical jobs require great craftsmanship and can be a source of creative expression. I remember marveling at the beauty of a plumber's pipe laying and soldering when he was installing a central heating system in my home. Sociologist Charles Wright Mills, writing about work in America in the 1950s, explained the importance of recognizing the value of skilled work:

The laborer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself; the satisfactions of working are their own reward; the details of daily labor are connected in the worker's mind to the end product; the worker can control his or her own actions at work; skill develops within the work process; work is connected to the freedom to experiment; finally, family, community and politics are measured by the standards of inner satisfaction, coherence and experiment in craft labor.⁴

We experience deep inner satisfaction, one of the positive emotions connected to the Throat Chakra, when we complete a piece of work to the best of our ability, drawing on a combination of creativity and attention to detail. When we are engaged in some activity that satisfies our need to express ourselves creatively, we may feel blissfully happy. However, when the work is not going well, creative activity can also generate feelings of despondency and self-doubt. Creative individuals are often well known for their passionate natures and the emotional highs and lows that accompany their work.

At our current stage of evolution, the world is not overflowing with pianists like Lang Lang, actors like Meryl Streep, ballet dancers like Rudolf

Nureyev, or other inspired performance artists who have perfected their art, although we are fortunate to have as many as we do. The Throat Chakra is very dominant in the chakra systems of successful performers. They have attained a high level of purity in their performance skills, skills that involve the whole body. For most people, self-expression is largely an unconscious matter arising from the gifts and weaknesses of the lower chakras, but for professional performers, being conscious of how they are expressing their art is an integral part of their practice. The capacity to observe and listen deeply to the inner self and then to express it through art is at the root of performance genius. A performer who works in this way is often called a *virtuoso*, a term that has the same root as *virtuous*, one of the translations of Vishuddha, suggesting a purity of performance. For this relatively small group of the population, Throat Chakra consciousness is very prominent.

Alexander Technique teachers work with performers in music, acting, dance, and sport precisely because these skills require a deep understanding of the whole body in movement and at rest. This is at the heart of Alexander Technique teaching, whether it is applied to the movements of performance artists or the movements of dentists, hairdressers, cooks, or specialists in other occupations. Equally, we are interested in teaching how to perform well the everyday movements of life that we all do, such as walking, talking, sitting and standing, bending, lying down, and resting.

As a young man, F. M. Alexander wanted to be a professional actor and reciter but was hampered by a tendency to become hoarse when he was performing. He discovered that he could cure his vocal problem by relearning the way he used his body. He came to understand through his own direct experience that the voice expresses the whole self, and he went on to teach the world how we can improve and take pleasure in the quality of our physical and vocal self-expression.⁵

Osteopath Robert Lever beautifully describes this body-based awareness of creative expression, capturing the essence of Throat Chakra consciousness, in his book on osteopathy, writing:

I also want to look at how [art] is made, the execution, the creative act and the use of the body and its fusion with Mind to allow for the transduction of an idea, an emotion or complexes of ideas and emotions into art. This involves a profound resonance between the

idea or the inspiration and the creative act itself that gives it life, expression and manifestation. It is where craft and inspiration meet. Watch the way a musician moves or even the way he or she sounds a note, let alone fashions notes into a movement or into a fabric that serves the entire piece. Watch a dancer or a sculptor, watch a potter, or a Chinese watercolourist who can produce an extraordinarily potent expression through the use of a single movement or brushstroke, through the way that the body assimilates a notion and then, almost “Zen-like,” gives birth to it.⁶

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

The Throat Chakra is the chakra of communication, which involves listening as well as expressing ourselves, speaking our own truth and listening to the truth of others. Ida is the channel of relating; from the level of the Throat Chakra, that means listening and expressing ourselves from a place of connectedness. Pingala is the channel of the separate individual—that is, our autonomous self-expression. The Sushumna channel flows well when these two channels are in balance in the Throat Chakra and we are able to confidently speak our truth and also to truly listen, enabling both ourselves and others to have the experience of being really heard (see [plate 9](#)).

French doctor Alfred Tomatis developed a profound theory about the importance of listening and its potential for deep healing. He differentiated between true listening and hearing and developed equipment that could retrain the ears to listen well. His work produced positive results for children and adults suffering from autism, dyslexia, hyperactivity, depression, and other disorders. He claimed that listening to certain music was good for the mind and body, and other music could be harmful. In particular, he considered Mozart and Gregorian chant to be very healing and used them as part of his retraining method. He also demonstrated that listening to yourself speaking or singing was energizing and healing. He especially advocated humming because it channels sound vibrations into the body.⁷ Indeed, humming and singing increase the flow between the Heart and Throat Chakras and bring energy and balance to the Ida and Pingala channels.

Imbalances in the Throat Chakra

We probably all know someone who talks interminably and doesn't allow others to get a word in edgewise. Have you noticed how exhausting it is to be in a conversation where you have to do the majority of the listening and don't get much of a chance to speak? Speakers who dominate conversations tend to become quite animated because, as Tomatis discovered, listening to your own voice is energizing. This characteristic indicates overactivity on the Pingala channel of the Throat Chakra, and not surprisingly, domineering talkers often don't have many close friends because the relational Ida channel is not functioning well. On the other hand, very shy and timid people who prefer to listen to conversations without contributing, even when encouraged, are imbalanced on the Ida channel, especially if they are suffering in silence and avoiding expressing their true thoughts and feelings. Because the Throat Chakra expresses the whole self, these imbalances are related to imbalances in the lower chakras.

Many types of work emphasize the Pingala channel because they require skill in speech, such as legal representatives, judges, lawyers, teachers, lecturers, actors, and politicians. All these jobs are considered *professions*, a word that suggests communication and a claim to knowledge. Sometimes listening is an important part of the work, but when it isn't, there can be a danger of an overactive Pingala channel. Other work requires highly developed listening skills, such as counseling and psychotherapy. These professionals need to take care that they do not become overexhausted because their work often involves more listening than speaking, causing an imbalanced Ida channel.

When the Throat Chakra is in balance, it is possible to express your feelings and thoughts clearly, without fear of what others may think, and equally you can reciprocate, listening and empathizing with what others are saying to you. You can also appreciate silence, whether on your own or with others. You can allow the natural pauses that occur in communication, which can be just as meaningful as the words.

Psychic Level

The Throat Chakra is connected with the psychic ability known as *clairaudience*, or "clear listening." One form of clairaudience is telepathy,

where we receive purely mental communication from another person. We might receive this psychic information as if we were hearing a thought in our mind that seems to come from a person we know. Sometimes this thought sounds as real as an external voice speaking in our mind, but more often it is simply a thought that arises in the same way as our normal inner chatter, except that we have the sense that the thought is coming from someone else whom we recognize.

People who are very close to each other can sometimes experience a telepathic connection. I remember friends of mine who had been married for over fifty years describing how one partner opened the door into the room where the other partner was working only to find that they were both humming the same phrase of the same symphony. In these cases, it can be difficult to know whether the event is telepathy or experiential knowledge of what the other person is likely to say or sing, so this is not a useful area for scientific research! However, Rupert Sheldrake did carry out convincing research on what might be called “dog telepathy” in his book *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home* (1999).

Have you ever had the experience of hearing the phone ring and knowing exactly who it is, without even looking at the number or picture on your screen? This doesn’t count if it’s someone who rings you several times a day! But if it is a call out of the blue from someone who doesn’t contact you often, then it is an example of telepathy.

Professional psychics often work with clairaudience along with clairvoyance (clear seeing) and clairsentience (clear feeling). They receive messages from people who are living but not present, or from people who have died, or from guides who possibly never incarnated on this earthly plane. Like many areas of psychism, clairaudience comes with a health warning: people who are clairaudient may sometimes receive messages from what psychics might call “lower astral beings.” These are described as disembodied beings, possibly people who have died, but who are not at a highly evolved stage, although they have the ability to contact us earthbound creatures with messages that can be very upsetting. It is important to maintain a level of discrimination if you hear voices and not to assume that a disembodied voice must be more spiritual and wiser than you are. A possible explanation of the auditory hallucinations of psychotic breakdown could be that a person in great distress has become open to these

destructive messages from less evolved invisible realms. On the other hand, psychologists believe that these destructive messages come from repressed shadow aspects of the self, which is an equally valid and much more widely accepted explanation. Whether these are inner or outer demons, this is an area where we need to accept our lack of knowledge and suspend judgment but retain our discrimination, whatever the explanation.

At the psychic level of the Throat Chakra, we may also experience what is called the “Big Voice.” Sometimes, when people are teaching or in some other public speaking situation, they can suddenly feel a flow to their communication; it becomes extraordinarily expressive and clear. The words arrive almost unbidden and effortlessly and are expressed powerfully, evocatively, and, if appropriate, even amusingly. Something inspirational and bigger than themselves seems to have taken over their communication system. People sometimes describe this as being “in the flow” or “in the zone,” when whatever they have been doing socially or creatively has taken on an effortless ease.

Many performing artists in acting, music, dance, and sport notice that sometimes the quality of their performance rises to a new level in a way that seems effortless. These can be examples of peak experiences, as described by Abraham Maslow (see [here](#)). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the psychic energy that performers receive from an audience increases the energetic flow throughout their chakras. During a performance, whether it be a lecture or sporting or cultural event, every member of the audience who is enjoying the experience is feeling positive toward the performer. Imagine those feelings as energy transmitted from the audience to the performers and how that energy might enliven and expand the chakra system of those performers, catapulting their performance to levels that they previously had not experienced. This is a common experience for professional performers, and it can be used for better or for worse. Charismatic speakers work with this energy, and it can enable them to persuade an audience to accept their views indiscriminately. For this and the other reasons laid out above, whenever psychic energy is at work, it is important to maintain our ability to reason and discriminate.

Hand Chakras

Our hands are involved in many creative activities, such as painting, making things, or playing musical instruments, where we can develop a high level of manipulative skill. Many people use their hands a lot when they are speaking, and the hands are the main means of communication for sign languages, developed by communities of deaf people all over the world, and part of our early ancestors' original communication systems.

We take in energy from the earth through our feet chakras and we both take in and give out our energy through our hand chakras. Combined with the Heart Chakra, the hand chakras give out healing energy; combined with the Throat Chakra, they express who we are through all the many creative outlets available to us.

The psychic skill of automatic writing combines the Throat Chakra and hand chakras. Here, the psychic holds a pen to paper and, without looking at the words, allows the hand to move without influencing the movement. More recently, some psychics have practiced automatic writing by keyboard, allowing their hands to type freely on a keyboard without having any idea of what words they are writing. This practice can be seen as a way of contacting wisdom from an external spiritual source or from a person's deep unconscious. Spiritual teachers such as Sri Aurobindo and, more recently, Neale Donald Walsch have worked with automatic writing.⁸ Ouija boards are another method of experiencing clairaudience, though they are not respected by scientists and psychics alike because their use is so open to abuse.

Spiritual Level

There is a cry, a call deep within our hearts that wants to be heard. We long for the liberation of our voice and of our soul, to rediscover the grandeur of who we truly are as a force of the highest vibration and creation.

KARINA SCHELDE, FOUNDER OF SOUL VOICE

In the Hindu tradition, each chakra is named according to its highest functioning. The Throat Chakra was given the name Vishuddha, meaning “cleansed,” “purified,” or “virtuous,” and here at the spiritual level, we

begin to see why. When the Heart Chakra is flowing, it opens us to the deeper spiritual levels of the chakras. The higher spiritual level of the Throat Chakra is where our self-expression is purified as we become more and more in touch with our truly authentic nature.

In some interpretations of the Jewish Kabbalah tradition, where the Tree of Life is mapped to the body, the triangular area of the body between the heart, the shoulders, and base of the neck, as marked by the three sephirot Tiferet, Gevurah, and Hesed (see [fig. I.7](#)), is called the “triad of the human soul.” It has the function of purification, cleansing, or “making bright.”⁹ In the chakra system, this function correlates to the journey from expanding the Heart Chakra to purified and authentic expression of the self in the Throat Chakra, which is some of the most important spiritual work that we can do.

When Heart Chakra consciousness begins to flow well, we begin the process of self-acceptance, and there is much healing to be done. When it is not flowing well, Throat Chakra consciousness expresses the experiences that programmed the lower chakras, which is the psychological level of the Throat Chakra. This programming will be a combination of positive and negative experience, the gifts and the wounds of our early life, and the lessons we have learned from those experiences.

However, when we are “open-hearted,” we begin to understand and accept ourselves at deeper and deeper levels. We see the adaptations that our inner child made to cope with early life and how we created a false self to protect the vulnerable true self. That false self could be an overadapted and overpleasing child, a rebellious and angry child, or some other protective adaptation, such as being the funny guy. In adolescence, as we begin to mature into adults, we develop a value system and a sense of self that is influenced by our experience as a child in the family and as a young adult approaching independence. This value system and self-image can be supportive or destructive to the emerging adult.

Once the Heart Chakra is flowing well, we begin to see these adaptations more clearly. We get in touch not only with our vulnerability and fragility, but also with our vitality and power that may have been crushed when we were children. We revisit the wounded child and we see how we developed the body armor of the false self. Some spiritual teachers describe this process as a “dark night of the soul” because, for some of us,

this slow awakening to our authentic self can be very painful. Joseph Campbell suggests that the Throat Chakra is where we meet our demons.¹⁰ In the Throat Chakra, purification is the process in which the false self is brought to light, the true self is experienced more strongly, and we begin to learn to become that more authentic self and express it more and more fully. It can be a demanding journey from the flowing Heart Chakra to the full expression of the Throat Chakra. This is a journey of self-purification and the difficult task of finding our true voice.

Just as the Heart Chakra is a higher expression of the Base Chakra, the Throat Chakra is a higher expression of the Sacral Chakra. The meaning of Svadhishthana, the Hindu name of the Sacral Chakra, is “home of the self”; it is where we begin to develop our personality. The meaning of Vishuddha, the name of the Throat Chakra, is “purification”; it is where we begin to discover our authentic self. One of the experiences of purification at this level is that we have access to the playful spontaneity, enthusiasm, and curiosity that we had as small children, but with the self-knowledge and awareness of an adult. Spiritual teachers of many different traditions emphasize the importance of this “child mind,” which allows us to directly experience the spiritual world, beyond the conceptual programming of the adult mind. Jesus Christ said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3, King James Version). In Zen Buddhism, this concept is known as “beginner’s mind”—an attitude that allows a person the freedom of not knowing and being eager, humble, and open to whatever arises.

On the journey of purification, we begin to get a sense of our true calling—that is, the way we feel called to express ourselves in the world. “Calling” suggests listening as well as speaking. We find our true voice and our vocation. We learn to listen to our deep inner voice, which calls on us to realize our potential. Then we begin to see a purpose to our lives, a purpose that is not simply a goal we wish to achieve (third chakra) but a sense of meaning about why we are here and the work we are meant to do in this lifetime. Some of this work will be largely the personal work of understanding and healing ourselves, as we all have inner work to do on the spiritual journey from Heart Chakra to Throat Chakra consciousness. But we may also feel a strong call to more artistically, socially, or environmentally directed outer work. In a balanced Throat Chakra, both the

inward and outward aspects of our authentic self are expressed. This outer work is not about self-advancement or building self-worth, which is the work of the Solar Plexus Chakra, although it is deeply fulfilling. It is work that is seen as a service to the world, the gift we give back to the world as our contribution and return for the gift of life that we have received. It is a gift imbued with love, as Saint Thomas Aquinas expressed so poignantly:

I have a cause. We need those don't we? Otherwise the darkness and the cold gets in and everything starts to ache.

My soul has a purpose, it is to love; if I do not fulfill my heart's vocation, I suffer.¹¹

When Heart Chakra energy is strong, there is a greater flow of energy into the whole chakra system because we are more open to the inspirational energy flowing down through the chakras from the Crown to the Base Chakra. And this brings creative energy to the Throat Chakra and enables us to listen not only to our experiential wisdom coming up through the chakras but also to the inspirational wisdom coming down through the chakras from the spiritual world. As an example, many performers believe that their inspiration and their performance gifts come from something beyond themselves, acknowledging the spiritual aspect of their creativity.

Accessing the spiritual levels of the chakra system allows healing and purification to occur. We learn to discriminate between what is true and what is false, between illusion and reality, both in ourselves and in others. This transforms our self-expression. The way we present ourselves to the world, our presence, becomes our present or our gift to the world. We all have a unique song to sing, which gives healing to us and the world simultaneously.

Developmental Psychology and the Throat Chakra

As discussed in the previous chapter, Authentic Consciousness is the stage of development that expresses the qualities of the Heart Chakra but also brings in qualities of the Throat and Eye Chakras.

Throat Chakra qualities that correspond to qualities of Authentic Consciousness include having a commitment to one's own self-development; finding one's true purpose in life, which is both personally fulfilling and contributes to the welfare of the world; and being able to express oneself in a playful and creative way.

In the next chapter we will explore the whole range of qualities linked to Authentic Consciousness (see [here](#)).

Cultural Considerations

Over the past hundred or so years, influenced by the development of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and counseling, we've developed greater awareness about all the many facets of human communication. Methods of using communication for conflict resolution, whether personal, corporate, or international, have developed. Couples in the process of divorcing have been encouraged to work together with a mediator, rather than use the more adversarial systems of divorce lawyers. In the 1970s, prison systems in North America began using restorative justice, a method of mediation and reconciliation in which victims and offenders come together to engage in facilitated communication as a means to repair the harm done and encourage empathy between people and communities. This system then expanded into what is today known as restorative practice, a mediation system now used in education, health services, workplaces, and communities.¹² At about the same time, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg developed a method of nonjudgmental self-expression called nonviolent communication. Rosenberg had been working with person-centered psychotherapy and racial integration projects, systems that suggest the need to balance assertiveness for oneself with consideration for others. Nonviolent communication expands on that idea, suggesting that empathy for oneself should be balanced with empathy for others.¹³

From a chakra perspective, these systems of conscious communication, in which we hold awareness of feelings as well as thoughts and exercise great care in making judgments, can be seen as ways of balancing the Lunar Ida (relational) and Solar Pingala (autonomous) channels. They facilitate an awareness of the different types of consciousness that arise from the Sacral Chakra, which is very feelings oriented, to the Solar Plexus Chakra, which

can too readily leap into judgments. Overriding all this is the emphasis on empathy, which is a means of developing Heart Chakra consciousness. Culturally, these developments demonstrate an increasing level of conscious awareness about how we communicate, which encourages the activity of the Throat Chakra in becoming more consciously self-aware. The population of people working with these kinds of ideas is very small, but it is growing, and it is an indication of our evolutionary development.

Artistic people of all types develop a more conscious awareness of how, with the whole self, they communicate their art form. When we look at the history of art, we see that local culture can be a powerful influence on that expression. Florence was the birthplace of Italian Renaissance painting in the late thirteenth century, and it flourished there for four centuries. Vienna was a center of musical excellence beginning in the late eighteenth century. The Impressionist art movement originated in Paris in the nineteenth century. On a smaller scale, artists' colonies began to form as village communities in the middle of the nineteenth century, with many existing today in the Western world.¹⁴ These are places where artists can have the time and space to work and benefit from interaction and collaboration with other artists. From a chakra perspective, these hotspots support not only Throat Chakra creative self-expression but also the conceptual creativity of the Eye Chakra.

Apart from small enclaves like these, and despite the fact that we still pay lip service to the value of artistic work of every kind, financial support for the arts is dwindling. Time-honored artistic enterprises that have large tourist appeal are supported, but essentially for economic reasons. Less established, more innovative, and more regional and community-based artistic endeavors are in decline due to funding cuts. I worked for eight years in a small nonprofit touring theater company taking plays to UK audiences who were not typical theatergoers. We played in village and town halls, clubs, community centers, schools, youth centers, and colleges, and we were well supported by local and national arts councils. The company has survived in this way for over forty years but sadly had its funding cut in 2015 and is now struggling to continue.¹⁵

Wars and global financial meltdowns make nations revert to more primitive concerns about safety and survival. As issues like economic and environmental instability, global pandemics, austerity policies, the rise of

terrorism, and the fear of overpopulation, particularly as expressed toward immigrants and refugees, loom large, many people regress culturally to the survival consciousness of the Base Chakra and the tribal consciousness of the Sacral Chakra.

However, as this trend toward lower levels of consciousness causes funding resources for the arts to dry up, artists have been building another creative system that supports their work: the creative economy as an avenue for wealth creation. Here, in addition to the classic creative expressions of literature, performance art, and visual arts, we find industries like advertising, film and video, publishing, music, design, fashion, toys, architecture, TV and radio, video games, software development, and sports. The United States leads this new industry with huge internet companies like Google, Facebook, Apple, and Amazon making billions and leading the world in wealth creation. John Howkins, a leading expert on the creative industries, writes of the United States, “It has a knack of taking ideas from anywhere and turning them into global ideas” and “Its main asset is its easy relationship between creativity, innovation and management, which are more integrated there than anywhere else.”¹⁶

Most intellectual property is the domain of the Eye Chakra, while creative expression and performance belong to the Throat Chakra, so this explosion of the creative economy is an example of upper chakra development involving both Throat and Eye Chakras. However, the development of creativity for wealth creation fits perfectly with the dominant cultural influence of our times, which is the Pingala channel of the Solar Plexus Chakra, or the Achievement Consciousness of Wade’s developmental psychology. This consciousness, with its glorification of the rich and famous, has made celebrities of many creative performers. We watch them perform, whether live or on film, television, or some other form of technology, and then we are encouraged through advertising to buy the recording, download the podcast, play the video game, or buy the T-shirt of the celebrities we like best, thus building a successful creative economy.

The creative industries draw on Throat and Eye Chakra consciousness, but our culture’s motivation for developing creativity is wealth creation, which is an aspect of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. Nevertheless, the seeds of a more creative culture are being sown.

Another aspect of today's cultural developments is the flourishing of social media and mobile phone technology. This extraordinary expansion in personal self-expression, the sphere of the Throat Chakra, indicates enormous change in our culture. Not only does it encourage the development of a global consciousness, as described in chapter 4, but it also invites us to express our personal and unique self through these universal channels of communication. With the advent of the "selfie" and the means to circulate it worldwide, we can all become international performers!

Whether this new form of personal expression is positive or negative will depend on the degree to which the Heart Chakra is flowing and the lower chakras are healing. The potential for people to "act out" their woundedness through social media is huge and very worrying. Nevertheless, the rapid development of social media and other outlets for personal expression open up vast learning potential for humanity as we learn how to work with this huge expansion of human communication. I hope and believe that these developments are symptoms of the huge seismic cultural shift that is stirring in the collective consciousness of the world as we evolve from Solar Plexus to Heart Chakra consciousness and balance the Solar and Lunar channels of the cultural chakra systems. This burgeoning of creativity supports the shift that is taking place.

Imagine a world where most people operate from a flowing Heart Chakra. This would mean that a great healing of the human race was possible. We would share with and care for each other. Everyone in the world would have sufficient food, clothing, and housing, a caring upbringing, a supportive health and education system, work that was not overly stressful, bountiful time for rest and relaxation, and a balanced life. We would take care of not only ourselves but other species and the planet as a whole. In this situation, with all of our fundamental needs met, our species would have the space for an enormous flourishing of creativity, an unimaginable evolutionary development that I believe we all, at some deep level, long for and know is within our reach.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Protecting the Ears

I met Catherine when I was giving a workshop on the Alexander Technique focusing on working with the voice. Catherine was a piano teacher, very softspoken and reserved, who wanted to improve her singing voice, which was lacking in freedom, range, and resonance. After the workshop, she decided to come for private sessions to help with her voice work.

One of the central tenets of the Alexander Technique is that the voice is affected by the way we use our whole body, and improving the way we use our body will improve the quality of our voice. Catherine was of medium height and slim. Her greatest physical problem was that her shoulders were permanently raised, as though she were locked into a startle response, the body's instinctual response to a sudden shock such as a loud noise (see [fig. 5.2](#)). She also stooped a little, probably the result of a habit of bending over her pupils as they played the piano.

We worked with the principles of the Alexander Technique, slowly making improvements to her stance, but her shoulders, although they made some improvement, were rather intractable. We also worked more directly with her voice and her breathing, encouraging freedom in the thorax, jaw and mouth, shoulders, ribs, and diaphragm.

At some point I thought we should bring an understanding of chakras into the work, and Catherine agreed. She was well grounded in the Base Chakra but had very restricted flow in her Sacral and Solar Plexus Chakras. She had grown up in a large family and been the quiet one, rather withdrawn and tending to disappear into her music when her noisy, boisterous siblings became too much for her. We worked to harmonize her energy flow, through both hands-on work and the kind of exercises I have described in earlier chapters. Her warm-heartedness helped the flow improve from the Base Chakra through to the Heart Chakra, but she had more restriction in her Throat Chakra, impeding the flow up to the Eye and Crown Chakras. We began to look at the need to balance listening with giving voice to her own self-expression.

One day, after chakra therapy work, we began working on her voice and suddenly Catherine exclaimed, “I raise my shoulders to protect my ears!” It was an “aha” moment, a huge revelation to Catherine, connecting back to her noisy childhood and demanding siblings. I was reminded that when I first met her I had thought she looked like someone locked in a startle response, and this was more or less what she had now discovered about herself. Her energy went through a massive shift as she was able to let go, at a very deep level, the protective holding of her shoulders. She understood the root cause of her voice problems. Her shoulders began to drop down and back more easily, widening naturally and creating much more freedom in her neck and chest. Her singing and speaking voice began to improve noticeably and fairly rapidly after that.

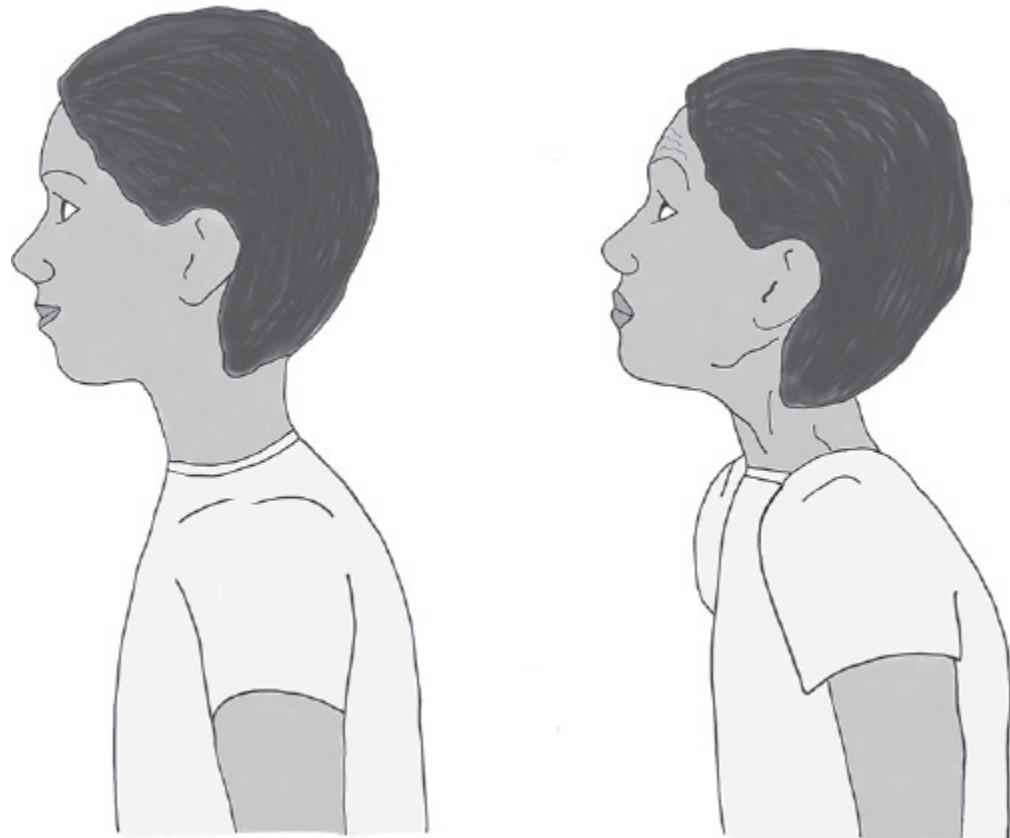


Fig. 5.2. Normal posture compared to the startle response

Nourishing the Throat Chakra

Speaking, singing, and humming are all very nourishing for the Throat Chakra. If you are at home on your own, or in any kind of private space, like your car, it can be energizing to talk to yourself aloud from time to time. Better still if you can think of a song to hum or sing. If you are not very confident about singing, find a recording of a song you like and sing or hum along to it.

Singing in a choir is a great way to nourish the Throat Chakra. In a choir, in addition to singing, you have to listen to others, and this balances the Ida and Pingala channels of the Throat Chakra. If you feel called to solo performance, then the Pingala Channel of your Throat Chakra is working well, and because solo performance often involves listening to accompaniment or to other soloists, the Ida Channel may also be working well.



EXPLORING THE PHYSICAL AREA AROUND THE THROAT CHAKRA

We can hold a lot of tension and discomfort in the area surrounding the Throat Chakra. In particular, the shoulders, arms, hands, neck, throat, and mouth all express the quality of the Throat Chakra in different ways. Our confidence, or lack of it, as communicators often shows up through the nonverbal messages our bodies send out. In the case study above, Catherine held her shoulders up to protect her ears. Other similar holding patterns include pulling the shoulders forward to protect the heart or hide the breasts, or pulling them back and tightening the upper back to give an appearance of being broadchested. Becoming more aware of our nonverbal self-expression can help with our self-understanding and potential for healing.

Put a stool or some other seat without a back support in front of a mirror and sit, with your feet flat on the floor and your back unsupported. If you cannot sit with your back unsupported, you can use a seat with a back support, but sit as upright as possible. Let your hands rest in your lap.

Close your eyes and become aware of the sensations arising in your consciousness.

Notice the contact of your feet on the floor, your bottom on the seat you are sitting on, and your hands on your lap.

Now tune in to your shoulders. Notice whether any sensations are present as you focus your attention on them. Keep your eyes closed and concentrate on your sensations and internal body image.

Do your shoulders ache or hurt in any way?

Do they feel similar to each other or different in some way?

Do they feel relaxed and open, or are they held and tight or some other quality?

Do they curve forward or backward? Is one shoulder pulled forward from the other?

What emotions and thoughts arise when you ask yourself how your shoulders feel?

Now give your attention to your arms and hands. Explore how each arm and hand feels to you and whether the left and right sides feel similar or different.

Now move your attention to your neck and throat. How does that area feel? Do you feel any difference between the left and right sides? Or between the back and the front of the neck?

Move your attention up into your mouth, your jaw, and your ears. Notice the sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise as you tune in to this part of your body.

Open your eyes and look in the mirror, and consider whether what you can see fits with your inner perceptions of this area of your body.

Are your shoulders of similar width? Do they look similar to or different from each other?

Does your head rest balanced on your neck, or does it tend to tip to one side, putting more pressure on one side of your neck? Do your mouth and jaw look the way that they felt when you had your eyes closed?

Stand up and look again in the mirror, noticing whether standing creates any changes in your shoulders, head, and neck. Let your arms hang down. Do they look of equal length, or is one slightly longer or slightly more bent as it hangs down?

Invite this area of your body to soften and feel relaxed and free from tension. Notice any ideas that have arisen about your listening and self-expression as you have explored the physical area around the Throat Chakra.

Write any discoveries in your journal, or if you enjoy drawing or painting, use that medium to capture what you discovered about yourself. But don't let an overactive inner critic turn this into a punitive exercise!

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

This simple but powerful exercise needs to be done with another person. Mirroring what another person has said is a valuable exercise in developing listening skills, a critical part of Throat Chakra consciousness. Equally important is being able to hear your words reflected back to you and to have the sense that you have been heard.

Sit comfortably, facing your partner. Choose one person to be the speaker and one the listener. The speaker has five minutes to talk. The subject needs to be something that the speaker feels strongly about. It could be something that happened that has upset or confused the speaker, or an ethical or political point of view that is important to him or her for various reasons. If the subject is something that has upset the speaker, the listener must be someone who was not involved in that experience so that he or she is an impartial observer of the story.

When the speaker has finished speaking, the listener reflects back to the speaker what the speaker said, trying to give an account of the story that is as accurate as possible. The speaker can correct any inaccurate details. The speaker and listener then give feedback to each other about what they learned from this exercise.

Now the speaker and listener reverse roles. The new speaker talks for five minutes on a topic of importance to him or her, and the listener reflects back what the speaker said.

LISTENING TO YOUR DEEPER SELF

There are many ways to listen to your inner voices. Journal writing can be a useful way of exploring what really matters to you and what your calling might be.

Sit quietly and silently ask yourself:

What am I being called to do in my life right now?

What is my purpose in life?

What can I do to make my life totally fulfilling and at the same time a service to others?

If one of these questions is more potent for you, you might gently and silently repeat it.

As responses come up in your thoughts and feelings, write them in your journal. Writing down your thoughts and feelings is a powerful way of listening to yourself and reflecting back to yourself.

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Working with the Throat Chakra can be challenging. We are now in the territory of professional speakers, performing artists, and top-tier athletes. But we all need to perform from time to time, whether it be a job interview or just meeting new people, so we can benefit from a level of conscious awareness of how we present ourselves.

Because the Throat Chakra is about discovering your creative communicator, a powerful way to explore your awareness of how you present yourself is to practice giving a performance, recording yourself on audio or video. You could recite a poem or read a piece of prose that you love. You could sing or make music, or you could dance or demonstrate some kind of movement work that you enjoy.

When you have recorded yourself, take a break, have a cup of tea, and then, when you are feeling more relaxed, sit down and listen and/or watch your performance.

If you are not a professional performer, it is quite possible that you'll find this suggestion to record yourself appalling. If that is the case, you are already learning something about yourself and about your Throat Chakra, and probably about your inner critic too! This exercise is not compulsory!

As you watch yourself perform, write down as many of your responses, positive or negative, as you can, and see if you can ascertain which chakra these responses are coming from. Did you notice anything playful about your performance? How confident did you look?

Examine the quality of your responses. Is your inner critic having a field day and you are wishing you had never started this exercise, or are you noticing positive aspects of your performance and feeling quite pleased with yourself?

Becoming more aware of how we present ourselves to the world is quite a challenging experience, so do congratulate yourself if you have had the courage to attempt it.



EXPRESSING THE VOICES OF THE CHAKRAS

A similar and very powerful way of exploring the Throat Chakra is to work with some of the exercises I have already suggested for the lower chakras in earlier chapters by doing them in a way that allows you to observe yourself.

The simplest way is to do them in front of a mirror or a camera.

Take one chakra at a time, and don't feel you have to do them all in one session.



Base Chakra

Do the Grounding Visualization exercise (see pages [here](#)) in front of a mirror.

Sacral Chakra

Tell the mirror or your camera something from your “treats list” from the Connecting with Your Inner Child exercise (see pages [here](#)). If you have written one down in your journal, read that one out, or you can spontaneously make one up, recalling favorite pleasures of the senses and of relationships.

Solar Plexus Chakra

Tell the mirror or the camera something from your list of self-appreciative thoughts you wrote in your journal from the Finding Your Strong Inner Champion exercise (see [here](#)). You can also tell the mirror or camera your life story from the Life Story from the Perspective of the Inner Champion exercise (see [here](#)).

Heart Chakra

Tell the mirror or camera how much you appreciate your inner animal, your inner child, your inner young adult, your inner healer, and your creative performer. Express gratitude for each chakra and for your multifaceted self, and also for anything else in your life that you wish to express gratitude for.

Notice if your responses differ as you focus on different chakras. Did you enjoy working on some chakras more than on others? Do you feel more positive about some of your chakras and more negative about others?

All this self-observation may make you overly conscious of your performance and of your reactions to your performance, all of which might be difficult to experience but very revealing about how you experience yourself as a creative communicator. Congratulate yourself on your courage if you have attempted these exercises!

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6

The Eye or Brow Chakra

Sanskrit name: Ajna

English translation: Perceive; Command

Central themes: The creative thinker; view of life; inspirational thinking; manifesting intention

Higher expression of the Solar Plexus Chakra

I take hold the world and pull it

Apart, into the tiniest slices.

Formulate equations.

Master the universe.

Explain everything.

Manipulate.

An object.

Only problem, to create this perfection, I have to assume it's dead. I couldn't have the universe interfering. I couldn't allow it to think, or be alive. That would really mess up my theories.

*On the other brain I sink deep in the world as myself watch
images feelings ideas arise revealing a different view we're
in this together inseparable The subject*

Unlike all the other chakras, the Eye Chakra is depicted not in a circular shape but as a circle with two petals, one on the left and one on the right. This yantra evokes the left and right eyes and the left and right hemispheres of the brain. It indicates the importance of the Solar (Pingala) and Lunar (Ida) channels to this chakra. It is here where they are said to terminate and unite in Sushumna, the central channel, but I would rather suggest that it is here where they culminate, where we are able to perceive most clearly the two ways of seeing and the two ways of thinking, Solar and Lunar.

Physical Level

The Eye Chakra is centered at the top of the spine where it meets the cranium at the atlanto-occipital joint (see [fig. I.2](#)). From there it beams out to the center of the forehead, just above the eyebrows, to the spot often called the Third Eye. The Eye Chakra is connected to the carotid nerve plexus and the pituitary gland, an endocrine gland that is about the size of a pea that has a front lobe and a back lobe. The pituitary is positioned behind the bridge of the nose, close to the optic nerves (see [fig. I.6](#)). It is often called the master gland of the endocrine system because it produces several important hormones that control other glands, like the thyroid and the adrenals. One meaning of Ajna, the Sanskrit name for this chakra, is “command,” which resonates with the characteristics of the pituitary gland.

The Eye Chakra is variously described as the chakra of seeing, the chakra of thinking, and the chakra of intuition. All these are true, and I would designate the consciousness of this chakra as “higher mind” because it is a higher expression of the Solar Plexus Chakra. Sight is the most developed of our senses, and a full third of our brain is involved with vision. It is difficult to separate seeing from recognizing, and thus seeing and thinking are closely linked. Only the young infant, or the brain-damaged person, sees without any interpretation or understanding. In fact,

another meaning of Ajna is “perceive,” which combines the seeing and thinking aspects of this chakra. And one of the most common ways of expressing that we have understood something is to say “I see.”

The links between seeing and thinking have been explored by observing human eye movements. For example, right-handed people tend to shift their eyes to the right when they are thinking in a logical, analytical, left-brained way and to the left when they are thinking in a more subjective, intuitive, right-brained way. Systems of therapy have evolved from these observations, such as eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, which was designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories.¹

Eye Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	 = Aum
<i>Position</i>	Top of spine (AO Joint)
<i>Neurology</i>	Carotid plexus
<i>Endocrine Gland</i>	Pituitary
<i>Petals</i>	2
<i>Sense</i>	Thought
<i>Color</i>	Purple



Fig. 6.1. Eye Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences

The Eye Chakra is associated with the most recently evolved part of the brain, the neocortex, and particularly the prefrontal area of the frontal lobes (see [fig. 3.2](#)). This area of the brain is involved with executive functions such as planning, coordinating, and governing. As mentioned in our discussion of the Solar Plexus Chakra, with the onset of puberty and throughout adolescence and young adulthood, the frontal cortex goes through an intense developmental process, becoming more active and efficient, and it continues to develop throughout life. The plasticity of the brain—its ability to adapt and change throughout life—is a fairly recent neuroscientific discovery.²

The Eye Chakra is a higher expression of the Solar Plexus Chakra (see [plate 10](#)); here, the self-focused and practical goal-oriented thinking of the third chakra develops into the more conceptual thinking of the sixth chakra. Both chakras involve the prefrontal cortex, with its emphasis on thinking and its ability to inhibit the reactivity of lower brain and neurological centers, but Eye Chakra consciousness is much more dispassionate, being less focused on the sense of self and personal values.

The left and right hemispheres of the brain are central to the activity of both the Solar Plexus and Eye Chakras, and a summary of their qualities bears repeating here. It is important to understand that unless there is damage to the left or right lobe of the brain, both hemispheres function together all the time, bringing their different views into an overall picture of reality, influenced by left, right, or equal dominance of the hemispheres. Both hemispheres function through language; the left hemisphere works with vocabulary and grammar, but the right hemisphere relates more to understanding the overall meaning, the emotional tone, and the use of metaphor or humor. Similarly, both hemispheres are involved with visual imagery and with emotions. Using Iain McGilchrist's metaphor from earlier in this book, the left brain gives us a narrowly focused view, comparable to a bird looking for seeds on the ground with one eye, and the right brain gives us a holistic, interconnected view, comparable to the bird scanning the environment with the other eye. This metaphor offers us a right-brained approach to understanding the two hemispheres. The table below, which I collated from his book, is a more left-brained approach to mapping or “representing” the differences. (See also [figs. 3.3](#) and [3.4](#), respectively.)

Both hemispheres are equally complex but different modes of thinking and understanding the world. They are connected by the corpus callosum, a band of neural tissue. As well as connecting the two hemispheres, an important function of the cortical connections in this band is to inhibit the hemispheres from interfering with each other. We need to have these two separate ways of attending to the world.³ This is analogous to the Hindu concept of the Solar (Pingala) and Lunar (Ida) channels in the chakra system. No one would want to merge the sun and the moon!

LEFT BRAIN/ PINGALA/SOLAR (MASCULINE)	RIGHT BRAIN/ IDA/LUNAR (FEMININE)
Selective attention	Broad global attention
Perfects existing skills	Open to new experience
Predicts from theory	Creates new theory
Outer public knowledge	Inner personal knowledge
Detailed analytical thinking of parts	Flexible thinking, integrating into the whole
Manipulates the outer world	Exploratory attitude to outer world
Sequential thinking, re-presenting the past or future	In continuous present time but embracing what is before and after
Grammatical, syntactical, literal, logical	Poetic, metaphorical, musical, artistic
Competitive	Relational, empathic
Optimistic (can be unwarranted/in denial)	Realistic (optimistic and pessimistic)
Anger or happiness	Full range of emotional connection
Diagrammatic visually	Aware of visual detail or beauty
Needs certainty or to be right	Open to new ideas
Objectified self as expression of will	Self-aware and in relationship to the other

Detached; sees the body as an object	In touch with the body and emotions
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Body Language

Some metaphors about the eyes are about their appearance. The eyes can be the “windows to the soul.” We can be starry eyed or beady eyed; we can be doe eyed or have eagle eyes. At other times the language describes how we see. Someone can be the “apple of your eye” or a “sight for sore eyes.” Something can be “hard on the eyes” or “easy on the eyes.” These expressions suggest more emotional qualities involved in our seeing.

At other times metaphors about the eyes involve a sense of understanding as well as just seeing. Obvious expressions include “I couldn’t believe my eyes” and “seeing is believing,” a metaphor that suggests that knowledge needs to be evidence-based. New information can be an “eye-opener.” Or we can do something with our “eyes wide open,” suggesting that we understand the situation. The connection between seeing and understanding is epitomized in phrases like “I see” and “I looked at it from both sides.” In the English language, “I,” the word meaning the self, sounds exactly the same as “eye,” which seems at the very least an interesting coincidence.

There are hundreds of metaphors about the head that are essentially describing the mind. For example, you can have a cool head, a hot head, a big head, or a thick head. You can be an airhead, a bean head, or a banana head. You can have a good head on your shoulders, have your head screwed on straight, use your head, lose your head, or even bury your head in the sand!

Some body metaphors suggest the hemispheric differences. If we are told to “get a grip,” it sounds as though we are too overwhelmed emotionally and need our left brain to start logically grasping the situation and the prefrontal cortex to inhibit the emotional pathways of the lower brain. Similarly, if we are told to “keep our eye on the ball,” we need to narrowly focus on the objective. Alternatively, if we are asked to “keep our eye on things,” we may need the more open scanning of the right brain.

I have given only a few examples. Language that relates to the higher thinking and perceiving of the Eye Chakra appears to be inexhaustible. It is

also an Eye Chakra activity to explore the metaphors of our language and to analyze language itself.

Psychological Level

Eye Chakra consciousness is the higher expression of Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness. The latter focuses on individual identity, our sense of self-worth, and the values that support that. It is just at the beginning of our complex thinking, directed toward supporting an adult sense of self and making choices that fit with our values, whereas Eye Chakra consciousness is more developed and dispassionate, conceptualizing and refining our views about many aspects of the world. Just as the self-expression of the Throat Chakra is influenced by all our chakras, so, too, through the experiential learning of all the chakras, do we grow our conceptual framework of what life is all about in the Eye Chakra.

We see the world through the lens of our early life experiences, good and bad. If our lower chakras were programmed in imbalanced or self-destructive ways, our view of life will reflect those wounded aspects of ourselves. If we have been lucky enough to have had largely supportive and positive experiences, our lower chakras will have been programmed with optimistic expectations of ourselves and our lives, and our outlook on life will reflect that. And if we have taken the transformative step of working with Heart Chakra consciousness to reprogram the limitations of past experience, then this will change the filter through which we perceive reality.

Ajna, the Sanskrit name for this chakra, means both “perceive” and “command,” and these dual translations capture the powerful potential of the Eye Chakra. Our perception of how the world works commands the way we experience it and the way we live our lives. It is the shaper of our intentions, or our command center. Our view of the world and our place in it creates a life path that is the expression of the conscious and unconscious intentions of the Eye Chakra. And, of course, our perception can be influenced by any of the lower chakras. The Eye Chakra could be seen as the chakra-tinted glasses through which we perceive and act upon the world.

The Eye Chakra takes us to the highest level of our thinking consciousness. It is the realm of mathematicians, scientists, intellectuals, and philosophical thinkers of all types. It is also the realm of the visual, musical, lateral, and intuitive thinkers. Whenever we are looking for patterns in things, analyzing our experience, working with our imagination, or developing theories or works of art, we are working with the creative thinking of the Eye Chakra. For example, researching and expanding upon a theory of how human consciousness can be understood through the body, using the chakras as a map of the psyche, is very much an Eye Chakra activity, while the writing of it involves the Throat Chakra as well!

Nothing can be created that hasn't been imagined first. Conceptual creativity is central to Eye Chakra consciousness. It can think verbally or it can visualize, creating internal images that can then be made manifest in the world. The scientist imaginatively develops a hypothesis before testing and writing up the research. The musical composer conceptualizes a composition and then translates it into notes on a page; the choreographer and the poet do the same. The creative artist uses imaginative visualizations explored through the Eye Chakra to create works of art through the Throat Chakra. Good lecturers and teachers work with both chakras, conscious that there is a performance element to the delivery of their concepts. The conceptualizing element of creativity is an Eye Chakra activity, while its performance and presentation are Throat Chakra activities.

The Eye Chakra opens during childhood, as do all the chakras, but it becomes prominent in only a small percentage of the population. Academics and theoreticians of all persuasions usually have prominent Eye Chakras; they desire to understand the world from whichever perspective they have specialized in. Musical composers, visual artists, and others who are involved in conceptual creativity in any field may have prominent Eye Chakras, although if their main focus is upon performance of their art, then the Throat Chakra may be more prominent.

We are all working with Eye Chakra consciousness some of the time. Puzzles like crosswords or Sudoku, television quizzes, and clever jokes engage the Eye Chakra. Appreciating a visual experience such as a picturesque film, reading a book, or creative daydreaming can be Eye Chakra activities. Much of our thinking combines the Eye Chakra with that of the lower chakras in some way. Reflecting on the political events of the

day, planning a holiday, or deciding how to furnish a room involves analytical thinking (sixth chakra) and creative imagination (sixth chakra), combined with a sense of one's values (third chakra) and a desire for happiness (second).

The emotions connected to the Eye Chakra are similar to those associated with the Throat Chakra. When we are thinking creatively and the ideas are flowing well, we can experience feelings of bliss that are deeply nourishing. This positive activity of the Eye Chakra feeds the positive emotions of the lower chakras. As human beings, we thrive on thinking creatively. But when our creativity is blocked and we are struggling, the higher thinking of the Eye Chakra often descends to the self-directed thinking of the Solar Plexus Chakra. Then the inner critic can dominate our emotional landscape, making us lose confidence in ourselves and shutting down our energy system so that we feel "dis-heart-ed" and miserable.

Many years ago, I taught mathematics, and I discovered that any math class could be divided into two groups. One group would delight in the deductive thinking needed to solve a mathematical problem, and the other group would wish they could be somewhere else because they were unable to solve the problem and it was making them feel really bad about themselves. The inner critic of the Solar Plexus Chakra had taken over the latter group, so they were unable to experience the enjoyment of pure thought, which is the domain of the Eye Chakra. If teaching math could be interwoven with building self-esteem, we might develop many more competent mathematicians!

Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna

The Solar and Lunar channels on either side of Sushumna, the central channel, rise out of the Base Chakra and meet again in the Eye Chakra. As we have journeyed through the chakras, we have seen how these Solar and Lunar influences have been expressed at the level of each chakra. The Solar Pingala influence represents the drive toward an independent separate self, while the Lunar Ida influence represents the drive toward relational interconnection. This paradoxical polarity exists in every human being and is enacted in our lives and personalities through endless permutations of the underlying principles. At the level of the Eye Chakra, the paradox is enriched by the discoveries we are making about how, for optimum

functioning, we need the left and right hemispheres of our brains to work together. In the chakra system, we would see this balanced functioning as the central Sushumna channel balancing the Solar and Lunar channels (see [plate 9](#)).

We can see the oppositional principles of separation and interconnectedness being demonstrated at even the most fundamental cellular level. Every living cell has to maintain its integrity and separation from the environment by keeping out unwanted material. And yet every living cell is totally dependent for its sustenance upon the environment. Its survival requires that it brings the nourishment it needs into itself from the environment. In this way, the environment—the physical as well as the energetic— influences every cell in our body, and it is, in turn, itself influenced by our emotions, thoughts, and state of being.

So we see that, from the microscopic to the macroscopic level, the interplay of dynamic tension between interdependence and separation is everywhere; it is a fundamental dialectic of the universe.⁴ Exploring this theoretical concept is an example of the higher thinking of Eye Chakra consciousness. The initial concept of the oppositional principles of separation and interconnectedness might be considered a holistic right-brained idea (Lunar). Its application to the microscopic world of the cell would be a detailed, analytical, left-brained application of the principle (Solar). Scientists need the holistic interconnected thinking and the detailed analytical application in their work. So do artists, who may have an inspired artistic vision but then have to work out the details, whether it be for a musical composition, a novel, or some other conceptual work of art. Human creativity is dependent on the cooperation between left and right brains.

All human knowledge begins with intuitions, proceeds from thence to concepts, and ends with ideas.

IMMANUEL KANT

At best, the Eye Chakra is the command center that coordinates all the many aspects of the multifaceted self. It is able to integrate the left- and right-brain approaches to understanding. It draws on information from the

reptilian and limbic systems and from the gut and heart brains. It listens, considers, imagines, and calculates with a capacity for discernment, integrating the different facets into a holistic overview of the self and the world in which it is embedded. The Eye Chakra re-presents the story of our lives, and with this work, it creates our view of the world.

Where the “I” Resides

The heart and the head are universally recognized as powerful centers of identity for human beings. The heart serves as an emotional and empathic center, while the head serves as an analytical and intuitive center. A well-developed Eye Chakra along with a flowing Heart Chakra brings balance to the head and heart, the importance of which has been recognized by thinkers throughout the ages.

I remember being in an acting class where the teacher asked the actors to imagine a situation where someone we loved and respected was asking for help. The request was “Who will go with me?” We were not allowed to speak but the words we had to think of were “I will” or “Take me,” and we had to demonstrate them with a gesture. All the actors pointed to, or placed a hand on, the center or upper part of their chest. The teacher suggested that this is where the “I,” the real self, resides.

A few years later, I was told of an experiment with a group of academics who were asked to point to a part of their body upon hearing the question “Where does the ‘I’ reside?” They all pointed to their forehead. This is where we sense the source of our thinking, the center of our head, behind the eyes. Who were right, the actors or the academics? Where would you point? Or would you point to different places in different situations? The fact that we point to different places shows that, subjectively, we know that our consciousness arises in different parts of the body. We know that our thinking

comes from our head and our loving feelings from the heart. The chakras invite us to explore these mind-body connections in more detail.

All the chakras are embodied centers of consciousness and represent different aspects of the self. Sometimes we talk of decisions and actions that have come from the heart, the head, or our gut feelings. All these different voices need to be heard and unified, and the Eye Chakra is the chakra most proficient at calmly considering them in a detached, analytical, but also holistic way. Ideally, its work needs to be balanced by the Heart Chakra. The dispassionate witness of the Eye Chakra needs to be balanced by the compassionate witness of the Heart Chakra.

Imbalances in the Eye Chakra

In people who are imbalanced on the Pingala channel of the Eye Center, the left brain is too dominant. They tend to be very fixed in their views, accepting certain theories and explanations as right and not being open to new possibilities. They may display an overfastidious attention to detail. For them, reality is based only on analysis and evidence, so they tend to be dismissive and overcritical of the intuitive aspect of intelligence. Their emotional responses to life can be rather unnuanced. When they are feeling positive, they will be happy, optimistic (potentially overly optimistic), and unaware of potential dangers. When they are feeling negative, they will be angry or just emotionally detached, not really in touch with either their emotions or their physical body, except to see the body as an object that needs to be fed and exercised. They can be very competitive and will vehemently defend their beliefs. They tend to reject spiritual beliefs because of lack of evidence.

In people who are imbalanced on the Ida channel of the Eye Center, the right brain is too dominant. They tend to be overly subjective in their thinking, too dependent on their intuitions and emotions. They can be dismissive of logic and analysis, with beliefs that are full of internal

contradictions that they are not aware of. They like to share subjective experiences but may prefer not to have any theoretical discussions analyzing differing views. They tend to live in the moment, staying in touch with their feelings, living in the flow, and experiencing life in a somewhat poetic way. Their approach to life might be described as living in an impractical and unrealistic fantasy world of their own, unable to bring things down to earth. They often have a spiritual attitude to life and profess a trust in the universe.

Research into the differences between the two hemispheres of the brain is fairly new, and there is still much to learn. One extraordinary contribution to this work comes from Jill Bolte Taylor, a neuroscientist who, at the age of thirtyseven, suffered a major hemorrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain. She wrote an account of her experience and her recovery from it in *My Stroke of Insight* (2008). Though (as my left brain cautions) hers is only one subjective account of a hemispheric imbalance, and there are enormous differences in experience for those who suffer a stroke in either hemisphere, her story is fascinating.

With damage to the left hemisphere, her everyday “brain chatter,” the inner voice that kept her aware of where she was and what she was doing, began to fragment. In its place she experienced a growing sense of peace. Visually, she became unable to discern her own physical boundaries, experiencing herself as fluid rather than solid, blending with the space around her. She lost her sense of a separate self and the details of her life and felt a tranquil euphoria, a feeling of being at one with the universe and existing only in this present beautiful moment.

In her account, Taylor describes how she managed to get help and slowly make a full recovery. She acknowledges that she was fortunate that her amygdala, located deep in the limbic system, and responsible for detecting frightening stimuli, was not affected or she might have been in a state of terror throughout the period of the stroke.

She then gives a rich description of the left and right minds, which is interesting to compare with McGilchrist’s research findings. They are largely in agreement, with a few differences, such as the fact that Taylor attributes “worry” to her left-brain faculties because she lost that anxious part of her personality during the period of her stroke—and relished that

loss. She surmises that worrying may arise from the left hemisphere's detailed analytical thinking and the need to be right and to achieve things.

Taylor concludes:

When we evaluate the unique characteristics of the two cerebral hemispheres and how they process information differently, it seems obvious that they would manifest unique value systems that would consequently result in very different personalities. Some of us have nurtured both of our characters and are really good at utilizing the skills and personalities of both sides of our brain, allowing them to support, influence, and temper one another as we live our lives. Others of us, however, are quite unilateral in our thinking—either exhibiting extremely rigid thinking patterns that are analytically critical (extreme left brain), or we seldom connect to a common reality and spend most of our time “with our head in the clouds” (extreme right brain). Creating a healthy balance between our two characters enables us the ability to remain cognitively flexible enough to welcome change (right hemisphere), and yet remain concrete enough to stay a path (left hemisphere). Learning to value and utilize all of our cognitive gifts opens our lives up to the masterpiece of life we truly are. Imagine the compassionate world we could create if we set our minds to it.⁵

Psychic Level

Often when I shut my eyes, faces appear before me. What is remarkable about them is their definition. Each face has the sharpness of an engraving. . . .

None of the faces is ever familiar to me. Usually they are fairly still, but they are not static images; they are alive. They are like the face of a person thinking. They are clearly not aware of my watching them. Yet I am able to make them look at me. “Make them” is perhaps too strong a term: it requires no great effort on my part. Instead of simply watching a group of them, I have to concentrate my attention on a particular one and then

she or he, as frequently happens in daily life, looks up and returns my gaze. . . .

They belong to the past. The certainty with which I know this has nothing to do with their clothes or the “style” of their faces. They belong to the past because they are the dead, and I know this by the way they look at me. They look at me with something approaching recognition.

JOHN BERGER, *AND OUR FACES, MY HEART, BRIEF AS PHOTOS*

Clairvoyance, the psychic ability most associated with the Eye Chakra, is the ability to see beyond the physical world into the energetic world, and beyond the present into the future and past. Some clairvoyants can see pictures and numbers in a person's aura and explain what they mean. Others see images of people who have died or of spiritual beings from another realm. In John Berger's expressive account quoted above, he sees the faces of people who have died. This is an example of clairvoyance from a person who, while artistically gifted, did not see himself as psychically gifted.

Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934) was a leading member of the Theosophical Society, and one of the first Western authors to write about the chakras, largely inspired by the beautiful images of them created by a clairvoyant friend. In the introduction to his book *The Chakras*, Leadbeater describes how the chakras appear to a person who can see them: “The brilliant colouring and the rapid and incessant movement of the chakras bring them immediately under his observation, and he naturally wants to know what they are and what they mean.”⁶ The book, published in 1927, has beautiful color plates of the chakras of which he writes, “so far as I am aware the illustrations which I give in this book are the first attempt to represent them as they actually appear to those who can see them.”⁷ I have included one of the images from Leadbeater's book as an example of what a clairvoyant might see (see [plate 11](#)). When looking at the image it is helpful to imagine that it is in a constant state of movement, rather like a wheel spinning in two directions at once. Keep in mind that clairvoyants do see things in different ways. Some will see the chakras as glowing circles of white light, while others will see colors different from the ones in this illustration.

A lot of people have at least some experience with clairvoyance. For example, it's fairly common for people to see energy, in the form of hundreds of little moving pinpoints of pure light, creating tiny "light squiggles," when gazing outward. "Gazing" is the operative word here because the light disappears if you try to focus on it. Other examples include seeing bright spots of slow-moving light, a colored mist that tinges the perceived world, or auras around people, such as a band of white light surrounding them, which may have colors flowing through it (see [plate 3](#)).

During meditation, with eyes closed, people often see colored shapes expanding and contracting. They can also sometimes be seen with eyes open. These colors relate to the chakras that are undergoing expansion and healing. For example, if you see green, the Heart Chakra is flowing more strongly; if you see orange, the Sacral Chakra is activated, and so on. In addition to these colors, you can also sometimes see moving geometric patterns or spirals. All are signs of activity at the psychic level of the Eye Chakra.

Precognitions about the future occur at the psychic level of the Eye Chakra, as does *déjà vu*, the experience that something occurring in the present moment has happened before, so you know exactly what is going to happen next as you watch the future unfold. Lucid dreaming, the ability to be aware that you are dreaming and sometimes to influence the dream, is another example of the psychic level of the Eye Chakra.⁸

Sheldrake and the Science of Staring

One of our most common psychic experiences is having the sense of being stared at from behind, then turning around and meeting the eyes of the person staring at us! Rupert Sheldrake researched this phenomenon and discovered that more than 70 percent of people have had this kind of psychic experience.

How are we able to sense that we are being stared at? Before the seventeenth century people believed that our eyes

gave out rays that allowed us to see the physical things in our environment. This belief changed during the Enlightenment when Johannes Kepler and others showed that light enters the eye and produces an inverted image on the retina, and so our eyes were then seen as sense organs that passively receive emissions of light. Supported by the results of his experiments in staring, Sheldrake proposes that there is an outward projection when we see something, as well as a received sense impression. Vision is carried out through perceptual fields that exist both within the brain and beyond it. The starer's perceptual field can be felt by the receiver of the stare.

This concept is part of Sheldrake's larger theory that living beings create complex morphogenetic fields around themselves that interact with the fields of other living beings and with the environment. This is a concept that makes the aura and many psychic phenomena easier to understand scientifically. We already know that living beings create and are surrounded by an electromagnetic field that can be measured. Sheldrake's theory can be seen as an expansion of this discovery. In his book *The Science Delusion* (2012) he discusses this and other psychic phenomena, such as telepathy in humans and animals, arguing its validity.

Some young children can see "imaginary friends." These visual experiences can be a sign that the psychic level of the Eye Chakra is working powerfully for them. But these children would still be at the developmental stage where Sacral Chakra consciousness is dominant. The phenomenon may result from the fact that young children are less developed in the frontal cortex, possibly allowing the visual and auditory cortices to have a more powerful influence, which could help them access psychic states more easily. In adults, the psychic level of both the Throat and Eye Chakras works better in those adults who are not overly analytical and conceptual left-brain thinkers, suggesting that psychic skills may be an

advanced development of the intuitive capacities of the right hemisphere of the brain. Many meditation techniques are designed to slow down the “overthinking” mind, particularly the left brain. This allows the present-time, big-picture awareness of the right brain to be disinhibited. Rebalancing the frontal lobes in this way seems to contribute to increased psychic experiences. There is still much to learn and much research to be done in this area.

Intention

As noted earlier, Ajna, the Hindu name of the Eye Chakra, means “perceive” or “command.” These two words together conjure up the concept of having a vision and realizing it. In other words, the Eye Chakra creates the intentions, conscious or unconscious, that rule our life. At a psychic level, intention is our ability to send out an energetic message to the world. It is an active outward influence, as opposed to the receptive skill of clairvoyance and other psychic phenomena mentioned above.

There has been quite a lot written about the power of intention. Some of it is oversimplistic, suggesting that we create our own reality as a result of our mental attitudes and habits of thinking. To imagine that, for example, subsistence farmers suffering from drought and famine caused by anthropogenic climate change are responsible for the situation they find themselves in because of the way they think is both callous and immoral. At worst, for those of us who are more fortunate and therefore have the larger carbon footprint, it is a very selfish way to avoid taking any responsibility for the unfair situation that we have participated in creating.

On the other hand, our thoughts about ourselves and the world clearly do influence the life experience of each of us, including at the physical level. As an example of a mental intention affecting physical reality within the body, Alexander Technique teachers use the concept of “direction,” which is an intention given to the body, such as “Allow the neck to be free.” Just giving ourselves this conscious intention can allow significant muscular releases if done regularly enough that it becomes a new habit of thought. Similarly, biofeedback machines can allow us to mentally influence automatic bodily functions, such as reducing pain and altering heart rate or brain waves.

Just as our intentions can influence the physical body, they also influence our emotions and thoughts, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, cognitive behavior therapy invites clients to discover their destructive habits of thought and replace them with positive suggestions and intentions, and this has had considerable success at a psychological level.⁹

The Alexander Technique also operates at a more advanced psychic level. Teachers are able to give directions not only to themselves but also to their pupils. As well as the pupil thinking about freeing the neck, the Alexander teacher, by placing his or her hands on the pupil, can “think” the pupil’s neck into being freer, without doing anything. This form of healing could be seen as combining the Eye Chakra’s clear mental intention with the Heart Chakra’s empathic healing. Many hands-on practitioners work in a similar way, bringing about positive change in their clients through energetic messages transmitted through their minds and hands.

The extraordinary power of the mind to influence physical matter and external events is well researched, although not fully accepted by the scientific establishment. Prayer groups and distance healers have been working with intention for millennia, and now these abilities are being explored by scientists. In *The Intention Experiment* (2007), Lynne McTaggart documents a series of scientific studies in which the power of thought was able to influence such things as plant germination, the acidity level (pH) of water, and the “heads or tails” responses of computer-generated “coin tossing.” As a result of her research, she became interested in the fact that groups of people focus a more powerful energetic message than an individual acting alone. She concludes the book with an invitation to her readers to participate in further “intention experiments,” which she now organizes online. Group intention has the potential to achieve quite remarkable outcomes, such as distance healing and reducing violent crime in a targeted area. McTaggart’s projects, which work with the Heart Chakra and Eye Chakra together, may take us into the spiritual level of this chakra.

McTaggart also discovered in her research that the power of the mind to influence matter can do harm as well as good. The scientific research for this was carried out on bacteria and plants and showed that it was possible to stunt growth in them with negative intentions. In one experiment participants were asked to hold a container of mild saline solution that

would then be poured on a plant, causing reduced growth. The participants were unaware of the nature of the experiment, but it transpired that the salt water held by those participants who were clinically depressed had a stronger negative influence on the plant than water held by happier persons. This suggests that our unconscious negative thoughts can cause a negative influence on the world around us, a salutary warning to us all!

Alta Major

From its center at the atlanto-occipital joint, the Eye Chakra beams forward to the center of the forehead and the spot sometimes called the Third Eye. It also beams backward to a minor chakra called Alta Major, situated at the base of the skull where it meets the top of the neck (see [fig. 6.2](#)). Alta Major is an aspect of the Eye Chakra that looks backward toward the past, whereas the Third Eye looks forward toward the future. It is where we unconsciously hold our ancestral view of the world, our race memory, and distant memories that influence our thinking. Psychically, it allows us to recapture very early experiences of life, as far back as birth, and memories of past lives.

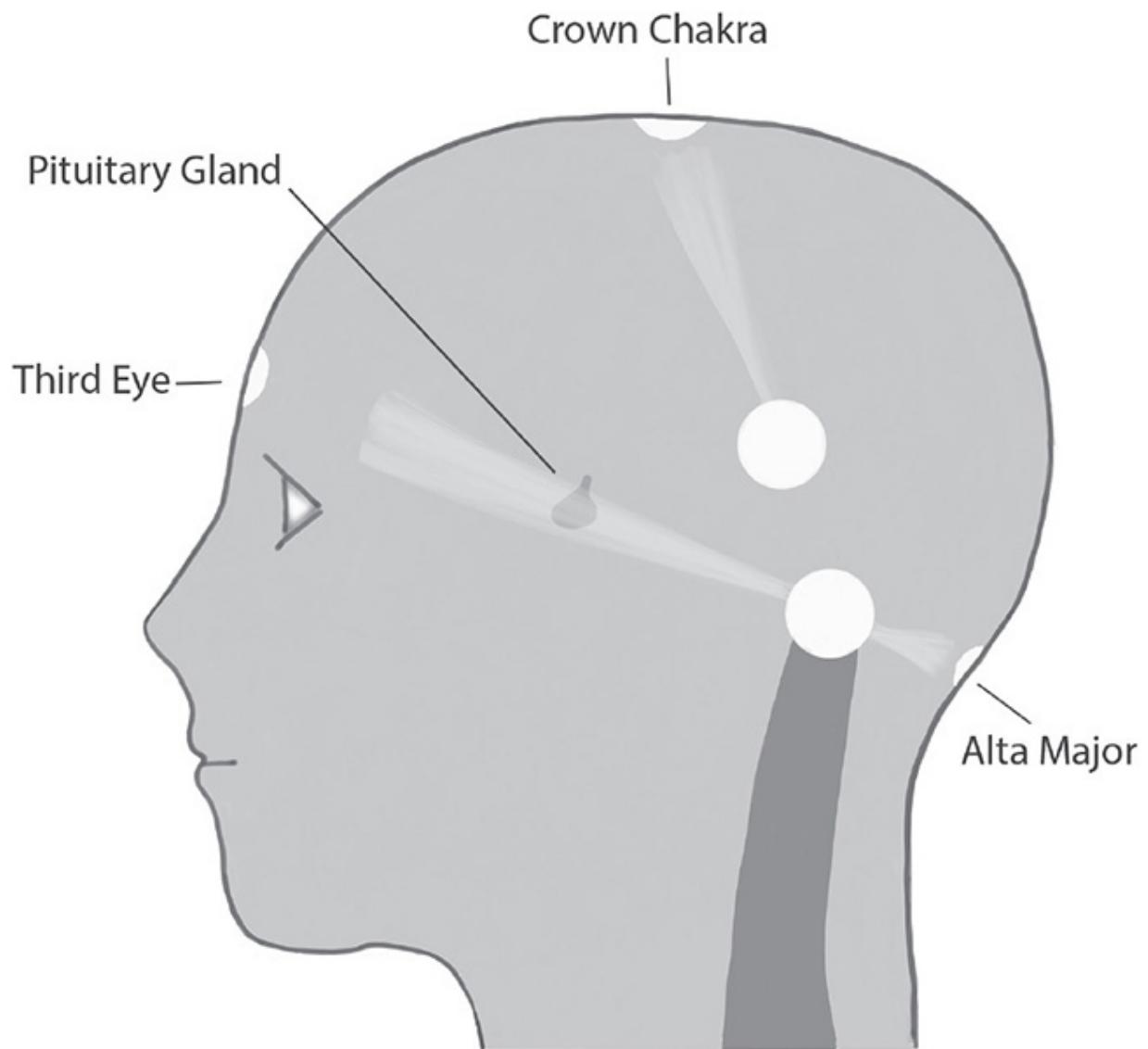


Fig. 6.2. Alta Major, the backward-looking aspect of the Eye Chakra

Hand Chakras

Psychometry is the psychic skill of receiving information about an event or a person by holding in your hands a physical object associated with that event or person, such as a piece of jewelry. When the information comes as a visual or thought form, as opposed to an inner voice or sensation, then the hand chakras are working in coordination with the Eye Chakra. That coordination can also happen during healing bodywork when the practitioner's hands are in contact with the client's body and the healer is

able to “pick up” visually what is happening in the client. As discussed above, practitioners can also transmit positive intentions of the Eye Chakra with the healing energy of the Heart Chakra through their hand chakras to the client.

Spiritual Level

*And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?*

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, “THE EOLIAN HARP”

In our journey through the chakras, we have moved up through the developmental stages of the lower chakras and the healing experience of the Heart Chakra into the more rarefied world of the upper chakras. This flow of energy from the Base Chakra to the Crown Chakra, from feet to head, from earth to heaven, is the experiential flow of the energy of life and consciousness, beginning with our most fundamental cellular development during fetal growth and birth, ruled by the Base Chakra, and then rising up through the spine to higher and higher levels of sensory, emotional, and mental experience. At the psychological level, chakra consciousness is explained as a part of our developing experience-based awareness. But this is only half the story! The upward flow of energy is balanced by the downward flow of energy from the Crown Chakra to the Base Chakra, from heaven to earth, bringing inspiration, the “energy of spirit,” into our minds and bodies. In the upper chakras, we can begin to consciously experience the power of this energy when it influences our creative self-expression in the Throat Chakra and our creative thinking in the Eye Chakra.

Inspiration, in this sense, may seem similar to intuition, but the two terms must be distinguished. *Intuition* describes an ability to access information from our deeply buried memories, from our unconscious mind, from dreams, or from our gut feelings. This links intuition to the right hemisphere of the brain and the Lunar channel. Intuition can also be seen as

a sensitivity to the outer influences in the environment, or the psychic skill of “picking up” information from other people, animals, or the energy emanating from an object or a place. It can have a precognitive quality, or it can see backward into the past with great clarity. Intuition is available to us through many of the chakras in different ways, such as in the clairsentience of the Sacral Chakra, in the empathy of the Heart Chakra, and through intuitive aspects of the psychic levels of the upper chakras.

In contrast, *inspiration* describes the phenomenon in which a person receives completely new information “out of the blue” and seemingly unrelated to anything happening around that person. The most profound experiences of inspiration are often described as flashes of genius. We hear of musical composers who suddenly envisage a whole symphony and poets who describe a work that has arrived in their minds complete. Scientists also experience these enlightening moments. The Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan contributed to his field of work what he understood to be divinely inspired mathematical formulas offering solutions to key areas of research. He was deeply religious, and the solutions to problems often came to him during worship of his Hindu family goddess, to whom he attributed the inspiration. He also received inspiration through dreams and visions. He once said, “An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God.”¹⁰

Dreams and visions can be a combination of inspiration and intuition. James Watson describes how he found the double helix image as a model for DNA in a dream about a spiral staircase. Many creative people find their inspiration through dreams and daydreams, which allow imagination to flow. Imagination fueled by the inspirational downward flow of energy through the chakras can be a powerful tool for discovering, or “uncovering,” new ideas. These eureka moments occur when we are deeply relaxed, not thinking too much, as a result of which we enter into a state of enhanced aliveness and illumination. We might describe such experiences as acts of grace, or peak experiences, where everything falls effortlessly into place with a quality of beauty and clarity.

At the level of the Heart Chakra, an act of grace can manifest as an overwhelming sense of love and perfection pervading an experience. In the Throat Chakra, it might be the experience of finding that everything flows effortlessly and perfectly during creative activity. In the Eye Chakra, it

might come as an inspired idea that seems to be gifted to us from the universe.

With a flowing Heart Chakra, the inspirational energy flowing down through the Crown Chakra into the chakra system expands. This expansion gives us greater insight into ourselves and the world, and that wisdom extends beyond our experience. We perceive the world through an “inspired lens.” Not only do we begin to understand the world from a spiritual perspective, but the vision and wisdom we are developing will become more powerful. We will feel elevated by the sense that we are fulfilling our purpose in life, supported by the spiritual energy of the universe.

If humans have access to an inspirational flow of energy, where is it coming from? How do we explain it? And how do we explain all the psychic phenomena that we have scientific evidence for? Some meditators who claim to have experienced enlightenment suggest that consciousness is the foundation upon which our universe is created. As spiritual author Jeff Carreira writes:

We live inside of a conscious universe. The foundation of reality is awareness itself. We have not been taught to think this way. Instead we have been trained to see ourselves as living things that coexist with other living things in an inanimate universe. This simply isn't true. You are part of a living and awake universe. Nothing separates *you* from *it*. You are not a thing in the universe. You are part of it.¹¹

The dominant cultural and scientific story is that the universe is made of matter and matter is not alive. This view of the world has had an enormous impact on humanity. In addition, ever since Descartes compared the mind to the workings of a clock, life and consciousness have been explained by mechanisms, by analogy with machines. Today our minds are compared to computers, and enthusiastic scientists believe that it is only a matter of time before computerized robots become indistinguishable from humans. But machines are dead! The mechanistic model lacks life, consciousness, and spirit. It is time for a new story.

Many writers have suggested the concept of a Universal Mind that our individual minds connect to in some way (see [plate 12](#)). The model of a Universal Mind can offer an explanation for the many paranormal discoveries that make the theory that the mind can be explained solely in terms of the brain untenable. Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James were some of the early proponents of this theory. At the turn of the twentieth century, R. M. Bucke introduced the term “cosmic consciousness” and Carl Jung came up with “collective unconscious.” Many other scientists have adopted this theory, with Erwin Schrödinger, a quantum physicist, being one of the most famous.^{[12](#)} Lynne McTaggart and Rupert Sheldrake have suggested fields of energy as an explanation for non-local consciousness.^{[13](#)} In his book *One Mind* (2013), Dr. Larry Dossey pulled together information from many different fields of research to present a very convincing argument for a “collective, unitary domain of intelligence, of which all individual minds are a part.”^{[14](#)}

The concept of a conscious universe is ancient. Early Hindu texts use the Sanskrit word *akasha* to mean the subtle and ethereal fluid that was thought to fill and pervade the universe and to be the peculiar vehicle of life and of sound. In the late nineteenth century, writers on Hindu philosophy developed the concept of akashic records. Theosophist Alice Bailey writes:

The akashic record is like an immense photographic film, registering all the desires and earth experiences of our planet. Those who perceive it will see pictured thereon: 1) The life experiences of every human being since time began, 2) The reactions to experience of the entire animal kingdom, 3) The aggregation of the thought-forms of a karmic nature (based on desire) of every human unit throughout time.^{[15](#)}

Although a photographic film might seem quite a clumsy metaphor in today’s complex world, it does not seem so very far removed from more recent scientific theories that compare the universe to a hologram and suggest that information is one of its fundamental components.^{[16](#)} As Bailey implies, the nature of the consciousness of a Universal Mind is so complex as to be barely within the grasp of our small and limited minds.

In most English translations of the Christian Bible, at the beginning of St. John's Gospel, God is described as the "Word." The term is translated from the Greek *logos*, which could more accurately be interpreted as a "reasoning principle." In this way, the Bible itself poetically suggests a universal intelligence:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not.
(John 1:1–5, King James Version)

The power of divine manifestation is expressed through the word, the life, the light, and the intention of God. I'm afraid our limited human consciousness might be seen as part of "the darkness"! A universal intelligence that creates everything and encompasses everything and into which we all connect is certainly a difficult concept for us to comprehend.

The Eye Chakra, the consciousness of vision and wisdom, is where we contemplate such unusual concepts. If we are part of this Universal Mind, our thoughts, be they words or images, have great power to influence ourselves and our environment, for better or for worse, at all levels of the chakras. At the spiritual level, they have the potential to create heaven on earth.

Visualization Meditation

The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.

GERMAN THEOLOGIAN MEISTER ECKHART (c. 1260–1328)

In the Tantric tradition, spiritual aspirants would meditate upon *yantras*, complex geometric diagrams that they would memorize and visualize as a meditation practice. The complexity of some of the yantras shows the level

of expertise in visualization demanded of these spiritual aspirants (see [plate 13](#)). The chakra yantras used in this book are much simpler than some of the yantras used for meditation. The visualization would nourish the Eye Chakra. It would also balance the Ida and Pingala channels; the left brain visualizes in a diagrammatic way, while the right brain visualizes in beautiful pictorial detail, and both would be needed to visualize the yantras, which are both diagrammatic and visually detailed.

It is interesting to note that nowadays, we do not see the same emphasis on complex visualization as a meditative practice. Popular practices such as attending to one's breathing, repeating a silent mantra, and observing what is arising in sensation, emotion, and thought all seem to be designed to calm the nervous system and decrease stimulation of the mind. Guided visualization, which is vocalized by a teacher, is much easier than visualizing a yantra, and is the closest we get to a meditative visualization technique.

Many of the meditative techniques practiced today seem to be designed to diminish the dominance of the left brain, the detailed analytical thinking that gets in the way of reaching higher states of consciousness. According to Iain McGilchrist, the period of history during which the Tantric texts were written was one in which humans had better balance between their left and right hemispheric thinking, unlike those of us in the modern world, which encourages left hemispheric dominance. Perhaps today we have a much greater need to calm the left hemispheric aspect of our mentation, and so we are drawn to meditative practices that encourage right hemispheric awareness, rather than those that call for detailed visualization, demanding the concentrated application of both hemispheres. Today's practices, by encouraging right-brain attention, actually promote balance in the Solar and Lunar channels of Eye Chakra consciousness, and the left and right hemispheres of the brain, and this could eventually lead to the nondual experience of Crown Chakra spiritual consciousness.

The benefits of a committed meditation practice are now widely recognized, even if they do not always lead to enlightenment. Mindfulness meditation, the practice of maintaining awareness of one's sensations, emotions, and thoughts as they arise, has been shown to relieve stress, lower blood pressure, and lift mood. A regular daily practice can improve memory and sharpen the mind, counteracting the effects of aging.

Mindfulness meditation helps balance the Eye Chakra at the psychological level and also nourishes the psychic and spiritual levels of the chakra.

A lot of neuroscientific research has shown that in advanced meditative states, the left and right hemispheres work together harmoniously, which is sometimes described as “whole brain thinking” or “synchrony.” This does suggest a state in which the Solar and Lunar channels have become unified, which can open the door to the nondual consciousness of the Crown Chakra. As mentioned in chapter 4, several companies now offer meditation audio tracks that, when listened to with stereo headphones, encourage synchronization of the left and right hemispheres in a way that mimics the brainwave patterns of advanced meditators. We are still at the beginning of research into these extraordinary brain states, and there is much more to understand about how this research correlates with the esoteric wisdom of Tantra and other ancient traditions.

Manifesting Our Intentions

When our intentions come from the spiritual level of the Heart Chakra and a focused meditative state (Eye Chakra), they are more powerful. One experiment carried out in Washington, DC, involved 2,500 practitioners meditating together, with the intention of reducing the crime rate in the city. During the specific periods of time when they meditated, the crime rate dropped by 25 percent. In a similar experiment carried out during the height of the Israel-Lebanon war in the 1980s, meditators operating from several countries all focused on bringing peace to the war zone. Levels of violence decreased, at a rate of anywhere from 40 to 80 percent, during the specific periods when the group meditations were taking place. Interestingly, the percentage of decreased violence increased relative to the number of meditators; that is, the more people who were meditating, the less violence occurred.¹⁷ With these and other experiments in intention, we have growing evidence that mass meditation efforts can influence human behavior for the better.

To further explore the potential of these discoveries, the HeartMath Institute set up the Global Coherence Initiative (GCI) in 2008. Based on the discovery that our heart rhythms resonate within the same frequency bands as Earth’s magnetic field and that the power of group consciousness can influence external events, researchers at the institute wanted to see if it was

possible to influence Earth's field through group heart-based intention. The project was based on the following ideas, as outlined by psychophysiologist Rollin McCraty in *Science of the Heart*:

1. Human and animal health, cognitive functions, emotions and behavior are affected by planetary magnetic and energetic fields.
2. Earth's magnetic fields are carriers of biologically relevant information that connects all living systems.
3. Each individual affects the global information field.
4. Large numbers of people creating heart-centered states of care, love and compassion will generate a more coherent field environment that can benefit others and help offset the current planetarywide discord and incoherence.¹⁸

In order to carry out this research, GCI has created a network, in different areas of the world, of six sensitive magnetic field detectors that monitor fluctuations in Earth's geomagnetic fields and resonances in the ionosphere. Anyone who is interested in participating in this project, using the HeartMath techniques for creating personal coherence, can become one of GCI's ambassadors, directing his or her energetic contributions of heart-focused care and intention to areas of the world coordinated by the project. In 2017, GCI had 165,000 ambassadors operating from 154 countries, and the numbers are growing all the time.

Working with a global community and the magnetic field detectors, GCI researchers are collecting data on the effects of heart-coherence intentions upon Earth's magnetic field in different areas of the world. From a chakra perspective, they are combining the care and love of Heart Chakra consciousness and the intention of Eye Chakra consciousness to influence Earth's auric field, of which the electromagnetic field is a measurable part.

The HeartMath Institute is one of several organizations working with group consciousness to bring about positive effects in the world. Lynne McTaggart's intention experiments, discussed earlier in this chapter, are another. The concept of the power of group consciousness to influence situations in the world is fairly recent and gives cause for optimism. If enough people can fully integrate their lower chakras and live life based

upon a flowing Heart Chakra, working with others to manifest the positive intentions of the Eye Chakra, then who knows what might be possible!

Developmental Psychology and the Eye Chakra

As we discussed in chapter 4, in relation to the Heart Chakra, the developmental stage that Jenny Wade calls Authentic Consciousness correlates not only with Heart Chakra consciousness but also with Throat Chakra and Eye Chakra consciousness. In addition, for these upper chakras, consciousness sometimes operates at the spiritual level, not just at the psychological level. This is because the Heart Chakra is the entry point into the spiritual level of all the chakras. When it is flowing strongly and consistently, it allows us to develop higher stages of consciousness, such as Authentic Consciousness and beyond.

When we look at the common qualities of people who operate at the level of Authentic Consciousness, we can see how the upper chakras—the Heart (fourth) Chakra, Throat (fifth) Chakra, and Eye (sixth) Chakra—work together. Below is a summary of the qualities Wade posits as aspects of people with Authentic Consciousness.

They have a commitment to self-development for its own sake (*fourth and fifth chakras*).

They are self-aware, conscious of their own conflicting aspects and able to integrate these different parts of their psyche into a coherent whole (*all the chakras, through the wisdom of the fourth and sixth chakras*).

They have high self-esteem, so they can accept the more negative aspects of themselves and be willing to change them (*healing of the lower chakras through the fourth, fifth, and sixth chakras*).

Their self-awareness enables them to more easily detach from and not act upon their negative emotions, and they are less fearful and neurotic in their behavior (*fourth, fifth, and sixth chakras*).

They are discerning and discriminating, but they do not condemn (*fourth and sixth chakras*).

They have a genuine empathy and tolerance for others, accepting diversity, not being bound by their culture, but identifying with the human race as a whole (*fourth chakra*).

They accept and express both the masculine and feminine aspects of themselves in an integrated way (*balance of the Solar and Lunar channels expressed through the fourth and fifth chakras*).

This is reflected in their whole-brain thinking; they combine intuitive, holistic, and symbolic thinking with rational, linear, analytic thinking (*balance of the Solar and Lunar channels through the sixth chakra*).

They see their lives as fulfilling for themselves personally and also contributing to the welfare of humanity (*spiritual level of the fourth, fifth, and sixth chakras*).

They believe in a spiritual though not necessarily religious dimension to life, and they are tolerant of ambiguities and uncertainties, believing life to be essentially meaningful (*spiritual level of the fourth and sixth chakras*).

They believe that their life has a purpose, which they wish to fulfill (*spiritual level of the fifth chakra*).

Death holds little fear for them; they see it as an adventure, at least intellectually (*spiritual level of the fourth and sixth chakras*).

Their lack of fear is demonstrated by their increased spontaneity, playfulness, and creativity (*healing of the second chakra through the fourth and fifth chakras*).

They express appreciation easily and enjoy sensual experiences fully (*healing of the first and second chakras through the spiritual level of the fourth chakra*).

They enjoy a richness of emotion and fully embrace being human, with all its ups and downs (*fourth chakra*).

Wade also notes that Authentic Consciousness holds the potential for an increase in peak experiences, which, from a chakra perspective, occurs when a person moves powerfully into the psychic or spiritual level of one or more of the upper chakras.

Cultural Considerations

Because the Eye Chakra is where we develop our view of the world, and the Throat Chakra is where we act upon the world through our self-expression, they both participate in the realm of Culture, with a big “C.” Anything to do with art or science, politics, entertainment, or sports engages these upper chakras. Often the content of our culture reflects the consciousness of the lower chakras because, as a society, our collective consciousness is functioning mainly at the Sacral and Solar Plexus levels. For example, soap operas are about families and communities, which is the realm of the Sacral Chakra, but they are being represented as a view of life, and this perspective involves the Eye Chakra. It would be impossible to reflect on all aspects of our culture here, but one good facet to examine is the education system, which is influenced by and influences the consciousness of the people who make up our culture.

Education

The word *educate* comes from the Latin *educere*, meaning “to lead out,” which evokes the process of encouraging our inner potential to blossom. From a chakra perspective, the ideal education system would involve nourishing and developing all the chakras at age-appropriate stages, including a balanced development of the Solar Pingala and Lunar Ida channels. I would like to explore imaginatively what this might look like.

In the West, children usually begin preschool when they are about three years old, when Sacral Chakra consciousness is in the process of becoming dominant. However, at this age, Sacral Chakra dominance is in its very early stages, and care must be given to meet Base Chakra needs, such as attachment, food and drink, movement, and rest. Ideally, preschool would run for only a few hours a day so that the children’s bonding with their primary caregivers is not damaged. Additionally, children would begin preschool with the program functioning much like a playgroup, with their primary caregiver accompanying them, which allows the movement between attachment and separation to occur at each child’s own pace until the child feels comfortable engaging with the group without the caregiver in attendance. I know that this setup is not possible for the majority of parents

in our current world, but this is an imaginative exploration of what an ideal education system might look like.

Sacral Chakra consciousness revels in the stimulation of a playful, supportive environment, which good preschools and primary schools can offer. If children feel safe and supported, they are spontaneously creative and natural learners, keen to understand the rules of the game, be it mathematics, linguistics, art, science, sports, or cookery. They accept and want to please the authority figures who are their teachers so long as class sizes are small enough to allow teachers to manage the individual needs arising in their pupils.

As children approach puberty and move into Solar Plexus Chakra consciousness, changes in the frontal lobes of the brain allow an increased ability to reason and consider multiple options, rather than simply obey instructions.¹⁹ As they begin the enormous transition into adulthood, adolescents need more opportunities to express their individuality, explore their interests, and discuss their values and life choices, all while building their self-esteem. Ideally, they would be supported in pursuing vocational choices as well as academic ones. To be effective, their teachers must function as mentors, earning the respect of their students rather than enforcing rules from the position of authority figures. Each student could have a personal mentor, a teacher they respect, who could help them explore their entry into adulthood. As well as being encouraged to achieve their personal goals, which involves the ambitious and competitive approach of the Solar channel, they could also be encouraged to value the Lunar channel's interdependent and relational aspects of life, which would bring balance to the left and right brains. With the abundance of information available on the internet, students could sometimes pursue their own fields of learning independently, supported by individual mentoring and small group learning.

The Heart Chakra opens during childhood, and its empathic witnessing of self and others would be an important and ongoing part of an ideal education system. Witnessing is a way of working with the inhibitory functions of the prefrontal cortex and can be taught through mindfulness practices and other forms of meditation. Schools could encourage their students to develop Heart Chakra consciousness by focusing on building awareness of the importance of the Golden Rule as a fundamental moral

principle and giving students the opportunity to deeply experience beauty in nature and in art.

Throat Chakra consciousness could be encouraged through sports, art, music and drama, and craftsmanship in practical skills. In small discussion groups, students would be invited to listen well and to speak their own truth, developing awareness of personal values, ethics, and social issues, as well as improving communication skills. Most students would have built enough self-esteem, as a result of the support they've been given, to feel able to assert themselves, whether their chosen interests are practical, artistic, academic, social, or some mixture of these.

Eye Chakra consciousness is an important part of education but needs to be balanced by attention to the other chakras. It also needs to be balanced on the Ida and Pingala channels, so there would be an equal emphasis on developing the subjective, intuitive, relational, and holistic right-brain thinking of the Ida channel as well as the objective, evidence-based, analytical left-brain thinking of the Pingala channel. In the school curriculum, the arts and humanities would have equal importance as science and mathematics.

A truly ideal education system would also support the potential for its students to develop the psychic and spiritual levels of the chakras, including the nondual consciousness of the Crown Chakra, though that seems quite out of range at our current stage of evolution.

How does this vision compare with the reality of our education system in the West? Just over 160 years ago, Charles Dickens wrote *Hard Times*, in which the education of working-class children was depicted as an exercise in obedience, with dictator-teachers who were only interested in facts and despised imagination. The children were being trained to become factory workers and socialized to not challenge authority. This education system was based on “in-struction,” which suggests putting information structures into a person rather than drawing the inner riches out. Unfortunately, our education system has its roots in these Victorian ideas.

Not surprisingly, it is at the secondary level of education when many students rebel, lose interest, or drop out because their needs have been abandoned. Most schools give little attention to building the self-esteem that is so crucial for Solar Plexus Chakra development in teenagers or to developing the compassion and empathy of the Heart Chakra.

Instead, our current secondary education system focuses on the higher learning of the Eye Chakra. For those students who are attracted to academic study, the system works well. The supreme goal of the Western school system is to send students to college, to those ivory towers where, at least in principle, pure thought is encouraged, unpolluted by the necessities of daily life. However, the “pure thought” tends to concentrate on the analytical and objective thinking of the left brain (Pingala), as opposed to the intuitive and subjective thinking of the right brain (Ida), whether students are pursuing the arts or science degrees. While in principle the arts and science both need analytical attention to detail and intuitive big picture thinking, science subjects deal with the outer objective world, and the arts tend to be more subjective and intuitive, so left-brain-dominant students will tend more toward scientific subjects and right-brain-dominant students toward arts subjects. That said, academic education as a whole is predisposed toward objective critical analysis, even in the arts, so the left-brain approach to learning remains dominant.

Nowadays, as attendance at universities becomes more inclusive, we see more practical and creative courses being offered, which would lend more emphasis to the Lunar Ida channel and involve more of the chakras. However, these courses can suffer from a difficult tension between encouraging creativity, practical skills, and experiential learning and maintaining the academic requirements, which are essentially expressed through left-brain analytical written work, the dominant requirement of the academic system.

Our modern education system gives us a clue about where our society has imbalances. Compared to the ideal system I tried to envisage, the world offered to our children is one in which Base Chakra needs are increasingly ignored. Sacral Chakra needs for pleasurable approaches to learning are diminishing due to increased assessment, and the Sacral Chakra willingness to accept authority is exploited beyond its age-appropriate stage. The competitive, ambitious qualities of the Solar channel of the Solar Plexus Chakra are encouraged at the expense of the connected relational qualities of the Lunar channel. The Heart Chakra is given minimal attention. The Ida/Pingala imbalance continues into the upper chakras, so that science subjects are valued above arts subjects, and only a small percentage of academically inclined young people on the left-brained Pingala channel of analytical, evidence-based thinking are supported in excelling, at the

expense of intuitive, embodied thinking of the Ida Channel. It is hardly surprising that many children who enter the education system with balanced or rightbrain dominance leave it with left-brain dominance.²⁰ Left-brain thinking is at the root of our education system, and the system is designed, both consciously and unconsciously, to make students fit into our dominant left-brain culture.

Of course, my summary is an exaggeration and oversimplification of the situation. Everywhere there are thousands of wonderful individuals and groups emphasizing the positive expression of less prominent chakras, and the less dominant Ida channel, in many different fields of work. But there is still much work to be done!

An Alternative Educational Model

Many educationalists argue that our current education system, with its emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic, is damaging to the natural desire to learn and create that all children have. One example is Rudolf Steiner, a gifted clairvoyant and philosopher, who was well acquainted with Hindu philosophy. Steiner founded the Waldorf education system, which operates successfully worldwide. He believed that children go through three stages of development, each of which lasts for seven years, which possibly he linked to the developmental stages of the three lower chakras. Steiner emphasized the importance of not focusing on the intellect in the first seven years of life but on encouraging physical and sensory experience through imitation of adults doing daily tasks, such as cleaning and gardening (Base Chakra, with influence from the Sacral Chakra). In Waldorf schools, a lot of time is given to artistic activities such as painting, music, and movement. Reading and writing begin only when children reach seven years of age, at which point they begin to turn to authority figures for instruction (Sacral Chakra). Intellectual skills are not emphasized until the age of fourteen, or puberty,

which would coincide with the Solar Plexus Chakra becoming dominant. Imagination and creativity are pursued throughout the education, encouraging a greater left and right hemispheric balance.^{[21](#)}

The Digital World

While our education system, lacking resources and struggling to cope, is stuck in outmoded ways of learning that do not meet the needs of the majority of our young people, the world around it is changing. Everywhere we see young people on their mobile phones or other screens, connecting with friends, listening to music, playing games, working. As society becomes digitalized, the amount of mental stimulation young people are getting is increasing exponentially. For most young Westerners, there's never a time when their mobile phone is not readily at hand, an entire world of information, social media, entertainment, and virtual reality at their fingertips. The physical world recedes and the psychological world advances.

As we discussed in relation to the Throat Chakra, the ongoing huge expansion in our creative industries is dramatically affecting our culture. The economy of the twenty-first century depends increasingly on the generation of psychological experience through creativity and innovation.^{[22](#)} Today, we are predominantly focused not on the physical and material aspects of life, but on the psychological needs for mental work and entertainment.

The growing volume of audiovisual input is highly stimulating to the Eye Chakra, even though the content might be about lower chakra matters. We have no idea yet how this will affect the brain, human consciousness, and evolutionary development. On the one hand, it suggests a huge potential expansion in global awareness in all fields of knowledge. On the other, we risk global imbalance if the lower chakras become less and less well integrated. Our world is moving from a focus on the lower chakras to a focus on the upper chakras, from a physical to a psychological world, but not in a very balanced or integrated way.

Another unintended consequence of this new screen-focused world is that our eyes become habituated to a narrow focus on screens, so we use less peripheral vision. There is such a strong connection between the eyes and the brain that this central fixation will affect hemispheric functioning. With less peripheral vision, we lose context, a sense of the big picture and the connections between things.²³

Nevertheless, the upper chakra development is exciting because it has great potential for human evolution. Experiencing the power of invisible modern technology—Wi-Fi, cellular networks, cloud computing—makes it easier to envision the power of invisible consciousness and its potential to subtly create change in ourselves and our world. These new technologies also make it possible for people to come together, virtually speaking, in large groups to set intentions at a global level, which several organizations, like the HeartMath Institute, are doing. We are still at the beginning of understanding the power of group consciousness, but if it can reliably produce positive outcomes, then we could be at the beginning of a consciousness revolution as more and more people get involved in participating in projects to bring about peace and harmony in the world.

Of course, the powers of the internet are not always used for good. Fake news and hate news are circulated within seconds to huge numbers of people. Cyber-bullying is an ongoing concern. But this is a time of transition, and so contradictory outcomes are to be expected. We simply have to learn to regulate and manage this huge and amazing resource—and that will happen when we are able to evolve as a culture to embrace whole-brain, heart-centered consciousness in which we value and balance all the chakras and the Ida and Pingala channels.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Chakra Training for Actors

Several years ago, I was invited to run a short course on the chakras in the drama department of an English university. I would be working

with a group of six drama students who were in their final year. The senior lecturer who invited me would also be present. I would spend a week teaching the students about the chakras as a map of the psyche, which initially would be used for self-exploration and understanding. Three months later, I would return for a further few days to help the students use the map of the chakras to interpret the characters they were playing in The Pelican, by Swedish playwright August Strindberg, which was part of their final assessment. Having enjoyed working in the professional theater in my twenties and thirties, I was delighted to accept.

Because the chakras are a map of the embodied mind, or the ensouled body, they are an ideal tool for actors, who use their minds and bodies to portray the character they are playing. It is not without precedent to use the chakras when teaching drama students. Konstantin Stanislavski, the first theater practitioner to seriously develop a system of actor training, studied Eastern philosophy and encouraged his students to practice Hatha yoga, which usually includes some knowledge of the chakras. He taught a system of three inner motive forces: a thought center in the head, an emotion center in the solar plexus, and an action center in the pelvis.²⁴ These centers could be seen as a simplification of the chakra system, a way of developing an awareness of centers of consciousness in the body. Stanislavski's favorite pupil, Michael Chekhov, also studied Hindu philosophy and was later influenced by Rudolf Steiner.²⁵ Chekhov incorporated all these ideas into his acting technique, working with some great actors like Jack Nicholson, Marilyn Monroe, and Clint Eastwood.

At the time, I had just finished training two therapeutic counselors in hands-on chakra work, and both were happy to accompany me through this course. This meant that in addition to running group sessions with the students, we could offer each of the students some individual hands-on work. During the week, each student would get one session with me and another with one of my graduates.

The course began with explanations and exercises on the Base Chakra. Then we moved up to the Sacral Chakra, and so on, moving upward through the chakras as the week progressed. We used lots

of practical exercises, guided visualizations, improvisations, and group discussions. The students had journals in which they recorded the qualities of each chakra, reflected upon their own expression of each chakra, and wrote or drew about the exploratory chakranourishing exercises that we engaged in (many of which are included in this book). Everyone slowly gained a deeper sense of themselves, including which of their chakras flowed strongly and which needed more support.

The individual hands-on work was able to throw more light on the “picture of the self” that each student was discovering. As practitioners, we could feel how well each chakra was flowing and work with the students to explore areas that needed more attention. Because this was a group project, the students were able to discuss their discoveries with each other and help each other clarify areas of confusion—as is true in so many parts of life, it’s often much easier to see the difficult areas in another person than one’s own unconscious problems!

For aspiring actors, exploring one’s own and other people’s psyches is tremendously valuable work. Actors have to be able to represent the psyche of a character in a drama. The actors’ own strengths and weaknesses influence their interpretation of the character they are portraying. But with self-knowledge, unconscious problems can be made conscious and weak areas can be strengthened. Such was the intention of the course.

The students found the first week illuminating and worked with the practical exercises we had given them to integrate and nourish all areas of the psyche. Then they applied the chakra map of the psyche to their characters in The Pelican. The characters in this play are an extremely neurotic bunch, which was ideal for interpretation using the map of the chakras! The feedback from the students was very positive. Working with the chakras had given them a method by which they could analyze their characters and develop their characterizations (Eye Chakra). If they decided that a character had one or more of their chakras very out of balance, they could find some psychophysical expression in their movement and voice to bring that imbalance to life in their performance (Throat Chakra).

Because the chakras correlate to the stages of human development, they could consider manifestations of imbalance as a developmental issue. Did this character's problems begin at birth, during childhood, or during adolescence? How did a character's problem in the Sacral Chakra affect the chakras above it? These kinds of questions allowed a rich interpretation of character to evolve, which eventually led to a very dynamic and gripping performance.

When the adrenaline of performance had trickled away, the students were able to take away with them a lifelong resource that they could use to understand themselves, to understand others, and to work on characterization in their future performances. From the perspective of the Eye Chakra, they had developed a conceptual map of the human psyche—an invaluable tool.

Nourishing the Eye Chakra

Just as using your voice is a good way to nourish the Throat Chakra, using your eyes is a good way of nourishing the Eye Chakra. Going for a walk with the intention that you are really going to enjoy looking at everything around you allows your eyes to move back and forth from focused to peripheral vision, expanding awareness of your environment. Let your eyes explore, being attracted to this or that color or movement or shape, delighting in seeing with a beginner's eye. Notice how you feel as a result of feasting your eyes!

EXPLORING EYE POSITIONS

Find a comfortable seat. Now, run through the instructions below, which have you think about specific people, objects, or processes, and notice where you look in relation to what you are thinking. Do you look straight ahead, to the left or right, or up or down or in between? Make a note of any correlations that you find between types of thinking and your eye positions.

- Remember the face of a person you know well.
- Imagine dangling your feet in a stream or swimming in the sea.

- Remember a conversation you had recently.
- Imagine a garden you would like to plant.
- Remember the last time you were really upset about something.
- Multiply $8 \times 9 \times 5$.
- Remember the last time you found something funny.
- Imagine having a conversation with someone about a topic that interests you.

PALMING

Lie down in a comfortable position. Lay your hands on your face, with your palms over your closed eyes. In this position, the hand chakras give out healing energy to the eyes, which is healing for not just the eyes but also the Eye Chakra. If you like, you can place a large pillow or cushion on your chest as support for your arms.

GUIDED VISUALIZATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAKRAS

Sit somewhere where you are able to feel peaceful and comfortable, with support for your back and both feet on the floor about one foot apart. If you prefer, you can lie down in one of the semi-supine positions (see [here](#)). If you are lying down, let your hands rest on your body, putting one hand on your lower abdomen (Sacral Chakra) and one on the upper abdomen (Solar Plexus Chakra).

Close your eyes. Feel the weight of your body dropping down toward the floor. Notice the points of contact between your body and the chair or the floor. Think of the earth supporting you. Try not to judge any sensations or emotions you are feeling but simply accept them as this moment's reality.

Bring your attention to your feet, your legs, and the base of your pelvic floor, where the Base Chakra is situated, between the coccyx

at the base of the spine and the perineum. How does this area of your body feel? What sensations and emotions arise from this area? What thoughts, intuitions, and images arise as you give it attention? What color and shape come to mind as you contemplate this chakra?

Now bring your attention to your lower abdomen, home of the Sacral Chakra, and consider how this part of your body is feeling. What sensations arise from this area? What emotions? Does it feel contented, neglected, happy, sad, or some other emotion? Does it have a color or shape? What thoughts, intuitions, and images arise as you give your Sacral Chakra attention?

In a similar way, bring your attention to the Solar Plexus Chakra and then the Heart Chakra, the Throat Chakra, the Eye Chakra, and the Crown Chakra. Consider each of your chakras in turn, noticing what arises as you give each chakra attention, and what your responses are. Get in touch with the complex consciousness that makes up your mind and body. Allow a picture of your chakras to emerge as you give them attention. Try to remember this picture that you have intuitively created about yourself.

When you are ready to stop, remind yourself that you have a body by rubbing your arms and legs and wriggling about a little before you get up.

Now try to draw, paint, write about, or otherwise represent the picture or story you created about your chakras in your journal.

IDA AND PINGALA MEDITATION

The Ida and Pingala channels are part of a complex system of nadis running throughout the body, in which Ida is part of the left channel system and Pingala is part of the right channel system. As we've discussed, nadis are energy channels that can be equated with muscles, nerves, veins, arteries, and acupuncture meridians (see [fig. 1.3](#)). They terminate in the Eye Chakra in some texts and in the nostrils in others. In this exercise, we will explore the left and right sides of the body, represented by the Ida and Pingala channel systems.

Sit somewhere where you are able to feel peaceful and comfortable, with support for your back and both feet on the floor about one foot apart. If you prefer, you can lie down in one of the semi-supine positions (see [here](#)).

Close your eyes. Feel the weight of your body dropping down toward the floor. Notice the points of contact between your body and the chair or floor. Think of the earth supporting you. Try not to judge any sensations or emotions you are feeling but simply accept them as this moment's reality.

Now give your attention to your feet. Begin with your left foot and become aware of how it feels. You might visualize that foot in your mind. Notice any sensations arising from the toes, the balls and arch of the foot, and the top of the foot. Now do the same with your right foot. Then compare the two feet. Do any feelings, thoughts, and images arise as you compare them? Do you notice any difference between the feelings, thoughts, and images associated with each foot? Do you like one foot more than the other? Why?

Move your attention to your left ankle and lower leg, and then to your right ankle and lower leg, visualizing each ankle and lower leg, and exploring the sensations, emotions, and thoughts that arise about each one. Then do the same for your knees and then your upper legs. Then compare the two sides. What feelings, thoughts, and images arise? Are there any differences? Do you like one side more than the other?

Now give your attention to your pelvic floor, hips, and buttocks, the area of your body around the Base Chakra, visualizing each area as you explore it. Do the left and right sides of this area feel the same or different to you? Notice whether any areas cause you discomfort. Notice what feelings, thoughts, and images arise as you give attention to the left and right sides of this area.

Do the same for each side of the lower back and the lower abdominal area, where the Sacral Chakra is located.

Move your attention to the upper abdominal area of your body, around the Solar Plexus Chakra, comparing the left and right sides.

Do the same for the left and right sides of the Heart Chakra area.

Now explore your shoulders, arms, and hands in a similar way, visualizing each side and noticing what feelings, thoughts, and images arise as you give attention to the left and right sides. This area of your body links to both the Heart and Throat Chakras. Are there differences between the two sides? Do you like one arm and shoulder more than the other?

Now visualize and explore the left and right sides of your neck, throat, jaw, mouth, and ears, which is the rest of the area around the Throat Chakra. Notice what feelings, thoughts, and images arise in this area and if there are differences between the two sides.

Finally, move your attention into the left and right sides of the upper part of your head, the area around the Eye Chakra (which also includes the ears). The Eye Chakra and Crown Chakra are both linked to the upper part of the head. Notice what feelings, thoughts, and images arise in this area and if there are differences between the two sides.

Now focus your mind's eye on the whole of your left side and on the whole of your right side, noticing where they feel balanced and similar and where they feel different, and where you feel positive about an area of your body, and where you feel less positive. Link these areas to the nearest chakra, and reflect on what psychological qualities might be corresponding to the physical experiences, good or bad. In the areas where the left and right sides feel different, consider the Ida and Pingala expressions of the related chakra, and whether the psychological expression of Solar Pingala or Lunar Ida influences have any correspondences with the physical experiences of the left and right sides in that area.

This exercise gives you an opportunity to link the physical and psychological expressions of yourself. Write down in your journal any discoveries this exploration has brought into your consciousness.

VISIONING JOURNAL

Write down any interesting ideas that spring to mind at odd moments during the day, before you forget them. At the end of the day, put any ideas that you still like into your journal. Keep your journal beside the

bed for writing down dreams and any inspirational thoughts that strike you upon waking in the morning.

From time to time, ask yourself the following questions and write the answers in your journal:

- What positive vision do you have for your life a year from now?
- What positive vision do you have for your life five years from now?
- What positive vision do you have for your life ten years from now?

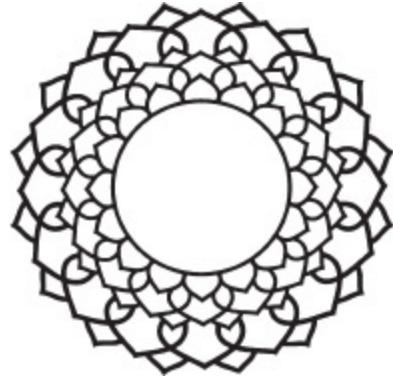
If you have a vision that you want to realize, work with the power of intention to manifest your dream. Regularly bring your vision to mind and commit to realizing it. It is best to do this when you are in a quiet meditative state of mind.

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FINALE

The Crown Chakra

Gateway to the Divine Realm



7

The Crown Chakra

Sanskrit name: Sahasrara

English translation: Thousandfold

Central themes: The whole self; knowing and not-knowing; enlightened consciousness

Higher expression of the Heart Chakra

All or No-thing

All and No-thing

We arrive at the pinnacle of the chakra system, the Crown Chakra, which is depicted as a thousand-petaled lotus covering the crown of the head. Its name, Sahasrara, means “thousandfold,” suggesting an infinite number of petals, and thus infinity itself. The Crown Chakra is associated with the color violet, but it is also represented by the color white, which has all the infinity of colors contained within it.

According to the yogic scriptures, at the birth of a human being, the goddess Kundalini Shakti, whose name in Sanskrit means “coiled power,”

descends from the Crown Chakra to the Base Chakra. Having created new life, she then lies dormant, coiled like a serpent in the Base Chakra. Shakti is the Great Divine Mother, the cosmic energy of manifest creation. She is the divine consort of Lord Shiva, the Supreme Being, an emanation of Brahman, the unmanifest, formless, unchanging energy of the universe. When kundalini energy rises through the central Sushumna channel of the chakra system, Shakti is reunited in blissful nonduality with her consort Shiva in the Crown Chakra. Kundalini Shakti is the creative energy of the universe. In the Laksmi Tantra, an ancient Hindu text, the goddess Kundalini Shakti describes her creation as follows:

With a billionth fraction of myself I voluntarily embark on creation by differentiating myself in two separate (particles), of which one is conscious (*cetane*) and the other is the object of its knowledge (*cetya*).¹

It is humbling to imagine that these powerful mythological and cosmic forces, understood to be the fundamental energies involved in all creation, are at the energetic center of each and every human being, expressing themselves through us, immanent and transcendent, as envisaged by the Hindu sages. At the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, the material feminine energy of creation merges with the masculine formless energy of primordial consciousness. “Seed” and “egg” are earthly reflections of primordial mind and matter; the seed of primordial mind acts upon the egg of primordial material potential and gives birth to the macrocosmic physical universe. At the human microcosmic level, the awakening of the Kundalini Shakti is part of the reverse process: the physically embodied being goes upward to seek reunification with its divine source.

Ida and Pingala terminate and unite in Sushumna in the Eye Chakra, and Sushumna then rises up singly to the Crown Chakra. This is the final stage of our journey through the chakras. With the Eye Chakra, our analytical left-brain explanations about the spiritual consciousness of the Crown Chakra need to unite with our visionary stories, ultimately to discover, through the Crown Chakra, a knowledge beyond mind and words.

The experience described in the story of the union of Shiva and Shakti is the outcome to which spiritual seekers from all traditions aspire. It is

described in different ways in different traditions, some emphasizing becoming one with the “all” (Shakti) and others the experience of formlessness (Shiva), while others find no separation between the two.² It is difficult to describe this chakra because it takes us to a realm beyond words and images, into the void, the emptiness out of which all creation expands into manifestation, not a separate realm but the ever-present source of all being.

The Base Chakra is our entry point into the earth realm and the physical and psychological levels of our being (see [plate 6](#)). The Heart Chakra, a higher expression of the Base Chakra (see [plate 10](#)), offers us the potential to enter the spiritual realm and become aware of the spiritual level of our being. The Crown Chakra is a higher expression of the Heart Chakra. At the spiritual level, it is the gateway to the divine realm, where we can become aware that we are one with all and one with God, the Ground of All Being that underlies and interpenetrates everything.

The Crown Chakra is always open, allowing the spiritual energy of the universe to flow down into the chakra system, just as the earth energy always flows up into the system, but we are generally unaware of this flow. In order to be conscious of this spiritual energy, to abide in nondual consciousness, we need to develop the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. This is where Shakti unites with Shiva, where Ida unites with Pingala, where the thousandfold becomes a unity, where all is one, and one is no thing at all.

At birth, spiritual energy flows down through the Crown Chakra and the spine and into the Base Chakra, which opens, connecting us energetically to the earth. These two energy flows—spiritual energy flowing down from the Crown Chakra and experiential earth energy flowing up from the Base Chakra—through the Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna channels, make up the framework of our energy system and our consciousness throughout our lives. At death, our consciousness leaves the body through the Crown Chakra.

How well the spiritual and experiential energies flow during our lives is dependent on how well all the chakras are flowing, especially the Heart Chakra, and the balance of the Ida and Pingala channels. A bottleneck anywhere will reduce the flow everywhere. However, although the spiritual energy is flowing through our chakra system and our world all the time, we

are normally unconscious of it unless we have developed the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. Enlightenment is the experience of awakening to the underlying reality of Crown Chakra consciousness and realizing that even the “billionth fraction” (or today we might say the decillionth or even the infinitesimally tiniest fraction) of universal creativity, such as we are, is also the beingness of the entire universe.

I felt it necessary to begin this chapter with an explanation of our subtle energy system, because it lays the groundwork for understanding just how important the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra is. Many writers on the chakras describe the consciousness of the Crown Chakra as purely enlightened nondual consciousness, where we become one with the universe, but one of my teachers, Michael Symonds, taught that nondual consciousness was the deeper spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, with the psychological and psychic levels functioning unconsciously, and I will share his ideas as we journey through this chapter.

Physical Level

The Crown Chakra is the only one that is not located on the spine. Its center is the pineal gland, a pea-sized endocrine gland that sits a little higher and more centrally in the brain than the pituitary gland (see [fig. I.6](#)). It is shaped like a tiny (5 to 8 mm) pine cone, which is how it got its name. Curiously, the pine cone has parallels with the pictorial representation of the Crown Chakra, as the leaves of the cone look rather similar to the petals of the thousand-petaled lotus.

Crown Chakra Yantra

Physical Level

<i>Seed Sound</i>	Silence
<i>Position</i>	Pineal gland
<i>Neurology</i>	None
<i>Endocrine Gland</i>	Pineal
<i>Petals</i>	1,000
<i>Sense</i>	None
<i>Color</i>	Violet and white

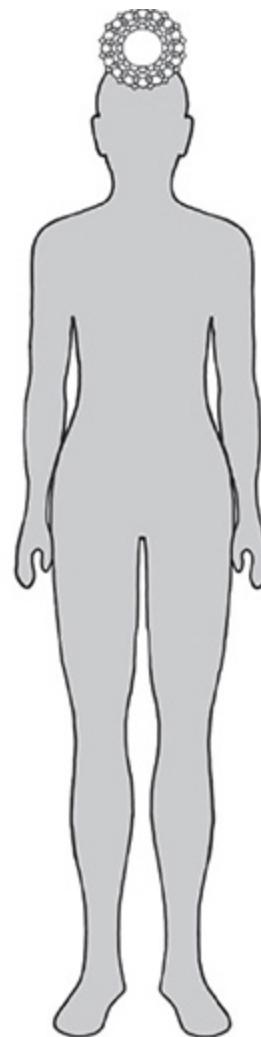
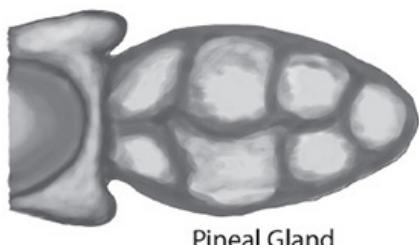
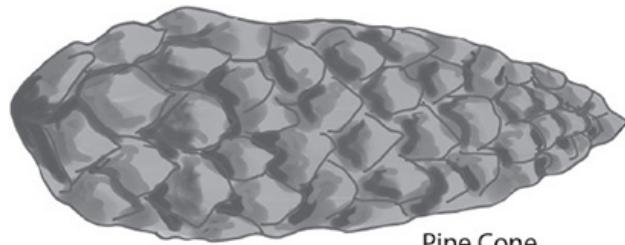


Fig. 7.1. Crown Chakra yantra on the body with physical correspondences



Pineal Gland



Pine Cone

Fig. 7.2. The pineal gland compared to a pine cone

(Not to scale—the pineal gland is tiny, about the size of a pea.)

For many years the function of the pineal gland was a mystery, but we now know that it synthesizes serotonin and melatonin, hormones that regulate the sleep/wake cycles known as circadian rhythms. This biochemical function has an interesting correlation with the spiritual meaning of the Crown Chakra. Spiritual teachers of all traditions describe the unenlightened person as someone who is asleep, or someone needing to wake up. Meditation teachers sometimes describe one of the deeper states of meditation as equivalent to being awake during deep sleep. Some meditators are able to practice lucid dreaming—that is, remaining aware while in a state of dreaming.

In fact, advanced meditators have been shown to produce the same types of brain waves during meditation that are associated with dreaming and deep sleep. Electroencephalograms (EEGs) can detect five brain-wave frequencies in humans: gamma (40 to 100 Hz), beta (12 to 40 Hz), alpha (8 to 12 Hz), theta (4 to 8 Hz), and delta (0 to 4 Hz). Gamma waves occur when a person is thinking in a highly creative, intellectual, inspired way. Low-frequency beta waves occur when a person is thinking practically and linearly, but as beta waves move into higher frequencies, they signal anxiety, frustration, and stress. Alpha waves characterize a state of relaxed alertness, while theta waves are dominant during dreaming and delta waves are dominant during dreamless sleep. Compared to the general population, advanced meditators show more alpha, theta, and delta waves both when they are meditating and during waking life.³

Curiously, some scientists hypothesize that the pineal gland produces DMT (dimethyltryptamine), a hallucinogenic compound that is chemically similar to melatonin and serotonin. Trace elements of DMT can be found in human blood and urine. DMT is the hallucinogenic component of ayahuasca, a botanical compound traditionally used in spiritual ceremonies by indigenous people living in the Amazon River basin. It is known to induce powerful psychedelic experiences.⁴

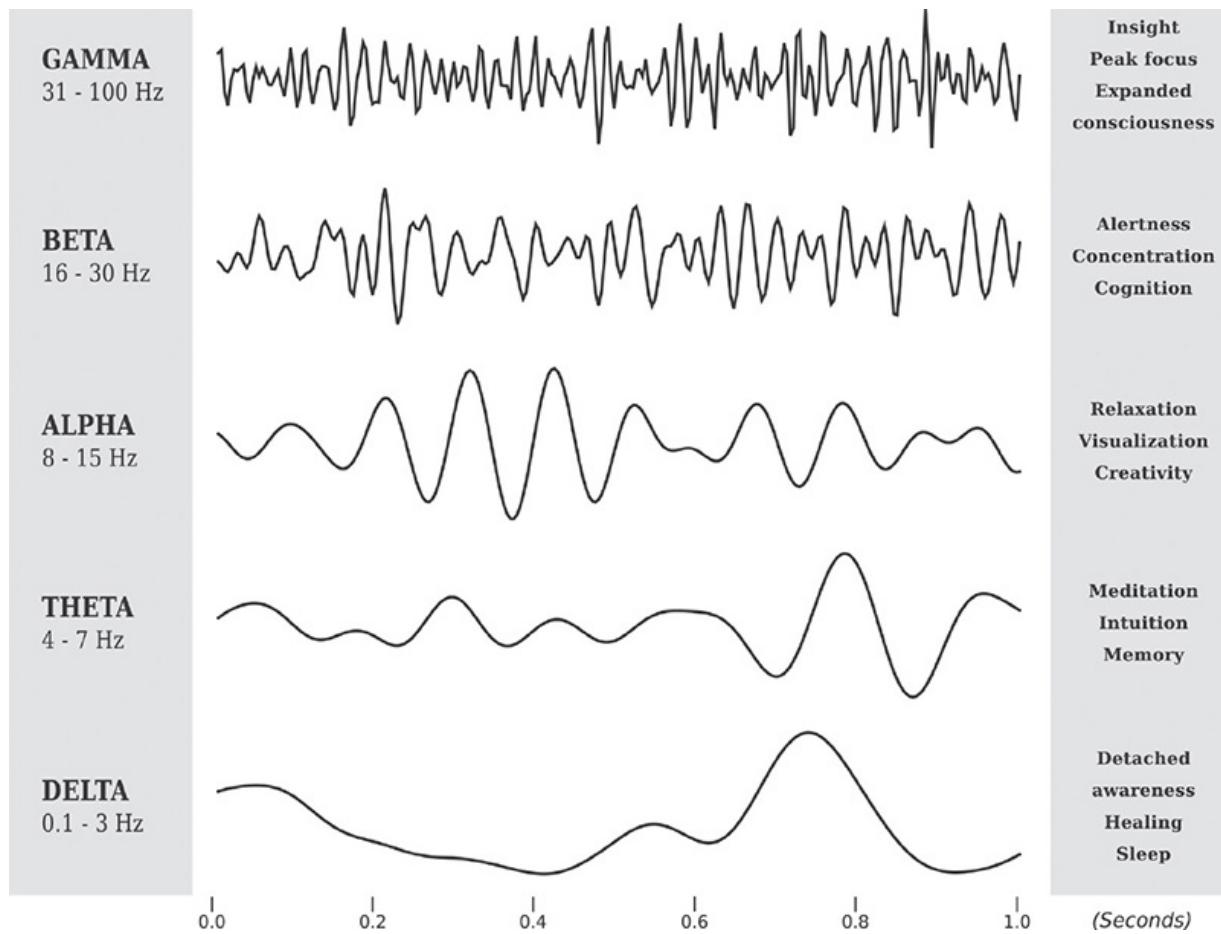


Fig. 7.3. Types of human brain waves

Perhaps the spiritual function of the pineal gland is to disconnect us from our deeper transcendent awareness, to metaphorically send us to sleep so that we forget our mystical origins and engage with the challenges of being incarnated! Or perhaps it is during deep, dreamless sleep that we reconnect to our spiritual essence and receive healing from the source of life, even if we don't remember it when we wake up. Then occasionally, in unusual circumstances, such as during profound meditation, the pineal gland releases DMT and triggers an experience of something far beyond normal awareness, an awakening to a transcendent reality.

René Descartes thought that the pineal gland was the “the principal seat of the soul and the place where all our thoughts are formed. The reason I believe this,” he said, “is that I cannot find any part of the brain, except this, which is not double.”⁵ He believed that it was the point where the mind connected to the body, or where the spiritual world meets the physical

world. As Descartes noted, the pineal gland is not paired—there are not two pineal glands, one in each hemisphere—and it falls at the midline of the brain. For Descartes, these factors imbued the gland with great significance, as they suggest a unity beyond division. In a similar way, in the chakra tradition, Ida and Pingala terminate in the Eye Chakra and move upward as one because at the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, we move beyond all division. For Descartes, pure thought was the summit of human achievement, but the Crown Chakra can take us to a state of pure awareness and knowing that is beyond thought.

Some writers on the chakras suggest that the pineal gland is connected to the Eye Chakra rather than the Crown Chakra.⁶ From an evolutionary perspective, the pineal gland is an atrophied light-sensitive gland. It responds to signals from light-sensitive nerves in the retinas of the eyes, which allows it to regulate sleep rhythms. It has its origins in the photosensory organ, known as the parietal eye, pineal eye, or third eye, that is found in some reptiles and amphibians. Helena Blavatsky, cofounder of the Theosophical Society, understood this association to mean that the pineal gland is linked to the Eye Chakra, which is also known as the Third Eye in the Hindu tradition.⁷ But the pineal gland, located slightly higher and further back in the brain than the pituitary gland (see [fig. I.6](#)), and with the function of regulating our sleep, correlates much more appropriately with the Crown Chakra, where we rest in spiritual sleep yet have the potential to be spiritually awakened.

More recently, scientists have discovered that every cell in our body can absorb light, and different cells respond to light of different wavelengths. Light absorption can improve circulation, enable the repair and growth of new cells, reduce inflammation, and heal depression and other conditions.⁸ Photons from the sun, ninety-three million miles away, enter our bodies and are converted into energy by the mitochondria of the cells. There is great potential for healing using light of different wavelengths, including infrared and laser treatment.

Light is often used as a metaphor to represent spirit. Spiritual aspirants become “enlightened.” As we learn about the extraordinary power of light to heal us both mentally and physically, the metaphor becomes closer to the scientific reality.

Body Language

Which name came first, the crown of the head or the king's crown upon the head? We see the top of our body as our crown, and the monarch's crown symbolizes a connection with spirit, a divine mandate to rule, the ultimate authority. With the Crown Chakra, we have reached the zenith of the body and of the chakra system—and our language reflects that, with expressions like the “crowning glory” and to “crown everything.” We also have the potential to enter the divine realm, which is often identified with light, as shown in the creation story of the Bible.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was good*: and God divided the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1–4, King James Version)

The connection of light with spirit and goodness is as old as the hills, almost literally! We know that, without the sun, life on Earth would not exist, and in our mythologies the sun is often portrayed as a god at the center of the heavens. Our language is riddled with metaphors about light, identifying it with love, wisdom, and goodness. Someone may be the “light of your life” or your “sunshine,” or you may “see the light” or “shine a light” on a problem. You may judge something “in glowing colors” or have a “brilliant” idea.

Psychological Level

My education in the chakras got its start with gifted psychics who could see the chakras clairvoyantly, through the psychic level of the Eye Chakra, and this was particularly helpful when learning about the Crown Chakra, the most enigmatic of the chakras. Michael Symonds taught psychic mediums how to see the different levels in the chakras and how to give chakra readings to their clients. In a psychic reading, he would look clairvoyantly at the chakras and then discuss the programming of each chakra and what

he could “see” in the early life of the client that created this programming. He always began a reading by looking at the psychological level of the Crown Chakra because this chakra has all the other chakras contained within it, and so it portrays a picture of the whole self. Looking at the Crown Chakra, he could see which psychological configurations in which chakras were affecting the whole chakra system. After seeing the whole picture, he would then look in more detail at individual chakras, exploring their psychological, psychic, and spiritual levels.

Sahasrara, the Sanskrit name for the Crown Chakra, means “thousandfold” in reference to the fact that this chakra contains everything within itself. Clairvoyantly, it reveals a picture of the whole being. It is a hologram of the individual and, at the spiritual level, a hologram of the universe, a microcosm of the macrocosm of all that is. Heart Chakra consciousness enables us to look compassionately at the different chakras, kindly witnessing their strengths and weaknesses. The Eye Chakra enables a more dispassionate and discriminating witnessing of the multifaceted individual. The Crown Chakra is our total “beingness,” the combined consciousnesses of all the chakras below it. At the psychological level of the Crown Chakra, we are largely unconscious of this consciousness; at the spiritual level, we access the awareness that underlies our beingness, the consciousness of consciousness itself.

At the psychological level the Crown Chakra is about how true we are to our whole self. To what extent are we the authors of our lives, realizing our true potential and purpose, and to what extent do other people and external or internal forces rule us, consciously or unconsciously, thus diminishing that potential? To what extent have we fully realized our potential in all the many different areas of our lives? At this level, the Crown Chakra is an energetic picture of the whole self, demonstrating the totality of each individual, and to what extent we are the sovereign rulers of our lives. At a spiritual level, it is where we discover our true divinity—that is, that ultimately we are God.

Imbalances in the lower chakras will affect our capacity to be fully the authors of our lives. We adopt careers, lifestyles, and relationships that are unconsciously influenced by the experiences of early life. If we grew up in a very logical, analytical family, we might end up in a career in science. For some of us, the influence of our family upbringing on our career path will

be valuable, and we will consciously choose to pursue that avenue, but for others, that influence may push us toward a career path that does not meet our true needs. Similarly, if we had a very domineering parent, we might choose a domineering partner and slowly discover that we are re-creating our childhood problems in our adult relationships. These unconscious influences are what we become conscious of as we do the work of purification through the Heart and Throat Chakras.

Sometimes we are aware of the outside influences or people that are controlling or manipulating us, but more often we are not. We often absorb cultural influences and assume them to be absolute. For thousands of years in the West, for example, women were believed to be inferior to men and were treated as their property. Even today in the Christian marriage ceremony, women are “given away” by their current owner, their father, to their new owner, their husband. Women unconsciously adopted these cultural attitudes, submitting to a lesser view of themselves, until feminist movements began to challenge them. Today, slowly, a more gender-egalitarian world is beginning to emerge. A similar historical story can be told about racial discrimination, child abuse, and other forms of mistreatment of our fellow human beings. When later generations look back at our current cultural assumptions, from a viewpoint of higher consciousness, they may be astonished!

However, it is entirely possible for people to be, at a psychological level, largely the authors of their own lives. These are people who have managed to overcome many psychological challenges of their early lives. They think for themselves, they are not manipulated by other people, whether consciously or unconsciously, and they have created a life that is fulfilling and meaningful. They are still subject to the laws of the land, which embody much of our cultural attitudes, although they may not agree with them all! Their whole chakra system flows fairly well, and they are able to be themselves. They will have had to do some personal work on themselves in order to have reached this level of authenticity.

Imbalances in the Crown Chakra

Dear ones beware,

*Beware of the tiny gods frightened men
Worship*

HAFIZ, “TINY GODS”

Woundedness in the lower chakras can bring imbalance to the psychological expression of the Crown Chakra. Being enslaved is a classic manifestation of extreme imbalance in the chakra system, which would then show in the Crown Chakra. The opposite imbalance might manifest as ruthlessness, authoritarianism, and a hunger for absolute power, to become godlike. In such cases, the Pingala channel will be very dominant in the lower chakras, especially the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Throughout human history, cultural beliefs that support these imbalances have existed. The “divine right of kings” policy dictates that a monarch is subject to no earthly authority because his right to rule comes directly from God. The power given to the Pope by the Catholic Church is similar. With autocratic hierarchies such as these, the potential for abuse and corruption is huge, especially because the creation of the laws of the land come from those in control. Though the history books are filled with stories of wise rulers, they also describe plenty of ruthless leaders with delusions of grandeur who would have had an imbalanced chakra system—and we see plenty of those still in power today.

Adolf Hitler is a relatively recent example. He had a difficult childhood, intense conflicts with his father, a sibling who died when he was very young, and a mother who died when he was eighteen. He had to live in homeless shelters for some years. His dream of becoming an artist was thwarted not only by his father but by the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, which rejected him twice. These experiences don’t necessarily turn a person into a ruthless dictator and mass murderer with the power to make most of his nation treat him like a god. They could just as easily turn a person into a depressed alcoholic or some other manifestation of woundedness, and potentially that person could overcome his woundedness and become a saint! It is our response to our experiences that defines the person we become. We do not know the role of karma or nature versus nurture in shaping our responses to life experiences. But the phrase “hurt people hurt people” is a useful guideline for understanding human outcomes.

We all benefit from doing the personal and spiritual work of understanding our past misfortunes, opening our heart to ourselves and to others, and not allowing the fear-based hatred of the lower chakras to dominate our lives and distort our expression of the upper chakras. Imbalances in the Crown Chakra are always accompanied by an undeveloped Heart Chakra, which allows the imbalances in the lower chakras and in the Solar and Lunar channels to govern the expression of the whole self. The first step on our spiritual journey to wholeness will always be to develop our Heart Chakra consciousness.

Psychic Level

Nowadays, the Crown Chakra is not often employed by psychic mediums. It is the territory of trance mediums, who allow a spiritual guide or energetic being to enter through the Crown Chakra and fully take over their mind, body, and voice. Their voice will usually change considerably when this happens, and their face and body will also often subtly change in expression and posture. Trance mediums may say that they “leave their body” or become unconscious while this process takes place. When they return to full consciousness, they are sometimes quite exhausted and usually will need to ask what the disembodied being said, as they themselves will not know. Not many psychics practice deep trance mediumship because, as well as the problems of exhaustion, there are dangers of handing over all responsibility to the guide and therefore being unable to assess the quality of the channeled material.

One of the best examples of trance mediumship was Jane Roberts, who, from the 1960s to the early 1980s, channeled a being called “Seth.” She gave a dramatic account of her first experience of this, which happened one evening when she was working on her poetry:

Between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force. . . . It was as if the physical world were really tissue-paper thin, hiding infinite dimensions of reality, and I was suddenly flung through the tissue paper with a huge ripping sound.⁹

When she came back to normal consciousness, she found that she had been scrawling notes with the title “The Physical Universe as Idea Construction,” which sounds quite similar to the goddess Kundalini Shakti’s description of creation quoted above!

For Roberts, this was the first of many sessions of trance mediumship, during which her husband would write down what Seth was saying. Roberts used those transcripts to publish several interesting books on the nature of reality. Although she was a writer, she insisted that these books were dictated by Seth, who described himself as an “energy personality.” She led hundreds of individual sessions and groups while channeling Seth, and her work had a powerful effect on the growing New Age movement of that time. She also claimed to have channeled Paul Cézanne and William James and published books of their words.

Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) was another famous trance medium of the twentieth century, but unlike Roberts, he did not experience himself being taken over by a specific guide. Instead, he gave thousands of psychic readings by putting himself to sleep. When he awoke, he was able to give extraordinary physical diagnoses of a person’s ailments and natural remedies to cure them. His writings influenced New Age thinking, especially the holistic health movement. He channeled past lives and spiritual teachings on many subjects, all in an unconscious state, which gave him the nickname of “the Sleeping Prophet.” He explained that when he put himself to sleep, he made contact with the universal consciousness, which gave him access to all time and space.¹⁰

The psychic level of the Crown Chakra is the territory of prophets and seers, who make contact with the Universal Mind and then transmit this knowledge to us. It is interesting that Cayce accessed the Universal Mind while asleep, as perhaps we all do, though without his powers of recall! It is the territory of “knowing,” as opposed to the “seeing” of clairvoyance and the “hearing” of clairaudience. It is where the inspirational channel gives direct knowledge that then has to be interpreted through words. Even people who do not consider themselves to be psychics can sometimes experience this “knowing” when something significant in their life occurs, such as when someone they love, who is not present with them, dies or needs urgent help.

Another psychic phenomenon that operates at the Crown Chakra level is the “out-of-body experience.” The most common example comes from patients in hospitals during cardiac arrest who undergo the experience of rising up out of their body and hovering near the ceiling, watching the dramatic resuscitation procedures being carried out upon their physical body below. Such patients give detailed accounts of these experiences that are much more accurate than accounts given by other cardiac arrest survivors who, not having reported an out-of-body experience, were asked to recall or imagine what happened to them during the resuscitation process.¹¹

Not all out-of-body experiences are a result of life-threatening situations. Sometimes they can occur during exquisitely beautiful experiences, such as during lovemaking.¹² There are psychics who claim to be able to practice “astral traveling” or “astral projecting,” leaving their bodies at will and traveling to other places energetically. Lucid dreaming, the ability to watch one’s own dreams, can sometimes involve leaving the body and astral traveling. (Note that lucid dreaming on its own works at the psychic level of the Eye Chakra, while lucid dreaming that includes astral projection involves the psychic level of the Crown Chakra.)

While the world of psychic phenomena should be approached with caution, it is equally important not to dismiss it altogether. Spiritual development brings psychic development with it, and our ability to experience beyond the normal is likely to increase as the human race evolves. Paranormal phenomena are so named because the scientific world has as yet no explanation for them, but the scientific world is evolving, too, and will probably one day find ways to embrace and explain these extraordinary abilities and phenomena.

Hand Chakras

Healers work with the hand chakras and the Heart Chakra to transmit the universal love energy that bathes our world. When they feel sensations of pain or discomfort in their client, then they are also using clairsentience (Sacral Chakra). When they put their hands on a part of the body and get an image of what is happening beneath their hands, they are using clairvoyance (Eye Chakra). When they put their hands on the body and receive verbal information about their client, they are using clairaudience

(Throat Chakra). And sometimes healers know exactly where to put their hands without words or images coming to them, and then they are using the psychic level of the Crown Chakra.

It isn't genius, it's knowing with your hands! As soon as I touched her back I went straight to the place the pain was. I wasn't thinking, it's just my hands are like that now. They just know.

MARJORIE BARLOW, AN EXAMINED LIFE

Spiritual Level

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner as the outer, and the upper as the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male shall not be male, and the female shall not be female: . . . then you will enter [the kingdom].

GOSPEL OF THOMAS, FROM
THE Gnostic APOSTLE THOMAS BY HERBERT MERILLAT

We have reached the top of the mountain, or the bottom of the ocean, where only a tiny minority of people gain access. Most people who aspire to this level of consciousness take up some form of serious spiritual discipline, possibly working with an enlightened teacher to help them progress toward these mystical states of consciousness.

My main purpose in writing this book is to offer a map of the psyche through an exploration of all the chakras, their types of consciousness, their levels, and their Solar and Lunar channels. We now reach the highest or deepest level of chakra consciousness, that which the spiritual practices of all the mystical paths are designed to move toward. There are many esoteric traditions that offer a path to enlightenment. The Hindu and Tantric traditions have most relevance to this book because they developed the model of the chakras and kundalini energy. There are many different traditions of Tantric yoga, developed over hundreds of years and involving many meditation and ritual practices, all designed to raise kundalini energy

up through each of the chakras.¹³ Tantra is unusual among spiritual traditions because it encourages the attainment of *siddhis*, those psychic abilities that develop with spiritual practice, and yet are nevertheless discouraged by most spiritual traditions. In the West, Tantra has become associated with ritual sexual practices, but these are a small part of the many methods involved in this tradition, so this emphasis possibly says more about our culture than about Tantric yoga.

When Kundalini Shakti rises up through the Sushumna channel to the Crown Chakra, she becomes unified with Shiva, her male counterpart, and as they become one, the aspirant knows the ultimate reality of the universe. This is the formless unchanging unity behind the diversity of all that exists. At this point, identity with the body and the personality disappears, which gives rise to the esoteric concept that the material world is an illusion. As noted above, the Crown Chakra is the only one that is not situated in the spine. Even physically, this chakra is liberated from the hard bony matter of the body and instead is situated in the soft matter of the brain, reflecting the potential for Crown Chakra consciousness to become liberated from the dense structure of the body.

As a higher expression of the Heart Chakra, the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra enables us to enter the divine realm of reality, where we become mystically united with divine, formless, ultimate reality. This is a realm beyond words, beyond understanding, beyond time and space, a realm of the purest witnessing of awareness itself, including all that arises in awareness. It is where we become united with that pure awareness, experiencing the Thousandfold as One, and unity with God, or Brahman, in the Hindu tradition. Less deistic interpretations include becoming one with the Ground of All Being or simply the Void or Emptiness. The word *experience* is not quite appropriate because this phenomenon takes place beyond bodily awareness. The Crown Chakra spiritual consciousness is one of pure knowing and being, involving the loss of the sense of a separate self.

Many descriptions of profound spiritual experiences differ enormously from the emptiness and formlessness that characterize the ultimate reality that we can access through the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. Some people describe visions of gods and light beings, or they have transformative bodily experiences, such as the piercing white light of

kundalini traveling up their spine and expanding into their head. They hear voices, whether that's a "still small voice" or the booming overwhelming calls of prophets, gods, and goddesses. Their body might twitch and shake uncontrollably. Waves of light can seem to permeate their whole body.

All of these experiences, powerful as they are, are experiences of the psychic or spiritual levels of chakras below the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. In the Buddhist tradition, these *piti*, as the experiences are called, are seen as part of the meditative journey toward awakening, and they are left behind as the meditator moves into formless awareness.¹⁴ Unity with the formless Source of Everything arises from the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, and it is the ultimate objective of kundalini, which rises through all the chakras and affects them all.

Kundalini can be understood as a purifying fire that burns away the early programming of the chakras, accelerating the evolution of the nervous system beyond conditioned responses. When kundalini awakens as the result of personal spiritual development work, the experience can be pure bliss. If it awakens spontaneously, however, in a person who has various energy blockages and has not done much personal developmental work, it can be profoundly disturbing.

In her book *Energies of Transformation: A Guide to the Kundalini Process* (1990), Bonnie Greenwell describes different types of kundalini phenomena and gives several case histories from both the East and the West. She has also written guides to help people who have experienced a kundalini awakening.¹⁵

The final destination of kundalini, or of any spiritual awakening experience, is to move beyond the radiant visions and voices of the chakras below the Crown into what Eckhart Tolle describes as a void, a timeless and deathless realm, where he felt indescribably joyful and peaceful. Here he realized his true nature, which was "consciousness in its pure state prior to identification with form."¹⁶ Ken Wilber expressed this concept very articulately:

If I contract as ego, it appears that I am confined in the body, which is confined in the house, which is confined in the large universe around it. But if I rest as the Witness—the vast, open, empty

consciousness—it becomes obvious that I am not in the body, the body is in me; I am not in this house, the house is in me; I am not in the universe, the universe is in me. All of them are arising in the vast, open, empty, pure, luminous Space of primordial Consciousness, right now and right now and forever right now. Therefore, *be* Consciousness.¹⁷

A useful way to understand extraordinary states of consciousness is to see them as developments from two natural states of consciousness: dreaming and deep dreamless sleep. Our daily waking state is our ordinary conscious experience, largely formed of beta and alpha brain waves. Sleep itself is associated with theta brain waves (dreaming state) and delta brain waves (deep dreamless sleep). Many extraordinary states are similar to being aware while dreaming. This is where we might experience visions and voices, tremors or waves of energy, where we are deeply absorbed by what is arising in consciousness. Awakened consciousness is rather like being aware during deep dreamless sleep; it is an awareness of consciousness prior to any mental conceptualizations. And nondual consciousness takes us further, to where we experience unity with both the primordial formless consciousness and everything arising within it.

All of these extraordinary states of consciousness can arise during meditation. As we've discussed, advanced meditators produce more theta and delta brain waves than nonmeditators, so people new to meditation often find themselves dropping off to sleep until they learn to be aware and wakeful while producing more theta and delta brainwaves.

Looking at these states from a chakra perspective, the ordinary waking state would be the psychological level of all the chakras. The first extraordinary state (akin to the dreaming state) would be the spiritual level of the Heart, Throat, and Eye Chakras and also the psychic level of all the chakras, including the Crown. The second extraordinary state (akin to the deep dreamless state) is where we enter the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, experiencing formless awareness. This then develops further into nondual awareness, where the Thousandfold becomes One. We are now at the divine level of being, where there is no sense of self, just the experience of witnessing, which then dissolves into mystical unity with all that is, with beingness.

One possible energetic explanation of awakened consciousness could be seen in terms of the aura, which is known to expand as a result of meditation and other spiritual practices. What if the aura, this field of energy invisible except to clairvoyants, is essentially consciousness? What if, as a result of meditation, the aura expands and consciousness becomes indistinguishable from the universal field or the formless Ground of All Being? The person meditating then becomes more identified with the divine realm than with the spiritual or psychological realms (see [plate 6](#)). The meditator experiences this process as unity with formless awareness, where the Thousandfold becomes One.

There is certainly a perplexing and enigmatic quality to this level of Crown Chakra consciousness. It is where we know and where we don't know. Awakened states have a quality of innocence and not-knowing about them because they have moved beyond the conceptual thinking of the Eye Chakra. At the same time, we feel a certainty in the knowledge that this state is our true nature. We feel an ease of being, an acceptance, a letting go of the desire to understand, and we simply bathe in the expansive luminous presence that we have become and that is eternally and infinitely happening.

Jill Bolte's account of her stroke, described in the previous chapter, could be explained by the possibility that at times she moved into the spiritual level of Crown Chakra consciousness. She describes losing her sense of a separate self and feeling at one with the universe, which sounds exactly like the descriptions of mystical states.

At the psychic level of the Crown Chakra, we discussed trance mediums who, through contact with Universal Mind, were able to bring inspirational knowledge to their clients. This is very different to the formless emptiness described by those who have experienced the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra where we access the pure formless awareness that is prior to, and gives rise to, the Universal Mind.

The Eye Chakra is where we invent and explore concepts and theories such as the Universal Mind to help us understand ourselves and the universe. The Crown Chakra is where we have the potential to become unified with the primordial energy of the universe, which gives rise to all that is, including the Universal Mind. Wilber reveals how different the enlightened state is compared to our complex theories about it.

People think that being awakened means you understand everything, but it really means the opposite. It means you don't understand anything. It is, all of it, a total Mystery, a baffling babbling of unending nonsense.

Enlightenment is not “omniscience” but “ascience”—not all-knowing but not-knowing—the utter release from the cramp of knowledge, which is always of the world of form, when all you are in truth is formless.¹⁸

The experiences of extraordinary states of consciousness described by meditators and psychics make this complex world very difficult to explain scientifically. Are we living in a sea of spirit, a sea of love and light, immanent and transcendent? Are we simply individual waves rising and falling back into the ocean of life? Why are we here? What is our purpose? Scientists tell us there is no purpose, that we are an arbitrary result of chance, and any altered states that tell us otherwise are mental aberrations. And yet we feel there must be more to it than that. What is the truth? What is the truth of my self ? What is the truth of the universe? We do not know. But in the Crown Chakra we do know. We don't know what it is, but we know it's there. We know there is something more to life than the facts of science, but we are not clever or evolved enough to make total sense of it. This book is an attempt to understand it in terms of the chakras—another attempt at analysis and never the whole truth!

Developmental Psychology and the Crown Chakra

The Eye Chakra left us at the level of Authentic Consciousness, which is focused on self-development, or realizing the full potential of the individual self. The next two stages of development in Wade's meta-study both correlate with the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra.

Transcendent Consciousness

After Authentic Consciousness, Jenny Wade's next stage is Transcendent Consciousness. The motivation of Self-Transcenders, as Maslow in his later

work called them, is to move beyond the egoic self in order to become one with absolute spiritual reality, God, or the Ground of All Being.¹⁹

One of the outcomes of developing Transcendent Consciousness is an increase in different types of altered states, such as visions, voices, and out-of-body experiences, but it's important to note that these are not the motivators for this stage of development. Altered states can happen at any stage of consciousness development and so are not indicative of a particular stage. People moving into Transcendent Consciousness no longer want to "have experiences" because having an experience demands a separate self to have it. Self-Transcenders have reached a place where they no longer want to identify with a separate self. They want to become one with the Universe, the absolute spiritual reality, leaving the separate self behind.

There seem to be two routes to this level of consciousness: the path of joy and the path of suffering. Having more or less realized their full potential through Authentic Consciousness, Self-Transcenders detach from self-fulfillment and develop an intense desire to realize a new way of being beyond the self. This normally involves a very disciplined spiritual practice, resulting in an increase in altered states, both pleasant and unpleasant, that destabilize normal consciousness and open the door to a new level of consciousness beyond self-boundaries.

The practices people adopt to achieve this outcome are various and might include physical disciplines such as yoga or martial arts, different types of meditation, sensory deprivation or overload, or psychotropic drugs. These practices result in altered states, but the practitioners are not aiming for altered states and can see them as a diversion from the overriding aim of transcending the separate self. However, through these altered states, they are able to lose identification with the body and then with the mind. They become able to perceive the self as a mental construct, as is time, space, and Newtonian reality.

As psychic abilities and levels of consciousness increase, Self-Transcenders experience the capacity to influence reality through mental intention, and their relationship to reality becomes one of participation and co-creation. They may also come to feel that death is an opportunity to experience greater unity with spiritual reality or the Ground of All Being.

The stage of Transcendent Consciousness traverses a large territory, from glimpses of nondual consciousness to the capacity to maintain this

awareness for long periods. The signifier of this stage of consciousness is that it is a search for self-transcendence and for unity with the divine. It requires commitment, discipline, and possibly also an act of grace.

From the perspective of the chakras, the outcome that Self-Transcenders are focused upon is the union of Shakti and Shiva, as the kundalini energy rises through the chakras to the Crown Chakra. As the energy travels through the chakra system, it cleanses and purifies all the chakras and opens up their psychic and spiritual levels. This gives rise to the visions, voices, and other various altered states associated with this consciousness and with the siddhis of Hindu philosophy. These altered states can be wonderful as deepening psychic and spiritual states emerge, or they can be terrible as unconscious repressed material surfaces. The motivation is not to experience these states but to move beyond them to the nondual consciousness of the Crown Chakra.

Unity Consciousness

Wade calls the next and most advanced stage of development Unity Consciousness.²⁰ Whereas Transcendent Consciousness describes individuals who are on a quest for unity with the Ground of All Being, the very fact that it is a search creates a dualism between the searcher and that which is searched for. Very simply, Unity Consciousness is attained by those rare individuals, like Jesus Christ or the Buddha, who rest in their divine nature, who are no longer searching for it but live their lives as fully enlightened beings.

In *Changes of Mind*, Wade devotes a whole chapter to exploring Unity Consciousness and how it differs from Transcendent Consciousness. From a chakra perspective, both stages indicate arriving, either intermittently or permanently, at the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. Transcendent Consciousness could be seen as a transitional stage in the movement from Authentic Consciousness to Unity Consciousness. Alternatively, because this level is the entry point into a whole new realm, it might be possible that there are several stages of consciousness within this divine realm. Plate 14 shows how Wade's stages of consciousness development fit on the map of the chakras.

Plate 15 shows how the chakras fit on Wade's model of the stages of consciousness development. The top sphere of this model is the implicate order, which Wade describes as the "unmanifest order of absolute self." By this I understand her to mean the formless reality that precedes all known reality, the latter being the explicate order. Below the top sphere is an empty sphere where manifest and unmanifest reality intersect. Its boundaries are marked with a dotted line because it is, as Wade says, "illusory yet real."²¹ These upper spheres suggest a reality and consciousness beyond Shiva at the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. As the Crown Chakra is only the gateway to the divine realm, it suggests a whole realm above it, beyond even the Unity Consciousness of the Crown Chakra, which still resides within a physical form. In some chakra expositions, theorists put several chakras above the Crown Chakra to convey this higher realm.

After-Death Consciousness

Finally, Wade examines the phenomenon of near-death experiences, which she calls After-Death Consciousness because the body registers as dead on all the medical markers during these extraordinary states.²² While After-Death Consciousness could be the final consciousness that we all experience at death, it is not a higher stage of consciousness compared to the previous two stages. A near-death experience can occur to a person at any stage of development, and it can have a transformative effect on the consciousness development of that person when he or she recovers.

There is substantial evidence for these experiences, and they tend to follow a recognizable pattern: First, the people who have experienced this phenomenon report, their consciousness rises up out of their dying body and looks down at the scene below. Loud roaring or buzzing noises may accompany this, but there is also a sense of deepest peace and contentment. They may hear nurses and doctors discussing their death and realize what is happening. Then they may experience being pulled into a dark void or tunnel, sometimes accompanied by a guide, who could be a dead relative or a spiritual being. They emerge into a beautiful, radiant new world, where they are met by dead relatives or spiritual beings from their religious tradition. They are filled with a deep feeling of love and bliss. They may watch their whole life flashing past them. At some point, they realize that they have to cross into the new world or return to the old one. Often they do

not want to return but are told that they must, or they feel that they must return because they are concerned about the people they are leaving behind. With this realization, they find themselves abruptly back in their body, experiencing all the trauma of their physical condition.²³

The standard scientific explanation of near-death experiences is that they are the final events of a dying brain or that they are a type of epileptic seizure. In contrast, from a chakra perspective, at death kundalini energy leaves the Base Chakra of the body, rising through all the chakras and exiting through the Crown Chakra. During a near-death experience, kundalini exits the body through the Crown Chakra but retains an energetic link to the body, which clairvoyants see as a cord connecting the energy body to the Crown Chakra. The link enables the person to return to the physical body; if the link is broken, death occurs.

Contrasting these two explanations, we can see how difficult it must be for the average scientist to tolerate the whimsical descriptions of esotericism! But neardeath experiences do seem to be an insight into what awaits us when we die. Death is the part of human life that is associated with the Crown Chakra. It is where we meet our maker. If we are glorified machines, it is where we break and stop working. If we are aspects of divine consciousness, it is where we discover that fact, unless we have already found it through the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra.

When my mother was dying, I sat at her bedside holding her hand for many hours. Toward the end, I experienced waves of energy pouring from her, through my hand and into my whole body, as my mother let go of her hold on this world. It was a beautiful and moving experience filled with love. I believe that this could have been the time when she was seeing her life flash past her, or going through her life review. As F. M. Alexander said, “we translate everything, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, into muscular tension,”²⁴ and as this tension releases during the dying process, memories connected to the original muscle tightenings can resurface.

I have had similar experiences, though not so intense, when working with clients. One person described her experience as I quietly held her leg allowing the muscles to release. She said she saw her life flashing past her in snapshots of memories that were linked to past experiences with that leg, from the time she fell out of her crib as a baby and hurt her leg to a more recent time when her leg cramped up after she stood for hours in the cold.

Cultural Considerations

People have experienced the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra throughout history, but they have always been a very small minority. Even where the great monotheistic religions rule, they are part of a Sacral Chakra culture motivated toward creating a cohesive, conformist community with shared values. The focus is on the exoteric rather than the esoteric. However, these religions do usually accept and honor those rare individuals who have experienced advanced spiritual states, calling them saints and prophets in Christianity or the equivalent in different traditions.

In our modern world, religion and spirituality are no longer part of mainstream culture in the way that they used to be. For centuries, the Christian religion was at the center of life in the West. At the turn of the nineteenth century, esoteric ideas from Eastern religions were introduced to the West, and throughout the twentieth century, increasing levels of immigration brought new religions into our world. The Christian belief of one true God was challenged in many different ways. The shift toward cultural dominance by Achievement Consciousness, linked to the Pingala channel of the Solar Plexus Chakra, with its emphasis on individualism and thinking rather than feeling, meant that society began to reject the authoritarian monotheistic religions that spoke to the Conformist Consciousness of the Sacral Chakra. Our culture increasingly accepted the scientific theory of a purely material universe that explained all intense experiences, such as falling in love or spiritual altered states, in terms of mechanical metaphors about the brain. The baby of our spirituality was thrown out with the bathwater of traditional Christianity, and atheism became our dominant cultural stance.

Because a spiritual perspective on life is at odds with the cultural myths that dominate the modern world, having the support of like-minded people is invaluable in encouraging spiritual development. Monasteries have been in existence since time immemorial and are a component of nearly all the major religions of the East and West. Nowadays, in addition to the traditional monastic paths to awakening, we have modern spiritual communities of numerous varieties following the teachings of an Eastern or Western leader. Other communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation in the north of Scotland, which I quoted earlier (see [here](#)), do not follow the teachings of one leader but offer a place of support for individuals on many

different paths of development, not all of them aspiring to becoming fully awakened or enlightened. All spiritual communities develop the consciousness of the Heart Chakra, as this is an essential route to higher states of consciousness and ultimately to awakened consciousness.

Chakra Healing Therapy

CASE STUDY

Healing from Earth to Heaven

Ross was a leading teacher in an international spiritual community with branches all over the world. He had been invited to teach at the English branch of the community for two to three weeks. Healing was an aspect of the community's spiritual work, so Ross was interested when he heard about my work with the chakras and asked if he could have a session with me before he returned home to Australia.

Ross was interested in the principles I was working with, so we began by discussing our different healing modalities. Then I asked him if there were any particular personal issues he wanted to talk about, and he said that he preferred to see what arose in the session. He lay down on my therapy table and I quietly prepared to put my hands on him. I usually begin a chakra healing therapy session by putting my hands on the client's feet to get a sense of how grounded the person is and what the balance between the left and right sides of the body feels like, after which I tune in to the rest of the body. But I couldn't move. I was gripped by deep anxiety and felt my whole body shrinking at the thought of making any physical contact with him.

Fortunately, I knew that Ross had done a lot of work on himself so I felt able to explain to him what I was experiencing. I told him that I was feeling a lot of fear about touching him, and how unusual this was for me. Ross immediately recognized what was happening. "I think you're picking up the abuse I experienced as a child," he told

me. That is, I was picking up clairsentiently, or in psychotherapeutic terms, experiencing a countertransference of, his terror of being touched. As we brought this awareness into consciousness, the anxiety began to dissipate in us both.

As a spiritual healer, Ross's healing work could be described as a process of bringing spiritual energy down into the auric field surrounding a person. He never made physical contact in his healing, and when he received healing from his fellow spiritual healers, no hands-on touch was involved, so although he was used to healing, he was not used to being touched. In addition, the healing he was accustomed to giving and receiving always took place with the person receiving healing sitting in a chair and the healer standing beside him or her. Because I was about to make physical contact, and also because he was lying down, as he had been during the childhood abuse, unconscious terror of abuse arose in his energy field, even though on the surface he was polite and friendly.

When a hands-on practitioner has this kind of psychic information, it can be transformative to talk about it in a calm and caring way. Our short conversation completely altered the energy in his auric field, and then we both felt comfortable about my touching him, which I proceeded to do, gently and mindfully.

Ross had a very expansive energy field inside and outside the upper part of his body, full of light and life, but the lower part of his body felt barely alive, diminished and undernourished. I began work at his feet and asked him to visualize the red glowing earth energy rising up through his feet and into his legs and pelvis, nurturing and enlivening the Base Chakra, glowing at the base of the spine and spreading out into the pelvic floor. As I worked, I continued to emphasize this flow of earth energy rising up through the lower chakras, changing into orange in the Sacral Chakra and yellow in the Solar Plexus Chakra. I gave a lot of attention, with my hands and my voice, to these lower chakras and the Heart Chakra, and as I moved into the upper chakras the energy flowed much more powerfully in both directions. Strengthening the lower chakras had allowed increased flow throughout his energy system.

Ross was surprised by this guidance and how it was affecting him. Throughout his spiritual development and his healing practice, he had only visualized the white shining spiritual light flowing down through his body, and he had never considered the experiential earth energy flowing up through his body. My guided visualization was a Heart Chakra exercise of compassionate witnessing and nourishing of his lower chakras. Because Ross had not sufficiently developed his Heart Chakra's loving downward gaze on his younger self, he had been unable to deeply heal the wounding from his abuse. At the end of the session, he told me that he felt much more substantial and grounded than was his normal experience. He gratefully recognized that he needed to bring the upward and downward energy flows into balance.

Ross only had this one session with me, but I did see him a year later at a social event, when he was visiting the English community again. He made a point of coming over to talk to me and told me that the session had been transformative, and that he had continued to work with the upward flow of earth energy, which had had a powerful impact on his life. In the intervening year, he had gotten in touch with his sexuality and was now living with a gay partner, in the happiest of relationships. I felt absolutely delighted that he had taken so much from the session with me.

During the early sessions of chakra healing therapy, the work tends to focus on the lower chakras and the Heart Chakra because this is where most healing is needed. As time goes on and the energy flowing through the lower chakras strengthens, more time can be given to the upper chakras. Sometimes I work in the auric field, rather than in contact with the body. When a lot of energy is flowing in the body, it needs to expand out into the auric field, bringing a feeling of expansion and well-being to the client. With the Crown Chakra, I nearly always work aurically, in the energy field above and around the chakra, and this usually brings expansion into the energy system of the client, especially into the upper chakras. My experience of Crown Chakra energy is that it allows a person to expand well beyond the physical boundaries of the body. I very rarely make hand contact with the crown of the head because this can feel unpleasant to the client.

Many spiritual healers, like Ross, work only in the auric field because their focus is on the downward flow of spiritual energy. But being too focused on the downward flow of spiritual energy into the upper chakras and the auric field can cause imbalances, which is what I found with Ross. This problem can often occur with people involved in intense spiritual practices that unconsciously repress or deny the body and the immature aspects of the psyche. Too much energy in the upper chakras and insufficient flow in the lower chakras can make a person uncentered and ungrounded. This can cause symptoms such as headaches or feeling “spaced out.” The upward flow of energy from our beloved earth is as important as the spiritual energy flowing downward into our souls.

Spiritual Practices from the Perspective of the Chakras

From the Tantric perspective, all spiritual practices are leading us toward Crown Chakra spiritual consciousness through healing, purifying, and nourishing the different chakras, balancing the Ida and Pingala channels, and encouraging greater flow in Sushumna, the central channel. I know of no spiritual practices that work specifically to nourish the Crown Chakra as it is the chakra of the whole self, so to nourish it we have to nourish all the many different aspects of the whole self.

The Crown Chakra is always open and flowing, constantly bringing spiritual energy downward through our chakras. By working to nourish all our chakras, so that they are flowing in an optimal and balanced way, we may have the chance to move into the awakened consciousness of the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. Even then it may occur only as an act of grace over which we have no control. There are people who arrive at this consciousness without all of the spiritual preparation that most spiritual aspirants engage in to arrive at this higher level of consciousness.

So rather than focusing on the Crown Chakra, in this section we will look at some examples of spiritual practices and how they relate to the different chakras. This is not a comprehensive list but a selection, which may give an idea of how different practices can emphasize and affect particular chakras on the journey to the enlightened state of the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra. Nowadays many of these practices, such as yoga and meditation, have become directed toward more practical goals,

such as good mental and physical health, but they all originally began as spiritual practices, and we will consider them as such.

Spiritual practice always involves the spiritual level of the Heart Chakra, as this is where we enter the spiritual realm of the chakra system. All the wisdom traditions emphasize the heart, which opens the door to our spirituality. It is here that we begin to develop the loving, accepting witness, and witnessing each of the chakras nourishes, purifies, and balances them, as well as nourishing the Heart Chakra itself.

MOVEMENT MEDITATION

Movement meditation can be defined as a practice of bringing mindful attention and focused awareness to the body in motion. Many spiritual traditions embrace movement meditation in forms such as Tai Chi, Qigong, and Buddhist walking meditation. The Hindu practice of yoga is a practice that works with the chakras, with many different yoga traditions all designed to purify and energize the body as a step on the road to good health, if not to enlightenment. In these practices the Heart Chakra is witnessing the Base and Sacral Chakras and maintaining concentration with the Solar Plexus Chakra. The Throat Chakra is also engaged as the mind and body perform these movements and become a mode of self-expression.

CHANTING

Chakra chanting is a powerful way of nourishing and purifying all the chakras, and in particular the Throat and Heart Chakras, increasing the flow of energy between them. Each of the chakras has a sacred seed sound, or *bija*, connected to it, as indicated in the diagrams for the physical level of each chakra. Each sacred seed sound acts upon the “egg” of the chakra, resonating, at the microcosmic level of the human being, with the union of the seed of primordial mind and the egg of primordial matter at the macrocosmic level. Chanting the seed sound of a chakra was an important part of the Tantric tradition, bringing healing and energetic balance to each chakra. James D’Angelo, a teacher of spiritual sound healing, has written detailed instructions on how to perform these bija chants, as well as exploring spiritual connections between sound vibrations and the chakras.²⁵

Tantrists aren't the only ones to have realized the deeply powerful effect of chanting. Monastic religious sects have practiced spiritual chanting all over the world. Repetitive chanting can lead to altered states that move us into the psychic and spiritual levels of the Heart and upper chakras, generating feelings of happiness and bliss. Dr. Alfred Tomatis, the French doctor mentioned in chapter 5, was once invited to observe the monks in a Benedictine monastery. The young abbot was concerned because his monks had become listless, depressed, and increasingly subject to illness. It turned out that this new abbot, in an attempt to modernize, had stopped the monks' daily practice of six to eight hours of chanting. Tomatis encouraged him to reinstate this practice, and within weeks the monks had regained their health, energy, and well-being.^{[26](#)}

SITTING MEDITATIONS

There are broadly two types of sitting meditation: mindfulness and concentration. Concentration meditation is where you focus very deliberately on something, and mindfulness is where you simply witness whatever is arising. The latter develops sensitivity and refinement, while the former develops an alert, focused awareness. Both are needed to achieve deep meditative states, but meditation training often begins with concentration meditation. Concentration meditation requires the focused, self-directed attention of the Solar Plexus Chakra, and mindfulness meditation requires the compassionate witnessing of the Heart Chakra. I believe that these two chakras working together is important not only for us to enter meditative states but also as a key to our personal and evolutionary development. When the Solar Plexus and Heart Chakra work together, great changes can happen at both the psychological and spiritual levels as the personality becomes the servant of spirit. The greatest hindrance to fruitful meditation is the tendency of the Solar Plexus Chakra to be constantly judging, which interferes with the quality of acceptance and openness of the Heart Chakra. As mentioned in the previous chapter, meditation also balances the two hemispheres of the brain, balancing the Solar and Lunar channels of the chakra system.

Breathing Meditations

Focusing on the breath is the starting point of many sitting meditation practices, and there are different ways of doing this. Some meditation practices involve very controlled breathing, such as silently counting on the in-breath and the out-breath, making them exactly equal in length, or deliberately extending the out-breath. Another classic practice involves counting ten breaths, then counting the next ten breaths, and seeing how long you can do that without mental distraction. Breathing consciously through your left and right nostrils in turn and then through both nostrils at the same time is an exercise designed to bring balance to the Ida and Pingala channels (see [Ida/Pingala Breathing](#)). These are all types of concentration meditations, requiring the practical, self-directed, focused thinking of the Solar Plexus Chakra. Controlled breathing is governed by the diaphragm, one of the most powerful muscles in the body, which is situated in the area of the Solar Plexus Chakra.

Gently witnessing the breath, without interfering with its natural rhythms, introduces more mindfulness, although gently returning to the breath when we have become distracted brings concentration meditation into the practice. Mindfulness meditation requires that we don't interfere but are aware of whatever is arising, so we witness thoughts and feelings arising along with our breathing, without becoming lost in those thoughts and feelings. When we can watch our natural breathing without interfering, we are giving attention to the instinctual processes of the Base Chakra, through the witness of the Heart Chakra.

It can be difficult to watch the body's unconscious, instinctual process of breathing. We tend to want to control it—to try to breathe a certain way, whether it's more deeply, more quickly, more slowly. I find it helpful to think of mindful breathing as “letting the body breathe you,” and that's usually the instruction I give for mindfulness breathing meditation. To enable this to happen, we need to be gentle and compassionate toward ourselves, and this is a Heart Chakra activity. We can bring our awareness to the breath filling our chest, the area of the Heart Chakra.

People who do not have a strong, flowing Base Chakra will find it more difficult to allow their breathing to flow without interference. If you're having trouble with it, try bringing your awareness to your heartbeat or pulse. You could place a hand on your wrist and feel your pulse to begin with, and then see if you can be aware of your heartbeat without feeling

your pulse. The beating of the heart is an instinctual process that we can't physically manipulate easily in the way that we can breathing, and this connects us to our Base Chakra by encouraging us to become gently aware of the inner animal that is keeping us alive. As our meditation practice develops, this simple witnessing without interfering becomes easier and our breath grounds us, helping our meditation become a calming, settling experience.

Body Scan

A body scan is the meditative practice of witnessing the whole body by slowly “scanning” it—that is, bringing your attention to all the parts of your body, from your toes to your head, very slowly, to see what sensations, emotions, and thoughts might arise.

You typically start with one foot, giving all of your attention to the toes, then the bottom of the foot, the heel, the top of the foot, the ankle, the lower leg, the knee, the upper leg, and the hip, noticing any sensations, emotions, and thoughts arising. You repeat the process with your other leg and then slowly move your attention up into your pelvis and then your abdomen, your chest and shoulders, your arms and hands, and your neck, face, and head. This practice allows the Heart Chakra to witness the sensations, emotions, and thoughts arising in the areas surrounding all the chakras. Scanning the body moves your focus around the body, which is a form of concentration, but you are also watching what arises, which is being mindful, so the two types of meditation work together. The Eye Chakra is also involved in witnessing during this meditation, but the Heart Chakra needs to be engaged to avoid the judgments of the Solar Plexus Chakra dominating and destroying the meditative state.

Silent Mantra Meditation

Silently repeating a meaningful or symbolic word or phrase, often called a *mantra*, is also a powerful spiritual practice that exists in most esoteric traditions. The seed sounds of the chanting meditation described above are examples of mantras. The silent repetition of a mantra calms the thinking mind, while at the same time the meditator absorbs the content of the phrase. This meditation involves the Solar Plexus, the Heart, and the Eye Chakras. Martin Laird, a contemplative Christian, calls this type of silent

mantra a “prayer word.” He explains that it gives the busy mind something to do, allowing us to maintain our focus as we attend mindfully and allow our inner awareness to deepen:

The prayer word gently excavates the present moment. The resulting interior focus eventually sets off and maintains a process of interior silencing. This interior silencing in turn begins to clear away much of the noise in our head. We discover in the process that there is more depth within us than we ever dreamt. There is not only chaos, confusion, emotional attachment, anxiety, and anger’s nettled memory; not just the marvel of discursive reason, imaginative insight, and unconscious instinct, but also an abyss of awareness that is always flowing with bright obscurity, grounding all these mental processes, one with all and one with God. The prayer word assists this excavation of the present moment until such time as the prayer word too falls silent. Ultimately all strategies of spiritual acquisition become silent and our practice, if it can be called that any more, is simply luminous vastness gazing on and gazed through by luminous vastness.²⁷

The Buddhist tradition has concentration meditations designed to develop the four heart qualities of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. For example, in a loving-kindness practice, meditators may begin by sending loving kindness to themselves and then to a person they respect, a person they feel very close to, a person they feel neutral about, and a person they feel hostile toward. They can do a similar practice working with compassion or sympathetic joy, sending it to themselves and then to the four types of people. To develop equanimity, meditators might silently repeat, “May I learn to see the arising and passing of all that happens with equanimity and peacefulness.” These meditations allow the thoughts upon which they are based to sink deep into the psyche, nourishing and expanding the Heart Chakra and calming the Solar Plexus and Eye Chakras.

One way to neutralize the self-critical Solar Plexus Chakra is through affirmations that emphasize our positive aspects. We can say these affirmations silently but rhythmically with our breath. All the lower chakras

can be nourished and balanced in this way. There are an infinite number of possible affirmations to choose from. If you're directing the affirmation to a particular chakra, you should, of course, choose an affirmation appropriate to that chakra. It is often a good idea to begin with one of the nourishing exercises from the preceding chapters before beginning to repeat an affirmation for a particular chakra.

Here are a few examples of lower chakra mantras:

I honor my animal nature and my connection to this beautiful Earth that keeps me alive (*Base Chakra plus Heart Chakra*).

I am a child of the universe and delight in experiencing all the simple pleasures of life (*Sacral Chakra plus Heart Chakra*).

I accept myself just as I am (*Solar Plexus Chakra plus Heart Chakra*).

Visualization Meditation

Visualization practices develop the Eye Chakra. In Tantric practice, yogis focused on visualizing *yantras*—complex geometric designs, which we looked at in the last chapter (see also plate 13). The simpler chakra yantras shown at the beginning of each chakra chapter in this book can bring healing and energy to each chakra when visualized on the body. It is also possible to intone the related seed sound, or *bija*, at the same time. This practice nourishes each of the chakras and also emphasizes the Throat and Eye Chakras, increasing the flow of energy on the journey toward the Crown Chakra.

Guided Meditation

Many guided meditation practices involve imaginative visualization. You may be guided on a journey through a beautiful landscape in which you climb a mountain or go down into the center of Earth or sit by the ocean or visit some other picturesque setting. You may be directed to a place where you meet a spiritual being. All guided visualizations develop the Eye Chakra, and the content of the visualization can also nourish other chakras.

Guided meditation can take forms other than visualizations. A guided body scan would invite you to bring your awareness to the sensations,

emotions, and thoughts arising from your body, therefore focusing more on the lower chakras. In my work as a chakra therapist, I often use guided chakra meditations of different types to bring healing and nourishment to each of the individual chakras. A spiritual teacher might lead a guided meditation offering very simple suggestions, such as “Let everything be as it is” or “Become aware of awareness itself,” following each suggestion with a long period of silence. These instructions can energize the Heart Chakra, with the potential of moving into the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra.

Transmission

When we meditate, we become more open to the energy fields around us and blend with them. This explains why group meditation can increase the quality of the meditative experience. When an experienced meditator is leading the meditation or simply meditating in the same space, it is possible to be influenced by his or her energy field, synchronizing with that person and receiving direct transmission from him or her. For this reason, the concept of a guru or teacher is central to most spiritual traditions. By being in the presence of someone who is awakened, we too can experience an awakened state and advance more quickly. Nowadays, we can download and listen to guided meditations led by advanced meditators and it still seems possible to receive direct transmission, despite the dislocation of time and space. Crazy as this sounds, it fits nicely with the concept of an enlightened state being an experience of infinity and eternity, where time and space no longer have meaning!

Research from organizations like the HeartMath Institute has demonstrated that we blend and synchronize our personal electromagnetic field with the fields of those around us. We know that advanced meditators generate more alpha, theta, and delta brain waves, and fewer beta brain waves, and so we can begin to understand how transmission works. Meditation audio tracks that encourage our brains to mimic the brainwaves of advanced meditators are available online and can help progress our spiritual development. We can also find a great many meditation courses online. As always, some good Eye Chakra discrimination is needed to find the right course and the right teacher, whether they are online, prerecorded, or in real time and space.

As meditation deepens, energy rises up through the chakras and can bring about psychic and spiritual experiences of the Throat and Eye Chakras, such as hearing words and seeing visions. Awareness of the body begins to fade as the energy moves up into the psychic and spiritual levels of the upper chakras. The sense of an individual separate self also fades because awareness has expanded out beyond the body into the spiritual realm. All these experiences are powerful milestones on the journey through the chakras to the spiritual level of the Crown Chakra, but they are not to be confused with that enlightened state, which is beyond seeing or hearing, beyond mind, where we enter the divine realm, a vast luminous emptiness of egoless formless awareness.

I will let Ken Wilber have the last word on his experience of rising and deepening into an enlightened state:

Nature retreats before its God, Light finds its own Abode. That's all I keep thinking as I enter into this extraordinary vastness. I am going in and up, in and up, in and up, and I have ceased to have any bodily feelings at all. In fact, I don't even know where my body is, or if I even have one. I know only shimmering sheaths of luminous bliss, each giving way to the next, each softer and yet stronger, brighter and yet fainter, more intense yet harder to see.²⁸

Journey's End

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. ELIOT, “LITTLE GIDDING”

In this journey through the chakras, we have seen unfolding the theory that we live in a conscious intelligent universe. Ultimately, at our highest and deepest level, the converse is also true: a conscious intelligent universe lives in us. We are in our essence an expression of the pure divine energy of the universe. This formless energy translates itself in some mysterious way into the mind and matter of our everyday experience.

The basis for all human understanding of the universe is the body and the mind. We live in conscious intelligent bodies, and conscious intelligent bodies live in us. The chakras, in all their diversity, are energy centers that bring together all the diversity of our body and mind, and through them, we connect with Spirit—the conscious intelligent universe, or God. The chakras can help us understand not only ourselves and the world we live in but also the world that, though we may not even fleetingly be able to glimpse it, underlies all reality.

In order to understand the different types of consciousness pertaining to each chakra, I have discussed them individually, showing how they build a multivalent personality. But in real life, most activities engage multiple types of consciousness all at once. Even when we do something as mundane as petting our beloved cat or dog, we combine second and fourth chakra consciousness. If we write a story, we combine fifth and sixth chakra consciousness. In many ways, separating these different types of

consciousness is artificial, but it can help us better understand them and then integrate and develop them in a conscious way.

The map of the chakras has been drawn and we have journeyed through it, pausing at the staging posts of individual chakras, exploring them in detail. Because the chakras are mapped onto the body, we get insights into how the physical body interacts with the inner psyche, showing how body and soul are interwoven in particular ways for each individual. Our chakras are working together in different ways all the time, creating a unique life experience, physically, psychologically, psychically, and spiritually. The more we are able to appreciate and nourish our life-supporting inner animal (first chakra), our happiness-seeking inner child (second chakra), our identity-oriented young adult (third chakra), our loving witness (fourth chakra), our creative communicator and thinker (fifth and sixth chakras), and the Solar and Lunar influences playing on each chakra, giving us the potential to access our divine beingness (seventh chakra), the more we will flourish physically, psychologically, and spiritually. And this begins with the transition to Heart Chakra consciousness and beyond. Culturally, developing our Heart Chakra consciousness is the next evolutionary stage in the journey of humanity. Slowly we evolve and slowly, not without blips and regressions, that evolution changes the world we live in.

At the end of the day, all we have is our mind and body. Even if we learn how to move beyond the individual mind and body to heightened states of consciousness, those extraordinary experiences still have to be integrated into the ordinary daily round of mind and body. Working with the chakras as an embodied map of consciousness can help to throw light on the multifaceted nature of our individual interior experience. It can help us understand the body's wisdom and to integrate the rich mixture of gifts and wounds that create each individual personality. We can see and feel more clearly the complex and sometimes conflicting nature of different aspects of who we are. This awareness can help build greater integration and harmony, for ourselves, our communities, and our world. I hope this book has contributed a little to this very human quest.

Notes

Introduction: Setting the Stage

1. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 10–12.
2. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 10–12.
3. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*.
4. Leadbeater, *The Chakras*; Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*; Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*; and Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*.
5. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 148–49.
6. Leadbeater, *The Chakras*, 38, plate VI.
7. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 36.
8. Johari, *Chakras*, 29.
9. Johari, *Chakras*, 29.
10. Rama, Ballentine, and Ajaya, *Yoga and Psychotherapy*, 108.
11. Greenwell, *Energies of Transformation*.
12. Judith, *Wheels of Life*, 58, 59.
13. Judith, *Wheels of Life*, 22.
14. Halevi, *Psychology and Kabbalah*, 182.
15. Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At*.
16. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.
17. Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*.
18. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.
19. Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development*.
20. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, and Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.
21. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief*, 15–17.

Chapter 1. The Base or Root Chakra

1. Grossinger, *Embryogenesis*, 136.
2. Judith, *Wheels of Life*, 106.
3. Ford, *Where Healing Waters Meet*, 27–28.
4. Harlow, Dodsworth, and Harlow, “Total Social Isolation in Monkeys.”
5. Leboyer, *Birth without Violence*.
6. Bowlby, *Attachment*.
7. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.
8. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 222–29.
9. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 3.
10. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 4.
11. Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso, and Greyson, *Irreducible Mind*, 394–403.
12. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 60–62.
13. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 2.
14. Chamberlain, *Babies Remember Birth*.
15. Elgin, *Awakening Earth*, 31.

Chapter 2. The Sacral Chakra

1. Soosalu and Oka, *mBraining*, 33–34.
2. Soosalu and Oka, *mBraining*, 30.
3. Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*.
4. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 4.
5. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 5.
6. Liedloff, *The Continuum Concept*.
7. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, chapter 6.
8. Church, *Mind to Matter*, 99–110.
9. Tucker, *Life before Life*.

Chapter 3. The Solar Plexus Chakra

1. Blakemore and Frith, *The Learning Brain*, chapter 8.
2. Schott, “Penfield’s Homunculus.”
3. Iain McGilchrist, “RSA Animate: The Divided Brain,” Iainmcgilchrist.com, 12 minute video, accessed May 3, 2019.
4. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 133.
5. Stewart and Joines, *TA Today*, chapter 12.
6. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 134.
7. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 131–32.
8. Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso, and Greyson, *Irreducible Mind*, chapter 3.
9. Williamson, *A Return to Love*, 190–91.
10. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 133.
11. Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development*.
12. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*.
13. Baring, *The Dream of the Cosmos*, 219.
14. Pearce, *The Heart-Mind Matrix*, 50.

Chapter 4. The Heart Chakra

1. Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power*, 119–20.
2. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 156.
3. Blakemore and Frith, *The Learning Brain*, chapter 9.
4. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 7.
5. Soosalu and Oka, *mBraining*, 95–96.
6. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 5.
7. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 36.
8. Pearce, *The Heart-Mind Matrix*, 66–73.
9. Dalai Lama and Cutler, *The Art of Happiness*.
10. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*.
11. Alexander, *Aphorisms*.

12. Huxley, “A Psychophysical Education,” 67.
13. Huxley, “End-Gaining and the Means-Whereby,” 150.
14. Williams and Penman, *Mindfulness*.
15. McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino, and Bradley, *The Coherent Heart*.
16. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 36.
17. For more information about the use of animals in therapy, visit the website of the nonprofit Pets as Therapy, which is based in the United Kingdom.
18. Pearce, *The Heart-Mind Matrix*, 179, 180.
19. Hanh, *True Love*, 1.
20. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 80.
21. Halevi, *Psychology and Kabbalah*, 13.
22. Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 57.
23. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 159.
24. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 175.
25. “Where Do We Go From Here?” Speech delivered at the 11th Annual SCLC Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967.
26. Carson, *Silent Spring*.
27. Quotation appears on the “About the Findhorn Foundation” page on the website of the Findhorn Foundation; accessed March 19, 2020.

Chapter 5. The Throat Chakra

1. Oppenheimer, *Out of Eden*, 25–30.
2. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 109.
3. Goleman, *Social Intelligence*.
4. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, 220–23.
5. Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, 21–48.
6. Lever, *At the Still Point of the Turning World*, 108.
7. Tomatis, *The Ear and Language*.
8. Walsch, *Conversations with God*, Book 1.

9. Halevi, *The Way of Kabbalah*, 170.
10. Campbell, *Myths to Live By*.
11. Aquinas, “Otherwise the Darkness,” 144.
12. The International Institute for Restorative Practices is a good source of information about restorative practices; you can look up the institute’s website online.
13. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*.
14. Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life*.
15. I’m speaking here of the Red Ladder Theatre company, founded in 1969 in the United Kingdom. You can look them up online.
16. Howkins, *The Creative Economy*, 47.

Chapter 6. The Eye or Brow Chakra

1. Shapiro, *Getting Past Your Past*.
2. Blakemore and Frith, *The Learning Brain*, chapter 9.
3. McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 17.
4. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief*.
5. Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight*, 137.
6. Leadbeater, *The Chakras*, preface.
7. Leadbeater, *The Chakras*, preface.
8. Devereux, *Lucid Dreaming*.
9. Edelman, *Change Your Thinking with CBT*.
10. Kanigel, *The Man Who Knew Infinity*, 7.
11. Carreira, *Embrace All That You Are*, 11.
12. Schrödinger, *What Is Life*.
13. McTaggart, *The Field*; Sheldrake, *Morphic Resonance*.
14. Dossey, *One Mind*, xxi.
15. Bailey, *The Light of the Soul*, 229.
16. Talbot, *The Holographic Universe*.
17. Childre, Martin, Rozman, and McCraty, *Heart Intelligence*, 126.

18. McCraty, *Science of the Heart*, 89.
19. Blakemore and Frith, *The Learning Brain*, chapter 8.
20. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 133.
21. Childs, *Steiner Education in Theory and Practice*.
22. Landy and Bianchini, *The Creative City*, 4.
23. Doidge, *The Brain's Way of Healing*, 223–24.
24. Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 162–67.
25. Ashperger, *The Rhythm of Space and the Sound of Time*.

Chapter 7. The Crown Chakra

1. Gupta, *The Laksmi Tantra*, 73.
2. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, chapter 1.
3. Church, *Mind to Matter*, 70.
4. Strassman, *DMT*, 67–85.
5. Descartes, “Letter to Messonier,” 143.
6. Judith, *Wheels of Life*, 22.
7. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 301.
8. Doidge, *The Brain's Way of Healing*, 114–59.
9. Roberts, *The Seth Material*, 11–12.
10. Sugrue, *Edgar Cayce*.
11. Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso, and Greyson, *Irreducible Mind*, 394–403.
12. Wade, *Transcendent Sex*.
13. Feuerstein, *Tantra*, 120–38.
14. Goleman, *The Meditative Mind*, 12–16.
15. Greenwell, *The Kundalini Guide* and *The Awakening Guide*.
16. Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 3.
17. Wilber, *One Taste*, 184.
18. Wilber, *One Taste*, 152.

19. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 175–202.
20. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 203–22.
21. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 253.
22. Wade, *Changes of Mind*, 223–47.
23. Sartori, *The Wisdom of Near Death Experiences*.
24. Alexander, *Aphorisms*, 36.
25. D'Angelo, *Seed Sounds for Tuning the Chakras*.
26. Doidge, *The Brain's Way of Healing*, 343–44.
27. Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, 69–70.
28. Wilber, *One Taste*, 148.

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