

Understanding the Chakras

The chakra system gives us a framework for understanding human beings in a way that integrates mind, body and spirit. 'Chakra' is the Sanskrit word for wheel. It is used to describe the energy vortices in the human energy field that were first mentioned over 3,000 years ago in the scriptures of India.

Chakras are organising centres for the reception, assimilation, and transmission of vital energy. Most Indian texts say that there are seven major chakras, each with a specific location in the subtle body. They are associated with specific physical, psychological and spiritual issues. Other spiritual traditions have five, eight, nine, twelve, or more chakras.

The chakras are located along the spine and are often pictured as lotuses, which open as we progress spiritually. Chakras can be active or dormant, depending upon our state of consciousness.

Upanishads

The chakras were first mentioned in the Yoga Kundalini Upanishad (part of the Krishna Yajur Veda) that was written sometime between 1,400BC and 1,000BC.

Later Upanishads were written between 200BC and 200AD. The ones that refer to the chakras and the subtle bodies are the Shri Jabala Darshana Upanishad, Cudamani Upanishad, Yoga Tattva Upanishad, Yoga-Shikka Upanishad and Shandila Upanishad. For more information please go to my article 'Origins of the Chakras'.

http://www.simonheather.co.uk/pages/articles/origins_of_the_chakras.pdf

The Yoga Cudamani Upanishad says, "Lord Brahma endows man with a body composed of the five elements and divided into three parts. The portion composed of physical elements is called the 'gross body' (sthulasharira); that portion made up of subtle elements is called the astral body (sukshmarsharira); that part which contains the causes of all that each human being is as an individual, is known as the causal body (karanasharira)." (Motoyama, p131)

"Within the causal body, the three gunas (qualities) – sattva (purity, wisdom, peace), rajas (activity, passion), and tamas (inertia, lethargy) – exist in a harmonious state of perfect equilibrium. However, in the astral and physical bodies, this balance among the gunas is lost, resulting in a dynamic interaction between them." (Motoyama, p132)

The Chakras

Hiroshi Motoyama, Ph.D. the author of the book 'Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness' states that chakras are energy centres that current scientific technology has not detected because they lie beyond the physical level.

Dr Motoyama says, "The chakras are the centers of the body's energy systems, which exist in each of the three different dimensions: gross, subtle, and causal. Each chakra

has three levels, and each level of the chakra functions in the corresponding dimension. These functions are closely related to each other.” (Motoyama p281)

Dr Motoyama says, “A chakra works as a centre of interchange between the physical and the astral, and between the astral and the causal dimensions.” (Motoyama p23)

Dr Motoyama says, “The chakras are also intermediaries between the physical body and consciousness, between the astral body and manas (mind), and between the causal body and the karana (causal mind), that is, between the body and the mind of each dimension. Further, the chakras act to integrate the interrelationship between the three bodies and minds in a holistic manner.” (Motoyama p282)

“Each chakra has its own sounds (nada and mantra) and geometric figure (yantra), which can be perceived extrasensorily.” (Motoyama p282)

“The aura of an awakened chakra shines more brightly and is larger than that of a dormant chakra. Even in the same person, an awakened chakra shines more brightly than others.”

“In each person, one chakra is naturally more active than the others, but which one it is differs from person to person according to the individual’s karma and nature.”

“It is very difficult to achieve enlightenment without awakening the chakras.”

The Nadis

The Nadis are mentioned in several of the ancient texts. An early version of the Nadi system is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad, which is believed to be 3,000 years old. In this text the Nadis are compared to the rays of the Sun. In the Yoga-Shikka Upanishad it is stated that the navel is the root of 72,000 Nadis.

The word ‘Nad’ means ‘movement’ or ‘stream’. Nadis are channels of energy in the gross and subtle bodies. The Shiva Samhita states that there are 350,000 Nadis in the body. The Shiva Samhita is considered the most comprehensive treatise on Hatha Yoga and is believed to have been written before 1,500BC.

There are two types of Nadis - subtle and gross.

Gross Nadis - blood vessels, nerves, lymph canals, veins.

Subtle Nadis - conduits of subtle energy, divided into two types - Pranavaha Nadis and Manovaha Nadis.

Pranavaha Nadis carry Prana (vital energy). The acupuncture meridians are the same as the Pranavaha Nadis.

Manovaha Nadis carry ‘Manas Shakti’ (mental energy). The Manovaha Nadis are channels of mind energy and channels of chitta (impressions) arising from the feeling self.

Prana is distributed to the body through thousands of channels. The system of Nadis is linked to the spinal nerves and the peripheral nervous system. Just as the nerves conduct signals from the nervous system to the glands, organs and tissues, the Nadis distribute “prana” to the body, converting it into different forms of vital energy appropriate for various organs, glands and tissues.

There are 14 principal Nadis. The three major Nadis are called Sushumna, Idā, and Pingala. The Sushumna Nadi is the central integrating channel connecting the chakras and their various levels of consciousness. The Idā Nadi and Pingala Nadi are two channels that lie on either side of the spine.

The Pingala Nadi is associated with solar energy. The word Pingala has many meanings in Sanskrit. It can mean ‘fire’, a ‘serpent’ or ‘reddish-brown, tawny, yellow, or gold-coloured’. The Pingala Nadi has a sunlike nature and masculine energy. Its temperature is heating and it travels from the right testicle in men to the right nostril. In women the Pingala Nadi begins at the right side of the base chakra.

The Idā Nadi is associated with lunar energy. The word Idā means, "comfort" in Sanskrit. The Idā Nadi has a moonlike nature and feminine energy with a cooling effect. It travels from the left testicle in men to the left nostril. In women the Idā Nadi begins at the left side of the base chakra.

Dr Motoyama says the 14 principal nadis correspond very closely to the acupuncture meridians of Chinese Medicine. He says that the Sushumna Nadi corresponds to the (Du Mai) Governor Vessel Meridian in Chinese Medicine. However it may also be linked to the (Chong Mai) Penetrating Vessel. He says that the Idā Nadi and Pingala Nadi are linked to the Outer Bladder Meridian that flows up either side of the spine. (Motoyama, p132)

Seven Chakras - Associations

Chakra One (earth element) - base of the spine - coccygeal plexus - survival - genito-urinary system - adrenal glands

Chakra Two (water element) - lower abdomen - sacral plexus - reproductive and genito-urinary system – reproductive glands

Chakra Three (fire element) - belly area - solar plexus - personal power, digestion, metabolic energy - pancreas

Chakra Four (air element) - the sternum - cardiac plexus - love - thymus gland

Chakra Five (sound element) - throat area - pharyngeal plexus - creativity, communication - thyroid gland

Chakra Six (light element) - centre of the forehead - intuition, imagination and clairvoyance - pituitary gland

Chakra Seven - the crown of the head - enlightenment, knowledge, understanding, - controls every aspect of body and mind - pineal gland

Disturbances, imbalances and restrictions in the flow of energy within the chakras are created by unresolved emotions, trauma, past actions, restricting beliefs and negative thought patterns. Balance can be restored in the chakras through yoga, meditation, tai chi, breathing exercises, massage, energy medicine and healing.

Chakra Colours / Sounds

In the Shat-Chakra-Nirupa compiled in 1577 each chakra is said to have number of petals, a colour and a bija mantra. (Arthur Avalon, The Serpent Power 1974)

Chakra One (Muladhara) – four petals – yellow – LAM
Chakra Two (Svadisthana) – six petals – white – VAM
Chakra Three (Manipura) – ten petals – red – RAM
Chakra Four (Anahata) – twelve petals – grey – YAM
Chakra Five (Vishuddha) – sixteen petals – white – HAM
Chakra Six (Ajna) – two or 96 petals – white/silver – OM
Chakra Seven (Sahasrara) – 1,000 petals – Gold – Silence or All Sounds.

Harish Johari a leading authority on the chakras, has similar colours for the chakras in his book 'Energy Centers of Transformation' -

Muladhara – Yellow with Red Petals
Svadisthana – White / Light Blue / Transparent with Red Petals
Manipura – Red with Blue Petals
Anahata – Colourless / Smokey Grey / Smokey Green with Red Petals
Vishuddha – Smokey Purple with Lavender Grey and Purple Petals
Ajna – White / Luminescent / Bluish / Camphor White with Pale Blue Petals
Sahasrara – All Colours with Rainbow Coloured Petals

In 1977 Christopher Hills published a book entitled "Nuclear Evolution". He was the first person to link the chakras to the rainbow colours. The association of the chakras with the rainbow colours is not found in the Upanishads.

Kundalini

The Kundalini is an energy ('Shakti'), said to be coiled up at the base of the spine. The Kundalini is seen as a goddess or sleeping serpent waiting to be awakened. Kundalini awakening is said to lead to states of deep meditation, enlightenment and bliss.

This awakening involves the Kundalini Shakti moving up the Sushumna Nadi through each chakra to reach the crown chakra. Many systems of yoga focus on awakening the Kundalini through meditation, pranayama (breathing), asana (postures) and the chanting of mantras. Many people describe the movement of the Kundalini as similar to an electric current running up the spine.

As the Kundalini energy pierces each chakra, it brings spiritual awakening to a person. When the Kundalini's journey is complete, the person is said to be fully enlightened.

In addition to the Kundalini that flows upwards from the root chakra to crown chakra, there is an energy that flows downward from the crown chakra to the base chakra. This energy flows from the spiritual realm and allows us to manifest our unique life purpose. Together the two flows of energy create an energetic balance between body (matter) and spirit (consciousness). If we have a free flow of these energies we can live a life of both presence and transcendence. (Judith Anodea, Wheels of Life, 1990)

Charles Leadbeater

Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854 – 1934) was an influential member of the Theosophical Society and author on esoteric subjects. Originally a priest in the Church of England, his interest in spiritualism caused him to join the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater developed extraordinary psychic abilities and went on to write over 70 books and pamphlets that examined in detail the hidden side of life.

For Leadbeater, the chakras are points of connection at which energy flows from one body of a man to another. A clairvoyant may see the chakras in the etheric double, where they show themselves as saucer-like depressions or vortices in its surface. When undeveloped they appear as small circles about two inches in diameter, glowing dully in the ordinary man; but when awakened they are seen as blazing whirlpools, much increased in size, resembling miniature suns.

He says, “We sometimes speak of them as roughly corresponding to certain physical organs; in reality they show themselves at the surface of the etheric double, which projects slightly beyond the outline of the dense body. If we imagine ourselves to be looking straight down into the bell of a flower of the convolvulus type, we shall get some idea of the general appearance of a chakra. The stalk of the flower in each springs from a point in the spine, so another view might show the spine as a central stem, from which flowers shoot forth at intervals, showing the opening of their bells at the surface of the etheric body.”

“All these wheels are perpetually rotating, and into the hub or open mouth of each a force from the higher world is always flowing- a manifestation of the life-stream issuing from the Second Aspect of the Solar Logos Second Aspect (the Ray of Love -Wisdom) which we call the primary force. That force is sevenfold in its nature, and all its forms operate in each of these centres, although one of them in each case usually predominates over the others.”

“Without this inrush of energy the physical body could not exist. Therefore the centres are in operation in every one, although in the undeveloped person they are usually in comparatively sluggish motion, just forming the necessary vortex for the force, and no more. In a more evolved man they may be glowing and pulsating with living light, so that an enormously greater amount of energy passes through them, with the result that there are additional faculties and possibilities open to the man.”

Leadbeater divides the chakras into three groups—

Physical – Base and Spleen

Personal – Solar Plexus, Heart, Throat

Spiritual – Third Eye, Crown

In his book Leadbeater talks about the Spleen Chakra and does not mention the Sacral Chakra. Apart from the Spleen Chakra all the other chakras he describes align with the traditional ones mentioned in the Upanishads.

Leadbeater says that chakras exist in both the Etheric and Astral dimensions. He says that the Astral Chakras only become active once the Kundalini is active in a person. He says that both the Astral and Etheric Chakras must be awakened for a person to acquire consciousness of the Astral Dimension.

He says that the Astral Chakras are like the sense organs of the Astral Body. Once the first Astral Chakra is active the Kundalini rises up the chakras activating each chakra in turn -

First Chakra – Home of Serpent Fire

Second Chakra – Allows Astral Travel

Third Chakra – Allows sensitivity to Astral Energies

Fourth Chakra – Allows us to feel the Emotions of Astral Beings

Fifth Chakra – Allows us to hear Astral Beings

Sixth Chakra – Allows Astral Sight

Seventh Chakra – Allows Full Consciousness of the Astral World

Research

Quantum physics is validating much of what was written in the ancient scriptures of India.

Dr Motoyama has developed instruments that measure the energy in the chakras. He built two machines: one to measure the ‘ki’ energy in the meridians (the AMI machine) and another to measure the energy of the chakras or energy centres of the body (The Chakra instrument). For more information about these instruments please go to the link at the end of this article.

Chakra Book

If you would like to learn more about the chakras I suggest that you read my book ‘Reclaiming Your Sacred Spirit – The Essential Guide to the Chakras’. The book is available via my web site - <http://www.simonheather.co.uk/pages/books.php>

There is a sample chapter on the Solar Plexus Chakra that you can read online - http://www.simonheather.co.uk/pages/chapters/reclaimingyoursacredspirit_sample.pdf

Glossary of Sanskrit Words

Chitta – The word ‘chitta’ means memory, it is derived from the root word ‘chit’ meaning ‘to be conscious’. The ‘chitta’ is the subconscious mind, it is the mind-stuff, the storehouse of memory and mental impressions.

Karana Chitta – Is the causal mind. It is the intuitive, superconscious mind of the soul. The Karana Chitta corresponds to the anandamaya kosha, the bliss sheath, also called the Karana Sharira, the causal body.

Karana Sharira – The causal body, is the vehicle of the consciousness. It is the superconscious mind of the Soul. The causal body carries all our impressions and tendencies in seed form

Manas – Comes from the root ‘man’, meaning ‘to think’ or ‘mind’. Manas is the recording faculty that receives impressions gathered by the senses from the outside world. It is bound to the senses and yields vijnana (information) rather than jnana (wisdom) or vidya (understanding). Manas is the faculty which co-ordinates sensory impressions before they are presented to the consciousness.

Shakti - Means ‘power’ or ‘empowerment’. Shakti is the primordial cosmic energy and represents the dynamic forces that are thought to move through the entire universe.

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The Nadis

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An Interview with Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama

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