

## Yoga and the First Three Chakras

Mount Meru is the mythological centre of the world, the method of transportation to reach the upper worlds above Middle Earth and the nether worlds, below it. It is synonymous to the Totem pole, in some cultures, and it is a metaphor for the spine. The spine is where the *chakras* are situated and each station, from the base to the crown, has a deity and a *shakti*, or energy, in residence, guarding the gate behind which lie treasures of universal knowledge. Each station has to be mastered in order to escape being deceived by the presiding goddess and to gain access to the gifts of refined perception. What is learnt by mastering each goddess become the tools needed to overcome the energies guarding the gate to the next level of entry.

Slowly, one makes one's way to the crown *chakra*, the *Brahmarandhra*, literally, the opening to *Brahma*, which is essentially a merging of one's individual consciousness into the cosmic, universal consciousness. The drop becoming the ocean is a metaphor used widely to express this phenomenon. It is the goal of yoga and is known as *samadhi*. The energies, or gatekeepers, one faces are both menacing and benevolent depending on the amount of practice the aspirant has, or hasn't, done.

The process is not a linear one. Unlike an freelancer, for example, who completes a day's work and expects to get paid for the same number of hours, with the yoga practice one can be working it daily and see no results for a long time. Then, suddenly, the practitioner may find him/herself in a new dimension of understanding where the workings of the universe are perceived as explained in the yoga texts. The senses become overloaded with the fine expressions of the elements in their purest forms, before they are mixed into different ratios to create what is seen as matter.

By this point, if the stages have been completed in a step by step manner one will be able to enjoy, blissfully, the hidden treasures displayed in front of them through each, mundane, episode being lived at that moment, with awe.

If, however, stages have been skipped the experience will, either, disappear quickly because of missing tools to help sustain it, or else the awe-fullness of the experience can create a feeling of sheer dread, and the practitioner, unable to escape this vision becomes stuck there. What could have been a blissful experience turns into a nightmare.

The dreadfulness can overcome the candidate because in order to reach a higher state of consciousness something has to be sacrificed and that is, ultimately, one's idea of how the world is. *Maya* - the veil which protects us mortals from seeing the world as it truly is, will have shifted some, and depending on the degree that this occurs will depend on how much one will be shaken to the core.

Associations are stripped away and a severing from everything one thought to be reality is what is experienced. It is death of the individual consciousness which has to take place to be able to merge into the universal consciousness. If the process is slow, there is time for the psyche to, gradually, deconstruct the old world view and replace it with the new. If, on the other hand, this takes place too quickly, there is the possibility of a breakdown as the new world view, undigested, will be too much of a shock to the system. The experience of oneness, of being everything and nothing may be just too much to bear.

An incremental world view adjustment is imperative to avoid potential madness. As the various limbs of yoga are practised the psyche turns inwards, away from the external, manifest universe and, imperceptibly, what is considered to be real starts to dismantle. Glimpses here and there show themselves through the cracks that begin to appear in the veil and disappear instantly so that what was seen was literally a taste of a possible new vision/world view. This allows for the psyche to digest what it has witnessed and acclimatise to the possibility of a new understanding, foreign at this stage, in the mind of the beholder. If it solidifies too quickly without an adjustment period the mind can lose its footing with nothing familiar to hold onto. The shock can be likened to seeing

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someone after a long time who has drastically lost, or gained, weight. The contrast takes some getting used to, yet someone who sees the change happening daily is unable to notice the metamorphose.

Another way to look at it is to view the chakras as storage houses which hold power. A sudden release of this power will flood the delicate system and inevitably cause a short circuit.

A good step by step practice, on the other hand, will offer glimpses that are digested well and made part of ones world view with less growing pains.

What makes a state vanish too soon?

Getting excited about being there and making a song and dance about it.

The realisation of being in a higher state and trying to prolong it is another way it will evaporate.

Having experienced the higher state it is easy, especially if the state comes early on, for some to be distracted and spend future practices looking for that same state. This is one of many traps. The higher state has served its purpose and brought the aspirant to a new world view so that, from that moment on, everything will be seen through new eyes. Trying to replicate that state will only distract from the next leg of the journey.

The number one factor to cause the practitioner to lose the higher state, the universal field of consciousness is thinking of him/herself back in the individual state of I-ness. Perhaps this is why the *Yamas* and the *Niyamas*, abstinences and codes of conduct, come at the onset of the yogic path, as prerequisites in the 8 limbs of yoga. The passions exhibit the biggest obstructions along the way, binding us to the body and, therefore, the individual state where *Maya* prevails. (Even though they are considered prerequisites it seems that a yoga practice can enhance these first 2 limbs also). *Asana* is the 3rd branch, or limb, the physical postures which assist in breaking down the blockages in the body and its progress is mirrored with a breakdown of the blockages in the mind allowing for more flexibility in both arenas. *Pranayama*, *literally lengthening the breath*, the fourth branch, reveals how the breath holds the key to ones outlook on this apparent world. It is here that the perils begin as the finer workings of the mind are bound by the finer workings of the breath and more precisely with *kumbhaka*, breath retention. The 4 stages which follow take the practitioner progressively more internal until complete annihilation of the individual state occurs. They are namely *pratyahara*, the withdrawing of the senses from external objects, *dharana*, keeping the mind fixed on one object, *dhyana*, contemplation of one object and *samadhi*, complete reintegration whereby total freedom is realised through the understanding that there is no separation of subject and object.

Absolute consciousness is made up of 2 things *prakash* and *vimarsh*. Light (*prakash*), and that which is constantly watching itself (*vimarsh*). Wanting to prolong the experience, or becoming excited about being there, puts one into desire mode; they are both states of an individual perspective. The drop has left the ocean again.

The first 3 chakras are an imperative first stage in ascending the metaphorical conscious ladder, safely, accumulating the right tools to see one further along the finer pathways to bliss.

All the gods living within, each with their own *shaktis*, or powers, are aspects of the same divine energy. They are there to protect the seeker and the energies s/he are to come in contact with will assist them to reach the crown opening to universal consciousness. At every step, as one gains something internally, something externally has to be given up to maintain the balance. The first three chakras teach how to safely raise the energy but more importantly, bring it back down so that a potentially heavenly experience does not flip into a hellish one.

*Muladhara chakra*

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The root. Roots give stability, prevent us from being thrown off centre and keep us 'rooted' to the Earth. This connection allows the earth to absorb excess energy, in the same way as an electrical current. If there is not enough of a connection to the Earth an electrical current can be harmful to the system in surplus quantity. With the right amount of grounding we receive stability in the body and, therefore, in the mind also. It is protective in the right amount (too much will render the aspirant 'stuck'). Another name for this region is *citi*, which is a pile of wood for burning, a funeral pyre. It is here that the Kundalini energy is kindled by the process of yoga.

### *Swadhishtana chakra*

Desires of the flesh. The next obstacle that needs to be mastered is the sexual energy. This is the dwelling place (*adhishthana*) of the self (*swa-*). It is stated (Banerjee, Philosophy of Gorakhnath) that the self denotes *prana* (the vital self), so this is the home of *prana* and it is here that it is preserved. By taming the sexual appetite the trainee guards and protects the *prana* from being dispelled, with the sexual fluids, and acquires the mental powers necessary to continue along the path.

### *Manipura chakra*

*Mani* means jewel and *pura* means city. The hint is in the name. This is an important place because it is the seat of fire. Fire sheds light, is needed for digestion, assimilation and transformation on all levels: food, knowledge, experiences. If you hold undigested emotions those wounds will grip you to the external and the individual state of 'me' rather than giving you access to the universal field where the 'I' disappears and becomes part of the whole. I am everything and, therefore, I have everything and need nothing. *Uddiyana bandha* is a useful tool which assists in the cultivation of the first three chakras. It helps to keep you rooted on your base and pulls all the sense organs and their openings inwards with the suction it creates, which, over time, quietens them and draws the mind inside. It also is the initial stages of cultivating *agni* the digestive fire, which is the key to burning the impurities of the body. *Uddiyana bandha* not only helps to keep you rooted on your base but pulls all the sense organs and their openings inwards with the suction it creates. This, over time quietens them and draws the mind inside.

The 4th chakra, the *Anahata chakra*, located at the heart region, is considered to be the site where balance is attained between the 3 chakras below it and the 3 above it. The throat is the seat of the 6th chakra, the *Vishuddhah chakra*. It is the domain of sound, and all communication on a finer scale, such as without words. It is also related to purification, *vishad*. The 6th chakra is called the *Ajna chakra*. *Ajna* means command, and this is the command centre. This region consists of the finer components of *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahamkar*, thought, intellect and ego, respectively, and it is where the previous elements are all present, and have returned to a rarefied state. Experience is no longer on a manifest, or tangible scale. The final state, at the *Sahasrara chakra*, is the station of the thousand petalled lotus. Here, the mind becomes established within the pure void, and all its activity ceases. It is pure consciousness. This is the field of experience where all is one, like the egg, or the seed, within which everything exists together, in essence. It is known as the plane of bliss, the realisation of the true self. The *sadhaka*, or *seeker*, is now an *amanaska*, one without mind, s/he is in the state of *samadhi*, the ultimate goal of yoga.

The journey from the base of the spine to the crown of the head begins with the most dense, and gross, of the elementals, Earth, and works its way back through the subtler elements: Water, Fire, Air, Ether, respectively, followed by the finer components of thought, intellect and ego. The density of the component within each chakra corresponds to the density of the respective state which is dealt with at that station. The direction of experience is the journey from the manifest back to the un-manifest, the individual to the universal, pure freedom. As the experiences become finer, the price is higher, and the obstacles become more precarious. At this stage the necessity of moving in a step by step manner shows itself to be most crucial.