

The Cakras

chak•ra: (*n.*) One of the seven centers of spiritual energy in the human body according to yoga philosophy.

[Sanskrit *cakram*, wheel, circle.] [American Heritage Dictionary, 4th edn.]

Introduction

In ancient Indian physiological theory, the human body is composed of two systems, the physical system and the energy system. The physical body is filled with skin, muscles, tissue, and bones. Alternatively, the human energy body system is filled with physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental layers (Feuerstein 139-140). These energy systems are called *cakras* [*Chakra* is a transliteration format of the word to help Western pronunciation. The formal transliteration from Sanskrit is *cakra*]. *Cakras* are the centers of spiritual energy nodes in the human body and are fundamental to spiritual systems of yoga practiced in the Hindu culture (Radha 18) [Yoga is also practiced by many other religious cultures, especially the Buddhist, and many New Age movements that have adapted it through Western influence]. The *cakras* are associated with the interaction between the physical and mental nature. The *cakras* are a form of life energy (*prana*) (Mangla 39), which moves through a series of pathways (*nadis*)(Saraswati 303). Each of the seven main *cakras* is aligned along the spine in an ascending order, and each possesses many distinguishing characteristics (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The alignment of the *cakras* reflects an individual's present state of consciousness and their desire to reach Sahasrara [Considered to be pure consciousness].

History

The *cakras* are thought to have origins in the later Upanisads (Mookerjee 24), specifically the *Brahma Upanisad* and the *Yogatattva Upanisad*. The earliest Upanisads originated in the eight century BCE, with over 100 different "lesser upanisads" being written over the following several hundred years (Mangla 249). These writings influenced both Tibetan Buddhism in

Vajrayana theory (Feuerstein X), as well as Hinduism through the Tantric Sakta theory of *cakras* (Radha 25-28). The Sakta theory of the *cakras* is the primary form that is understood by most western cultures due to the work of Sir John Woodroffe, who went by the alias Arthur Avalon. In 1919, Woodroffe wrote *The Serpent Power*, a translation and commentary on two primary Indian texts, the *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* and the *Padaka-Pancaka*.

Cakras comes from the Sanskrit, meaning wheel or circle, and is derived from the Aryan's word for the wheel of their chariots (Feuerstein 47). It represents balance, and often refers to the "wheel of life" (*Dharmacakra*), as in the *Mahabharata's Aswamedha Parva* (Section XLV). The *Mahabharata* [longest epic in history], an influential text in Hindu culture, was thought to have originated between 200 BCE and 200 CE. It tells the many stories of India, including what Swami Satyananda Saraswati explained as the "wheel of life" (Kumar 9) ["The whole process occurs in continuity, each stage fusing into the next and transforming in a very graduated way. This seems logical when you consider that it is the same consciousness which is undergoing the experience..." "From Mooladhara up to Ajna Chakra, the awareness is experiencing higher things, but it is not free from ego. You cannot transcend ego at the lower points of awakening. It is only when Kundalini reaches ajna chakra that the transcendence begins. This is where the ego is exploded into a million fragments and the ensuing death experience occurs. At this point Savikalpa ends and Nirvikalpa begins. From here, the energies fuse and flow together up to Sahasrara, where enlightenment unfolds." (Kumar 9)]. When *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* and *Padaka-Pancaka* were written, they explained the *cakras* as an emanation of consciousness from Brahman. The energy of Brahman comes down to create the specific levels of the *cakras*, and settles in the Muladhara Cakra until union with Brahman is achieved in the Sahasrara Cakra.

Each *cakra* has many unique characteristics that make them different from the next. Each level is like a hierarchy that can only be reached by following a path through each *cakra*. The *cakras* represent different locations throughout the body. Each location rises up from the

next until it reaches the head and above. The *cakras* also depict any relations to nature and the benefits that this must bring. Each of the individual *cakras* will be explored on an individual basis in the following sections.

Muladhara

The first *cakra* is the root or base. It is found at the base of the spine, as it is the foundation of all *cakras*. Muladhara represents the earth and an orientation towards self-preservation (Woodroffe 115). The relationship between the earth and energy leads to the hypothesis that this region is responsible for the survival instincts (Radha 34). The connection that is created between the individual and their bodies helps to bring health, prosperity, security, and dynamic presence. The Muladhara region is also thought to be the region that controls ejaculation in the sexual act (Johari 51).

Svadhithana

The second energy along the spine is represented by the element water, which is related to emotional identity and a need for self-gratification (Mangla 183). The energy aids in the connection between individuals through feeling, desire, sensation and movement. The overall fluidity of life is increased by the development of Svadhithana (Woodroffe 118). This is the first rise in energy in the flow through the *cakras*.

Manipura

Manipura is the power *cakra* that is located in the abdomen near the adrenal glands. This *cakra* is responsible for keeping individuals healthy (Johari 59). It works by representing fire

and the need to orient oneself to better achieve success. Manipura allows for the energy required to stay spontaneous and effective. Patanjali argued that this was the *cakra* that was responsible for the knowledge of the orgasm because this is the *cakra* of the life force (Mookerjee 40). This control is important, as it is the base of all of the *cakras* and the origin of all life.

Anahata

The fourth *cakra* is one of balance and integration (Mangla 185). Anahata is represented by air and self-acceptance. The fourth *cakra* is considered the heart *cakra* because it is at the centre of the body's energies. Anahata is related to love and is responsible for the unity of mind and body, male and female, persona and shadow, ego and unity (Radha 163). Anahata uses its strong positioning to develop along the spine to achieve an elevated level of consciousness. Like the heart is the center of the physical body, Anahata is the center of the *cakras*.

Visuddha

The fifth *cakra* is located just prior to the mouth, in the throat. It is responsible for many of the creative steps required to improve the status of a specific individual (Mookerjee 42). There is an overall feeling towards the vibrations that help to orient one's self with their creative identity or self-expression (Johari 71). These vibrations are also responsible for the production of language and sound that can be used for Mantras.

Ajna

The sixth *cakra* is the eyebrow *cakra*. It has light as a symbol in order to help guide the way to a self-reflection (Saraswati 114-122). It works on the skills required to see both

physically and intuitively. It allows for an increased level of communication with the God's, as well as an overall bigger picture to see how to improve the current situation. This is the first level of *cakras* that is involved with abstract thought and the ability to look back at one's self (Mookerjee 44).

Sahasrara

The final *cakra* is the crown *cakra*, which is considered to be like pure consciousness. It is required to have a high level of awareness, thought and universal identity (Mangla 89-95). By supporting the development of consciousness, the *cakra* is bringing new knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual connections (Woodroffe 138). This is the location where the paradoxical act of transcendence occurs by passing beyond *samsara* (Mookerjee 44).

Western Culture

Since the original versions of the Upanisads were written in India, there have been many different adaptations of Indian practices that have been brought to the western world, including the *cakras*. People have continually attempted to reach higher levels of consciousness through meditation, prayer, and overall lifestyle choices. The presence of higher levels of consciousness, or energy, continues to be found throughout the world. The impact of Indian culture and their traditions is becoming mainstream and is starting to be found in American pop culture (Sharp 84). By gaining an understanding of the history behind these traditions, people can be aware of the impact that these references have on them.

Figure 1: Cakra table depicting the many different aspects of the central body energies. Taken from *Kundalini Tantra* (Saraswati 401-403)

<i>Cakra</i>	<i>Nature</i>	<i># of Petals</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Gland</i>	<i>Dhatu</i>
Muladhara	root lotus	4	Deep red	Root	Perineal body	Bone
Svadhithana	one's own abode	6	Orange-red	Genital	Gonads	Fat
Manipura	city of jewels	10	Yellow	Navel	Adrenal	Flesh
Anahata	Source of unbroken sound	12	Blue	Heart	Thymus	Blood
Visuddha	Center of nectar	16	Purple	Throat	Thyroid	Skin
Ajna	Center of command	2	Clear or grey	Eyebrow	Pineal	Marrow
Sahasrara	Thousand petalled lotus	1000	Red or multi-colored	Crown	Pituitary	Semen (the essence of all others)

Figure 2: Cakra table further depicting the different energy nodes of the body (Meadow 3)

<i>Cakra</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Altar Offering</i>	<i>Sense</i>	<i>Animal</i>	<i>Deva</i>	<i>Granthi</i>
Muladhara	Earth	Yellow square	Fruit	Smell	Elephant	Ganesa	Brahma
Svadhithana	Water	Silver/white crescent moon	Water	Taste	Crocodile	Visnu	
Manipura	Fire	Red inverted triangle	Flame	Sight	Ram	Rudra	
Anahata	Air	Smoky six-pointed star	Incense	Touch	Antelope	Isa	Visnu
Visuddha	Ether	White circle	Flower	Hearing	White Elephant	Sadasiva	
Ajna	Mind	Clear/grey circle	Mind	Mind		Paramsiva	Rudra
Sahasrara	Beyond	Beyond	God	Beyond		Siva	Jyotir

References and further reading

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Related Topics of Interest

Muladhara
Svadhithana
Manipura

Anahata
Visuddha
Ajna
Sahasrara
Prana
Nadis
Brahma Upanisad
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Noteworthy Websites on the Topic

<http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/kundalini.htm>

http://www.sanatansociety.org/chakras/kundalini_yoga.htm

<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~mclennan/BA/JO-TEP.html>

<http://www.kheper.net/topics/chakras/chakras.htm>

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakras>

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<http://www.sacredcenters.com/chakras.html>

<http://www.eclecticenergies.com/chakras/chakratest.php>

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