

« The Wisdom of Chakras »

By Deepak Bansal

Whether in a yoga studio or during an alternative therapy session, you might have heard phrases like, “Your chakras are blocked!” or “Your chakra is very active.” But what do these statements mean?

The word "chakra" comes from Sanskrit, combining "cha," meaning movement, and "kri," meaning work or enablement. Literally, it can be interpreted as "something that enables movement" and is often loosely translated as "wheel." Chakras are considered psychic centers in the body, each with a specific purpose that facilitates different types of movement and energy flow.

The concept of chakras is not empirically or scientifically validated; it originates from the ancient wisdom traditions of India and relies on a belief system that cannot be directly proven. Despite this, chakras are a fundamental aspect of the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural systems of the Indian subcontinent, forming a basic element of its thought processes.

In this essay, we will explore the historical contexts of the chakra system. We will examine the seven key chakras in the human body and reflect on their philosophical and practical significance.

A. Historical Context

Dating the concept of chakras in Indian scriptures is challenging. One of the earliest mentions is found in the Vedas (1500-1000 BCE), although the term "chakra" is not used in the context of psychospiritual vortices. The concept was further developed in the later Upanishads and various Tantric and Buddhist texts. The comprehensive chakra system we recognize today was first detailed in the 16th-century book "*Sat Chakra Nirupana*" by the Tantric scholar Purananda Swami. In the West, the concept was popularized by Sir John Woodroffe, a British journalist, in his 1919 book "The Serpent Power."

According to Indian systems, each physical body (gross body) has a subtle, energetic body. Energy flows through this subtle body via channels known as "*nadis*," with around 72,000 nadis in total. Among these, three primary nadis are essential: *Ida* (left channel), *Pingala* (right channel), and *Sushumna* (middle channel). These nadis converge at the spinal center, where Kundalini energy (often depicted as a coiled serpent) is believed to reside.

These nadis in the human subtle body intersect at approximately 114 points, facilitating the movement of energy. These points, also known as psychic centers or energy vortices, are called chakras. Considering this framework, there are about 114 chakras in the human body, though different traditions emphasize different numbers of primary chakras. Most Indian traditions identify seven key chakras in various body parts of the subtle body.

B. The Seven Chakras

According to broadly accepted Indian traditions, there are around 7 key chakras in the human subtle body from the spine and above. Each chakra has a specific location, function, color, day of the week, and sound.

1.0 Root Chakra: Muladhara

At the base of the spine, around the perineum region, lies the Muladhara Chakra. The word "Muladhara" combines "mula," meaning base or root, and "adhara," meaning foundation. Also known as the Root Chakra, it is associated with the material aspects of life such as stability, foundation, physicality, and grounding exercises. **The color red**, associated with this chakra, signifies vitality, energy, and the life force that grounds and connects us to the physical world.

The symbol of the Muladhara Chakra is a four-petaled lotus with a yellow square at its center. Each petal represents joy, pleasure, delight, and blissfulness of material life. At the center of the symbol is the seed mantra "*Lam*," a sound that resonates with and activates the chakra. Astrologically, the Muladhara Chakra is linked to Saturday, reflecting its connection to stability and grounding.

2. Sacral Chakra: Svadhisthana

Located in the pelvic area, the Svadhisthana Chakra, or Sacral Chakra, governs creativity, sexuality, and emotions. The word "Svadhisthana" combines "sva," meaning self, and "adhisthana," meaning established. **The color orange** is associated with this chakra, symbolizing warmth, creativity, and emotional balance.

The symbol of the Svadhisthana Chakra is a six-petaled lotus with a white crescent moon. Each petal represents a different aspect of our emotional and creative energies: affection, caring, love, passion, intuition, and purity. The seed mantra "*Vam*" is at the center, resonating with and activating the chakra. This chakra is linked to Monday, reflecting its connection to the moon and emotions.

3. Solar Plexus Chakra: Manipura

The Manipura Chakra, or Solar Plexus Chakra, is located in the navel region. It is the center of personal power, will, and transformation. "Manipura" means "city of jewels," highlighting its importance as a powerhouse of energy. **The color yellow** is associated with this chakra, representing personal power, energy, and transformation.

The symbol of the Manipura Chakra is a ten-petaled lotus with a downward-pointing red triangle. Each petal represents a different aspect of personal power: clarity, wisdom, self-confidence, well-being, self-discipline, honor, virtue, purity, dignity, and tenacity. The seed mantra "*Ram*" is at the center, resonating with and activating the chakra. It is linked to Sunday, symbolizing its connection to the sun and personal power.

4. Heart Chakra: Anahata

Located in the center of the chest, the Anahata Chakra, or Heart Chakra, governs love, compassion, and emotional balance. "Anahata" means "unstruck," referring to the sound made without any two things striking. **The color green** is associated with this chakra, symbolizing love, harmony, and healing.

The symbol of the Anahata Chakra is a twelve-petaled lotus with an intersecting star of David, symbolizing balance and harmony. Each petal represents a different aspect of love and

compassion: joy, peace, love, kindness, empathy, clarity, purity, unity, compassion, bliss, forgiveness, and understanding. The seed mantra "*Yam*" is at the center, resonating with and activating the chakra. It is linked to Wednesday, reflecting its connection to communication and harmony.

5. Throat Chakra: *Visuddha*

The Vishuddha Chakra, or Throat Chakra, is located at the throat. It governs communication, self-expression, and truth. "Vishuddha" means "pure" or "purification," highlighting its role in purifying communication. **Blue** is associated with this chakra, representing clarity, truth, and self-expression.

The symbol of the Vishuddha Chakra is a sixteen-petaled lotus with a downward-pointing triangle inside a circle. Each petal represents a different aspect of communication: joy, peace, patience, faith, charity, gentleness, self-restraint, truth, knowledge, sincerity, forgiveness, kindness, love, purity, purity of heart, and divine song. The seed mantra "*Ham*" is at the center, resonating with and activating the chakra. It is linked to Thursday, reflecting its connection to learning and expansion.

6. Third Eye Chakra: *Ajna*

The Ajna Chakra, or Third Eye Chakra, is located between the eyebrows. It is the center of intuition, insight, and mental clarity. "Ajna" means "command" or "perceive," indicating its role in guiding perception and intuition. It is at this spot where Hindus apply red powder (or tilak/bindi) to show reverence. **The color indigo** is associated with this chakra, symbolizing intuition, insight, and spiritual awareness.

The symbol of the Ajna Chakra is a two-petaled lotus, each petal representing knowledge and wisdom. The seed mantra "*Om*" or "*Aum*" is at the center, the seed syllable of all mantras, resonating with and activating the chakra. It is linked to Friday, reflecting its connection to beauty and intuition.

7. Crown Chakra: *Sahasrara*

The Sahasrara Chakra, or Crown Chakra, is located above the head. It is the center of pure consciousness, spiritual connection, and enlightenment. "Sahasrara" means "thousand-petaled," symbolizing the infinite nature of this chakra. **The color violet or white** is associated with this chakra, representing purity, spirituality, and enlightenment.

The symbol of the Sahasrara Chakra is a thousand-petaled lotus, representing the infinite nature of consciousness and spiritual awakening. The seed mantra "*Om*" or silence itself resonates with and activates the chakra. It is linked to Tuesday, reflecting its connection to Mars, representing action and determination.

The seven chakras correspond to the seven colors of the rainbow (in the same order), are associated with the seven days of the week, and influence seven aspects of human existence. It is believed in some traditions that an enlightened person has 108 of 114 chakras open, which is another reason why the number 108 is considered sacred in Indian traditions.

C. Philosophical Significance of Chakra System

The Chakra system, in everyday practice, is utilized to unblock the energetic fields of these psychic centers, thereby connecting to the specific strengths provided by each chakra. However, the wisdom of chakras extends far beyond this, permeating the metaphysical and philosophical frameworks of various wisdom traditions. Interestingly, two seemingly paradoxical traditions employ the same chakra model, albeit through different approaches, depending on their starting points.

1. *The Descent – From up to down*

In early Indian scriptures, the Crown Chakra serves as the link between the divine or higher self and humans. This chakra, with its infinite nature, acts as the receiving center for divine energy, which can be harnessed to open the other chakras in the body.

In this descent system, divine energies exist outside the human body, and our consciousness can be developed to receive higher consciousness, allowing it to penetrate our being. When higher consciousness enters the body through the opening of the Crown Chakra, it can be used to attain wisdom (third eye), speak the truth (throat), embody love (heart), act with power (solar plexus), feel the world (sacral), and simply be (root). Our human bodies are instruments that can consciously receive this energy and transmute it to become better individuals.

2. *The Ascent – From down to up*

In response to the process of connecting to the Divine by opening oneself to it, another philosophical structure emerged in the 1st millennium CE, known as Tantra. Tantra believes in utilizing the stored energy within the human body to connect with the divine. A fundamental principle of Tantric traditions is that the stored *Kundalini* energy, symbolized by the coiled serpent at the base of the spine in the subtle body, can be liberated and used to activate the other chakras. This released energy travels through the primary energetic channels, or nadis, called “*Ida*,” “*Pingala*,” and “*Sushumna*,” moving upward from the base.

The main assumption in the Tantric model is that the human body contains all the energy required to connect with a higher power. By learning to harness and move this energy through the different channels of our psychic body, we can attain a connection with the higher self. In some Tantric traditions prevalent in the West, the sexual *Kundalini* energy can be transformed into various forms of energy: sensual energy (sacral), power energy (solar plexus), love energy (heart), truth (throat), wisdom (third eye), and connection with the higher self (crown). Therefore, the process of storing, moving, and transmuting this sexual energy can open the doors to divine connection and a harmonious life.

In both ascent and descent, the center is always the energy of the heart chakra. This is one of the reasons some texts refer to it as Anahata, the unstuck sound, as it represents the point where descent and ascent meet. The Anahata, or heart chakra, features David's star in the middle, symbolizing the intersection of the triangles of ascent and descent.

The chakra system offers a wisdom framework (despite its lack of scientific validation) that underpins various Yoga, Tantra, Ayurveda, and Guru traditions in India. It is almost impossible to discuss Indian systems in the current cultural context without mentioning the chakra system. The effectiveness of this system, like any belief system, is a personal decision.