



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF Chakras

Nancy Jackson (Swami Dayananda) offers tips on using signals from the chakras to enhance personal understanding.

In the wide arena of today's yoga, chakras have become learning points for a broad range of practices. The seven yoga chakras define an energy system of vibrations of your body. These chakras have symbolic associations with light, sound, body aspects, illnesses, feelings, totems, and pathways to enlightenment, among others. They also are direct links to your emotions and provide information that can uplift you.

The chakras have long been a study for yoga traditions and in the modern era became integrated in applications of psychology. In 1932, the psychologist Carl Jung gave a series of talks that became a book, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*. Even earlier in the twentieth century he had praised yoga practices for tools to become conscious of feelings you may not have been aware of. He says, "Yoga was originally a natural process of introversion."

Because it can be easy to trivialise and generalise about the chakras, it is especially important to investigate and practice techniques over a period of time. Every experience is individual and open to interpretation. I have worked with

the chakras for more than thirty years and have found some shortcuts that can help you shift energy and provide insight into your interactions and relationships with people and your life.

BALANCED OR DISTURBED?

Your energy field is your personal manifestation. Just as important as what you experience, feel or think, is how you vibrate. What is your resonance or frequency right now? A gentle hum or om? Fiery irritation? The collapse of tears or joy of triumph? Every effort and interaction changes your vibration. Most telling are your emotions.

Chakras are the sites where you perceive, absorb, and dispense energies of personal experiences. Hopefully you are often content or even have a feeling of expansion or upliftment. But when you discover physical and emotional tensions, you can use these signals to recognise a physical experience or feeling.

The energy signals from the chakras can be extremely subtle or surprisingly easy to recognise. Have you ever received information that made you tongue-tied? Or felt like a

kick in the stomach? A knife in the heart? These are direct correlations to chakras. You interpret an external influence emotionally and it can go directly to an energy centre. Jung says, "When an emotion reaches a point of great intensity, it no longer expresses itself in words, but in a physiological way."

As you may already know, the word chakra means wheel, and can also be translated as mandala, ring, or cycle. Sometimes you can actually feel a wheel of energy. For example, when you are excited or apprehensive about doing something you might feel a churning in your stomach. Or you might feel a point of tightness right between the eyes when you've been doing too much detailed work.

External situations such as physical pain, pressures from work or school, or difficult people all show up in your body's energy. So do internal patterns, such as what you think of yourself, how the world works, or leanings towards particular emotions that arise again and again.

Disturbances from any direction are mirrored by your chakras. Free-flowing energy of a chakra can become blocked, deficient, or

excessive, generating imbalance in your entire body system. Usually it's temporary but over time if you create habits, these can become chronic. Like more electric appliances loaded onto a circuit, when you free the obstacles you open up your energy. When you are clear, you are more likely to think soundly, feel light and easy, and readily get things done.

In this article we'll be working with seven chakras. Please refer to the chart below for details on each chakra. And, although I quote Jung in relation to his work with chakras, these techniques are not about psychoanalysis. They apply specifically to the energy of what is going on with you in this moment.

THE LOWER CHAKRAS

The lower chakras 1 and 2 characterise your relation to the physical world. Associated with basic needs, survival, and everyday interactions, these chakras represent

automatic responses and actions. One technique of working with the lower chakras is to notice if you have been struggling. In general, some signals of imbalance in the lower chakras are when you are unsettled, constantly changing yet resisting change, or feeling isolated or a victim of circumstances.

BASE CHAKRA



When you have base support, like a tree your roots are firm and strong. You guide yourself well through the events of life, even when upheavals occur. Jung says, "Everything runs smoothly, we are going to have lunch, we have appointments, we are perfectly normal citizens. Obligations, duties. We are upon our root support. We are in our roots right in this world. It is reality as you touch it."

Earth is the element for the Base Chakra. Naturally if you feel unsettled you might experience a lack

of support, insecurity, confusion, or being a victim of circumstances. Here's where you could seek the company of supportive friends or family. You also might want to ground yourself by drawing energy from the floor or ground rather than listening to the chatter of the mind. Balancing measures also include spending time outdoors, one-on-one with nature. When you recognise you need to stabilise yourself, look for inner stillness.

SACRAL CHAKRA

With a balanced Sacral Chakra, you have a zest for life and recognise abundance. Being in the element of water, you are able to flow. You can tap into your creativity and move towards manifesting desires. According to Jung, the Sacral Chakra represents: "The life we live freely and thoughtlessly just throwing ourselves into the stream of life and letting ourselves be carried, floating on all that comes to us."

CHAKRA 7. CROWN CHAKRA	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Sahasrara</i> "Thousand Petaled" ASPECTS Awareness CHARACTERISTICS Discernment FEATURES Pure intelligence and sense of being CONCERNS Reception	
CHAKRA 6. THIRD EYE BETWEEN AND SLIGHTLY ABOVE YOUR EYEBROWS	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Ajna</i> "Beyond Wisdom" ASPECTS Light CHARACTERISTICS Insight FEATURES Inner world CONCERNS Perception	
CHAKRA 5. THROAT CHAKRA	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Vishuddha</i> "Pure" ASPECTS Ether CHARACTERISTICS Expression FEATURES Correlation of feeling and thought CONCERNS Communication	
CHAKRA 4. HEART CHAKRA	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Anahata</i> "Unstruck or Unheard" ASPECTS Air CHARACTERISTICS Values FEATURES Feeling and understanding CONCERNS Relationship	
CHAKRA 3. NAVEL CHAKRA	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Manipura</i> "Lustrous Gem" ASPECTS Fire CHARACTERISTICS Drive, accomplishment FEATURES Individual character CONCERNS Will; wants	
CHAKRA 2. SACRAL CHAKRA AT THE LOWER ABDOMEN	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Svadhithana</i> "One's own place" ASPECTS Water CHARACTERISTICS Flow FEATURES Raw emotions CONCERNS Needs	
CHAKRA 1. BASE CHAKRA AT THE BASE OF YOUR SPINE	SANSKRIT NAME <i>Muladhara</i> "Root" ASPECTS Earth CHARACTERISTICS Worldly life FEATURES Foundation; being grounded CONCERNS Stability	

Certainly, activities that bring us joy are positive. But it can be easy to get caught in repetition of pleasurable activities, which can become compulsions. If you find yourself stuck in something you don't really want to do, you might want to release its hold. The Sacral Chakra is also related to being trapped by raw emotion or believing you'll never feel better. You can readily succumb to blame, striking out, or personal dramas. When you are overwhelmed, focus on the emotion itself. Identify what you're feeling rather than why you are feeling it. Try to drop the story that is fuelling your reactions.

CHAKRAS 3-4-5-6

These four chakras can provide a wealth of information. As you continue to work with chakras, you will develop the ability to recognise your energy fluctuations. For example, you are in a car and the car in front turns without warning. Your stomach knots, the knots rise into your heart, and your throat expresses surprise. Or, you find out that something you just completed needs to be modified. Your heart sinks into your stomach and sits there like an anvil. More subtle examples are a nagging feeling in your Third Eye that you are overlooking something. Or the slow burn in your belly generated by lack of cooperation at work.

Jung provides an example: "We begin in the head; we survey the world. That is ajna. But we cannot linger forever in the pure spheres of detached observation, we must bring our thoughts into reality. We voice them and so trust them to the air. When we clothe our knowledge in words, we are in the region of vishuddha, or the throat centre. But as soon as we say something that is especially difficult, or that causes us positive or negative feelings, we

have a throbbing of the heart, and then the anahata centre begins to be activated. And still another step further, when for example a dispute with someone starts up, when we have become irritable and angry and get beside ourselves, then we are in manipura."

The navel, heart, throat and third eye chakras will provide information. (In general, the lower chakras don't provide clear information in the way these four chakras do.) When you feel agitated or notice a tightness in one of these four chakras, close your eyes and sit with it. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Where is the disturbance? Can you recognise a tightness, tension, niggling, or heavy sensation in one or more chakras?
- Can I let it go? Sometimes you can immediately release the tension. For example, letting go of impatience or inconvenience.
- What feeling is it? Try to name the feeling, such as anger, fear, or sadness of some dimension. If you can't, just acknowledge you have a feeling in a chakra.
- What is this associated with? Was there a phone call, an incident, or a memory that triggered you?
- What is the thinking behind this feeling? Voice your actual thoughts, even if they are blunt or silly.
- Is my thinking valid or useful? Question your thinking.
- What is the quickest way for me to release the tension? Do you need to get up and do something different? Talk to someone? Distract your mind?
- Is this familiar? Most likely you have developed habits of emotional responses that affect your energy

and your body. If you can, catch yourself just as you are about to repeat a pattern. Can you respond in a different way?

- What do I need to know? Here you are directly asking for your inner wisdom. Listen quietly and ask again until you receive an answer that resonates.

NAVEL CHAKRA

As the seat of will, the navel chakra generates energy to propel you forward. It can strongly be associated with the ego, defining what you want and don't want. The force of the navel gives you the power to take risks and make things happen. Associated with the element of fire, it can also be volatile. Anger readily flares when you don't get what you want.

When you are challenged, you can virtually double-over with emotional tension in the navel. Severe imbalance can manifest as nausea or constant stomach and abdominal complaints. The feeling can be so strong that some people undergo medical tests, which show no physical disorder. More common is a sensation of tension – the tightness of butterflies before a performance or game. Or queasiness when you have to confront someone with an issue. Frustration, too, shows up in the navel, as does agitation, perfectionism, overwork, or the feeling of being powerless.

Jung says it's the fire of passion. "Everywhere you pour out the fire of desire and that is the fire of illusion because you desire things which are futile. Yet there is the great treasure of the released emotional energy." That treasure is the Sanskrit name for this chakra, meaning 'lustrous gem.' It refers to warmth, energy, contentment, and well being.

Once you are aware of an excess or deficiency you can use your own reserves of power to strengthen your will or burn through resistance to get something done. Carrying the analogy further, you can allow this fire to burn through inertia or allow hyperactivity to burn out. To have fire is to have fullness of energy and lustre like the facets of jewels.

HEART CHAKRA

Jung says, "Above the diaphragm you come into anahata, the heart or air centre, because the heart is embedded in the lungs and the whole activity of the heart is closely associated with the lungs." He says in the Heart Chakra we are lifted up. We become progressively aware and conscious. Air fills the spirit with

individuality and boundlessness. It is the seat of the conscious being.

Like the qualities of air, emotions themselves are hard to catch and hold. They can be elusive and deceptive. When you allow emotional experiences to accumulate they are 'unheard.' Here's when you can turn your attention to hear what your feelings are telling you. What is the feeling and what is the thinking behind the feeling?

It's common to find your thinking filled with judgments. You might discover a litany of how other people should behave, old hurts, or regrets for decisions you've made. When you investigate your feelings and discover the thinking behind them, you are in a position of power.

You have become fully conscious of stored emotions.

You have a choice to continue thinking and feeling the same or to change your thinking. One expedient method to change your thinking is to identify a judgment, such as "He's always late; he doesn't respect me." Then align it with your values, such as "I value being on time." You can also question your thinking by asking if this thinking brings you agitation or peace. You might want to let go of you point of view.

Wholeness lies beyond personal stories of pain. When you stand firmly in the centre of your heart you are heart-felt, invincible. Harsh words or judgements from others

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can't reach you in a posture of compassion and understanding for yourself and for everyone else. An open heart is accepting, kind, and filled with gratitude.

THROAT CHAKRA

The Throat Chakra is associated with the ether. Jung says, "There one lands in a world of concepts." It is the place where you manifest speech from consciousness. Words are voiced in the throat. Before speech is thought. Before thought is intention towards thought, as in when you're trying to think of the words to a song. Before intention is the sea of consciousness. Every word and every thought arises from consciousness.

In yoga, thought itself is referred to as a vibration, a thought-wave. Some

thoughts and sounds have more pleasant vibrations than others. The Throat Chakra embraces all sound vibrations, music, song, and communications of all types. Communication is two-way. You have to be able to listen to your own inner truth as well as voice it.

From conversations to the onslaught of media, in today's culture we all undergo disturbances of the throat on a constant basis. The throat chakra is a place to purify, or refine your own thinking. Whenever you acknowledge your own distress you can ask yourself, what is my thinking? When you realize that it's your own thinking that is giving you the feeling you have purified the chakra.

THIRD EYE CHAKRA

The Third Eye, known as the inward-looking eye, is the seat of higher or more refined knowledge. Characterised by illumination, imagination, sensitivity, and insight, the Third Eye represents spiritual depth. This is a seat of meditation, sweeping away thought to sit in peace. Jung says, "In consciousness, we are in ajna."

The Third Eye also represents the working mind. When clear, you can focus on small as well as broad issues. You make sound decisions, lead well, take responsibility, and stay calm. Too much input or stimulation and you might have trouble concentrating, you could have a headache, or you can be



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convinced that something is true when it isn't. Excessive detailed thought or engaging in electronic devices can make your third eye feel weak. The Third Eye can also suffer imbalance if you think about your feelings rather than feel your feelings.

Meditation is a great practice for investigating all the chakras. It is especially helpful for clearing the Third Eye. Even if you sit to meditate and have a chattering mind, you are building the practice of self-awareness.

CROWN CHAKRA

The Crown Chakra represents the state of awareness, or your most spiritual nature. As the transcendental chakra, it doesn't succumb to

tensions. But it is important in the alignment of these seven chakras.

Starting from the lowest, the series of chakras represent a journey from the automatic physical and emotional reactions of the first two chakras, to progressively more awareness of the will, emotions, thoughts, and insights with the next four chakras. They culminate at the Sahasrara, representing dimensionless consciousness. Starting from the highest, the Crown Chakra draws energy into the body, becoming more tangible and understandable.

Everyday life brings us surprises and complexities on every level. Working with the chakras is a broad and integrated process that will bring more awareness into your life. It's

about being vigilant: recognising how you take the world into your body and psyche. And when appropriate, noting when you might want to change your responses. As we embrace the human experience we can be in all realms – the most physical as well as the most ethereal. At any moment we can be awake, aware, alert, and entirely present.

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