

Using the Chakra System in Psychotherapy

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INTRODUCTION

Within each of us resides an extraordinarily useful map of the evolution of human consciousness. The chakra system of Tantra and Kundalini Yoga provides insight into the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the human experience. In one's quest to deeply get to know themselves and to rediscover their true nature, the chakras can be a powerful asset. Theoretical and experiential knowledge of the chakras offers the opportunity to heal emotional distress, examine and transform negative beliefs, and shift unsatisfying life patterns. The chakra system is very useful in the psychotherapy process, in that it can help in the identification of blockages to growth and opportunities for healing.

PART I: CHAKRAS AND THEIR RELATION TO VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Physical Level

On the physical level, chakras vitalize the body by absorbing primary energy (prana, chi, etc.) from the universe, breaking it down and then sending it along subtle energy channels (known as *nadis*) to the nervous system, glands, and then the blood to fuel the different areas of the body. Each of the seven major chakras connects one's energy to the major nerve plexuses on the spinal column, the glands in the endocrine system, and the specific systems of the body (Brennan, 1987, Myss 1996a). If a chakra is blocked it will eventually manifest on the physical dimension in the form of an illness. As Rudolph Ballentine (1999), author of *Radical Healing*, states, "The disorders and diseases from which you suffer point to the region of the body with its governing chakra that expresses the issues where your energy is 'stuck'" (p. 414). Thus, the actual location of an illness, when looked at in the context of chakras, can be diagnostic.

Chakras can also be experienced as sensations in the body. Examples include a "racing" heart, "frog" in the throat, "butterflies" in the stomach, a "knot" in the solar plexus, the sense that "the bottom is dropping out" at one's base, or the experience of an orgasm in the sexual center. Paying attention to physical sensations such as these not only increases somatic and psychological awareness, but also can offer insight into the source of a physical illness or psychological issue (Judith 1987, Hover-Kramer, 2002).

Emotional Level

In the emotional realm, unpleasant or traumatic experiences can cause us to block our feelings, which inhibits psychological functioning. This results in a stifling of our natural energy flow, which adversely affects the development of the chakras. This also can lead to physical health issues (Brennan, 1987). Barbara Ann Brennan (1987) discusses this phenomenon:

(I)f a child is rejected many times when he tries to give love to another, he will probably stop trying to give love. In order to do this, he will probably try to stop the inner feeling of love he is responding to with action. In order to do this, he will have to stop the energy flow through the heart chakra. When the energy flow through the heart chakra is stopped or slowed down, the development of the heart chakra is affected. Eventually a physical problem will likely result. The same process works for all chakras (p.71).

When a person interrupts their experience, they in turn block the chakra that corresponds to that experience (Brennan, 1987). For example, if a woman feels fear she will experience a block in her first chakra. If a boy does not feel free to express himself he will experience a block in his fifth chakra. Traumatic experiences, chronic defenses, cultural conditioning, dysfunctional beliefs, and physical or emotional abuse (whether real or anticipated) can all play a role in chakra blockage. Ideally, chakras are open, balanced, and work together as a team. When chakras are blocked, reception and expression of energy becomes distorted (Judith, 1996). To compensate for contraction in one or numerous chakras, other chakras may become overly relied upon. For example, a person who felt the need to shut off their heart due to a lack of love in their family may overly rely on their intellect as a means of achievement and thus a source of praise (Prendergast, Resonance Workshop, 2003).

The chakras record an imprint of every emotionally important experience that a person has had in their life (Eden, 1998). In this way, chakras are like databanks of information – each chakra stores the type of information specific to its function (Myss 1996b, Myss 1996c). If a person had an experience where their boundaries were ignored, they will store that information in their third or “personal power” chakra. If they were violated sexually, that information will be stored in their second or “sexual chakra.” If someone experiences a “broken heart” they will store that experience in their fourth or “heart chakra.”

Mental Level

Chakras also play a large role in the mental realm. Chakras contain the mental programming that governs our behavior. The word chakra translates as disk, and fittingly

each chakra functions similar to a floppy disk that holds the core programs that determine all of our decisions (Judith 1996, Judith, 1999). Anodea Judith (1999), in her book *Wheels of Life*, puts it like this:

In the mind, chakras are patterns of consciousness - belief systems through which we experience and create our personal world. In this way, the chakras really are programs that run our lives. Our lower chakra programs contain information about the body in terms of survival, sexuality, and action. The higher chakras bring us to more universal states of consciousness and work with our deeper belief systems about spirituality and meaning. Sometimes we get locked into a program and it becomes our habitual way of interacting with the world around us (p. 28-9).

After the issues governed by a certain chakra are explored and worked through, a person will likely develop core beliefs that are positive, functional, and based in reality. When a chakra's issues are not worked through the person will likely manifest negative, or dysfunctional, beliefs in relation to the level of consciousness that is governed by that particular chakra. For example, if a man has not worked through his "personal power" chakra issues he may believe that it is unsafe to assert himself, that people are always looking to take advantage of him, and that other people know what's best for him. If he has worked through his personal power chakra issues then he may believe that it is appropriate to assert himself and set boundaries. It's also likely that he will have strong self-esteem.

Spiritual Level

On a spiritual level, the chakra system functions as a map of one's evolutionary challenges (Ballentine, 1999). Each chakra contains a spiritual life-lesson that we must master in our evolution towards higher consciousness. In brief, the first chakra resonates with the life-lesson of survival; the second with sexuality and creativity; the third with personal power, assertiveness, and self-esteem; the fourth with love and forgiveness; the fifth with expression and will; the sixth with intuition, wisdom, and beliefs; and the seventh with transcendence and presence (Myss 1996a, Eden, 1998). Caroline Myss (1996a), author of *Anatomy of the Spirit*, puts it like this:

The chakra system is an archetypal depiction of individual maturation through seven distinct stages. The chakras are vertically aligned, running from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, suggesting that we ascend toward the Divine by gradually mastering the seductive pull of the physical world. At each stage we gain a more refined understanding of personal and spiritual power, since each chakra represents a spiritual life-lesson or challenge common to all human beings. As a person masters each chakra, he gains power and self-knowledge that become integrated into his spirit, advancing him along the path toward spiritual consciousness in the classic hero's journey (p. 68).

The energy of each chakra is a microcosm of a universal force, expressed within the body (Eden, 1998). When attention is directed at a certain chakra it brings the consciousness of that chakra into focus. As the issues that emerge at different chakras are mastered, the foundation is laid for the consciousness of the next chakra to come forth. Another way to look at this is that when an issue has been worked through and the relevant spiritual lessons have been integrated into one's life, the energy will no longer demand expression at that center and is free to flow up to the next chakra. (Ballentine, 1999). This doesn't necessarily mean that lower chakras are less spiritual than the higher ones. Each chakra is a conduit for a specific type of universal energy and each developmental stage is sacred in its own way. Eden (1998) summarizes this point when she says, "For many people, in fact, personal evolution is more about dropping deeper and deeper into their "lower" chakras than about cultivating the higher ones" (p. 138).

Elements and Animals

Another interesting aspect of the chakra system lies in its relation to the earth's elements. The Indian Tantric tradition connects the first five chakras, respectively, to the following elements: earth (1st), water (2nd), fire (3rd), air (4th), and akasha - in which sound moves (5th). Comprehending the essence and quality of the associated element offers insight into the distinct nature of the various chakras. "Earth is solid and dense; water is formless and fluid; fire is radiating and transforming; air is soft and spacious; sound is rhythmic pulsation" (Judith, 1996, p. 8). Harish Johari, author of *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation*, also connects the first five chakras to specific animals. This offers further insight into the distinct character of each chakra.

PART II: THE SEVEN MAJOR CHAKRAS

The First Chakra

This chakra is commonly known as the root chakra, as it is the lowest major chakra on the body (Rama, et al., 1976). Its location is at the base of the spine. The first chakra is one's foundation. The Indian name for the first chakra is "*Muladhara*," which translates as "basic support" (Johari, 2000, p. 93). The element associated with this chakra is earth, which is characterized by solidity, substance, stability, form, and matter. This chakra relates to earthly things such as our bodies, health, survival, and the function of rooting or grounding us on the physical plane of existence (Judith, 1999). As Eden (1998) points out, "The root chakra is a receiver for the Earth's subtle energies. Through this connection, the term 'grounded' takes on a literal meaning" (p. 144). The first chakra connects one's energy to their legs and feet (which keep a person connected to the earth),

rectum, spinal column, and kidneys (Brennan, 1987). The elephant, because of its urge for survival and symbol of physical strength is the animal that is associated with the first chakra (Johari, 2000).

The issue of survival is dominant in the first chakra. When a person is obsessed with security and safety issues their consciousness is strongly governed by this chakra.

Christopher S. Kilham (1994), author of *The Five Tibetans*, summarizes this point:

Survival is a drive imprinted into our genetic makeup. It is the root of our consciousness. The most ancient part of the brain, the reptilian inner brain, functions mainly in support of survival. The first chakra influences the system in the same ways as the reptilian brain. Just as the first chakra is at the root of the spine, so the influence of this chakra is at the root of all consciousness (p. 18-19).

First chakra fears can manifest in a variety of ways. These range from fear of losing one's job (one's source of food and shelter); fear of being attacked or injured (either psychologically or physically); fear of being abandoned by one's tribe (including family, friends, or any other important group); fear of becoming ill; or an even deeper fear of complete annihilation. (Johari, 2000, Rama, et al., 1976, Ballentine 1999, Prendergast, 2000). John Prendergast (2000), Psychotherapist and author of the article *The Chakras in Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, discusses the level of intensity that first chakra fear can reach when he says, "Clients will resonate with the empathic reflection of 'terror' more so than 'fear' when their issues reside in this *chakra*" (p. 51).

A strong influence on one's sense of safety and security relates to their relationship with their family. Myss (1996a) refers to this center as the "Tribal chakra" because it connects one to group experiences - both positive and negative (p. 103). Since psychological health is strongly influenced by one's family and early social environment, the first chakra can be seen as the basis that emotional health lies upon. If a child grows up feeling a sense of connection, support, and loyalty from their family or "tribe" they will likely develop a sense of belonging on the earth. In result, they will have mastered some of their first chakra survival issues and thus feel safe and secure in a variety of group environments, including with family, friends, and co-workers (Myss 1996a). When this is the case, one may hold beliefs such as, "I belong;" "I'm safe and secure;" or "I'll be okay" (Prendergast, 2000).

On the flip side, constriction in the first chakra can result from threats to a child's safety. Physical threats such as abuse or death of a parent, as well as psychological threats such as fear of abandonment or engulfment during the individuation process can significantly influence one's first chakra health. For example, Prendergast (2000) mentions, "(A) client may believe and deeply feel that she will die if she expresses her own needs and feelings

and separates from her narcissistic mother. Constriction (in the first chakra) will result from poor bonding with the primary caretaker” (p. 51). Dysfunctional beliefs that might develop in this situation include, “I don’t belong;” “I’m unwanted;” “I’m unsafe;” or even, “I’m going to die” (p. 51).

If an individual’s energy gets stuck at this center and is unable to flow into the higher centers then it is likely that issues of fear, safety, and self-preservation will be dominant. When a person feels a threat to their security it is not uncommon for them to become cruel, aggressive, and violent towards others (Johari, 2000). Furthermore, a person who is dominated by their first chakra may not feel the freedom to think for themselves because their individual ideas may conflict with “tribal” standards (Myss, 1996a). These people can typically follow orders very well but struggle to find their own way and make their own decisions. Blocked energy at the first chakra can result in disorders such as hemorrhoids, constipation, colitis, sciatica, tight hamstrings, and varicose veins (Ballentine, 1999).

According to Myss (1996a), the spiritual lesson that lies symbolically dormant in the first chakra is the truth that “*All Is One*” (p.104). People sometimes resonate with the idea that they are “one” with those in their biological family. This belief may extend out to those who are part of one’s religion or nationality. However, the latent truth in this chakra is that everyone is “connected to all of life” (p.104.). As Eden (1998) puts it, “Through the root chakra, we know our identity with the Earth, our identity with our offspring, ultimately our identity with all who live (p. 146). As this truth awakens in the first chakra it has the power to open a person up to feeling compassion, acceptance, and connection to all forms of life (Myss, 1996b).

Prendergast concludes that over the years of working with psychotherapy clients, the first chakra appears to be the most commonly constricted one. In his words, “The fear of death appears to be the greatest inhibitor to the growth and healing process. Because it is so threatening, this fear often is heavily repressed and avoided” (2000, p. 52). He goes on to mention how crucial first chakra health is to the functioning of the overall chakra system: “It is very difficult to sustain an authentic openness in the higher *chakras* such as the heart until there is a relative stability in the first *chakra*” (p. 52). Coming to terms with one’s strong identification with their physical body and inevitable death can help them to open up to the “nonlocalized ground of their Being” which is their true nature (p. 52). When major first chakra issues are mastered, energy demand in that center will require less expression and thus will be free to move up to the next center (Ballentine, 1999).

The Second Chakra

This center is known as the sexual chakra. Its location is in the lower abdomen, encompassing the area between the navel and the genitals (Ballentine, 1999, Myss, 1996a). Its element is water and it relates to bodily functions connected to the regulation of fluids such as blood, saliva, urine, mucous, lymph, as well as sexuality and reproduction (Judith, 1999, Johari, 2000). The second chakra connects one's energy to their sexual organs, large intestines, bladder, pelvis, and quadriceps (Myss 1996a). The animal associated with this center is the crocodile because it represents sexuality, sensuality, hunting, trickery, as well as sunbathing (Johari, 2000).

While the energy of the first chakra is most concerned with survival of oneself, the second chakra is primarily concerned with survival of the species. This manifests as an interest in sexuality and brings increased focus to the one-to-one relationship with other people. (Ballentine, 1999, Myss, 1996c). Aptly, Myss (1996a) calls this the "Partnership chakra" (p. 129). Ballentine (1999) discusses the shift in emphasis between the first and second chakra:

This is a new twist on the survival concerns of the first chakra. When hormones run fast enough, self-protection measures are dropped for total immersion in sexual contact. On the biological level, this is the subordination of the survival of the individual to the survival of the species. On a subtler level, it is an abandonment of fear for the joy of merging with something beyond the limited self. This makes it a first step outside self-preoccupation, an opening into transcendence – a basic model for an evolutionary leap (p. 417-418).

Just as humans have an instinct to survive they are naturally inclined to gravitate toward sensual pleasure. Freud referred to this as the pleasure principle (Judith, 1999). An individual who has their energy centered in this chakra will typically be preoccupied with sensual pleasure, especially sex. As opposed to seeing other people as a possible threat, as was the case in the first chakra, the second chakra person will tend to view those of the opposite sex (or whatever sex a person is attracted to) as sexual objects (Rama, et al., 1976).

The need to control things in the external world resides in this chakra (Myss, 1996a). Generally, the expression of energy through any one chakra can be influenced by the center(s) below it. Much of the energy that could be accessible to the second chakra can get stuck dealing with self-preservation issues in the first chakra. When this occurs, the energy that does flow up to the second chakra is strongly influenced by survival fears, As a result, in one's attempt to gain security, sexuality can be used to control another person (Ballentine, 1999, Ballentine, tape 8, 1992).

When one's sexual desire is not fulfilled their focus will often shift to other kinds of sensual gratification. The fact that totally fulfilling sexual gratification typically requires the interest of another person complicates matters and thus, by default, other sources of sensual gratification are often substituted. This can be a valuable area of exploration for people who over-indulge in sense gratification (Ballentine, 1992, tape 8). For example, the root of trouble for a person who overeats may lie in a lack of meaningful relationships and an unsatisfying sex life.

Abuse in this chakra is the most common precipitant of imbalance in this center. Any range of violations, including premature toilet training, improper use of enemas, shaming of the body and /or sexuality, abortion, rape, incest, or sexual abuse are registered in the second chakra (Prendergast, 2000, Judith, 1996). This can lead to body image issues, aversion to sexuality, and guilt. Negative core beliefs such as "Sex is disgusting;" "I don't deserve sensual gratification;" or "I'm dirty" may follow (Prendergast, 2000). Prendergast (2000) points out that "(t)his center may sometimes become overly active as a compensation for the lack of love in the family of origin, resulting in sexual promiscuity" (p. 52).

The "sexual chakra" relates to all aspects of creation. As Eden (1998) puts it, "Within the second chakra, babies grow, imaginative projects germinate, and the boundless creativity of the universe pours into each of us" (p. 148). Creating a family, making art, music or poetry, engaging in meaningful life work, generating an income, making a contribution to society, coming up with innovative solutions to life problems, and working with one's hands to construct or fix something all fall into the category of second chakra energy (Myss, 1996a). This is the part of humans that desires to give birth to new ideas and watch them come to fruition (Myss, 1996c). Kilham (1994) further elaborates on the connection between the second chakra and creativity:

Creativity is made manifest in many ways and underlies many activities. As the most fundamental act of human creativity is procreation, the second chakra is the center of sexual energy, procreation and regeneration. Sexual energy underlies every act of individual expression. It is a creative force, the influence of which extends far beyond sexual activity to include thought, feeling, behavior, dress. Sexual energy informs art, music, fashion, even architecture and automotive design. It is an all-pervading force (p. 19).

Americans suffer a high amount of disease in this area, specifically ovarian and prostate cancer, because, as Myss points out, "this is the part of the body where we have creative abortions" (1996c). She further states that "Fibroids result from second chakra creative energy that was not birthed and from life energy that is directed into dead end jobs or relationships (1996a, p.130). If this center lacks energy flow due to overly dominant survival issues at the first chakra or if creative and life energy is blocked in the second

chakra then a person may also experience STD's, menstrual pain, cystitis, infertility, and/or impotence (Ballentine, 1999).

While a central element of the first chakra is following tribal standards, second chakra energy shifts to the discovery of other types of relationships. Relationships can offer much happiness but they can bring about enormous challenges as well. From Myss's (1996a) perspective, the spiritual truth that is waiting to be tapped into in the second chakra is "Honor One Another" (p. 131). Myss says,

From a spiritual perspective every relationship we develop, from the most casual to the most intimate, serves the purpose of helping us to become more conscious. Some relationships are necessarily painful because learning about ourselves and facing our own limitations are not things we tend to do with enthusiasm. We often need to be spiritually "set up" for such encounters (p. 131).

A person's healing and spiritual development can get blocked at this chakra if they are stuck in the illusion that the people they are in conflict with have entered their lives for destructive purposes. Having vengeance and resenting someone who causes a person trouble can be a stumbling block to healing second chakra issues. One can understand the divine teaching of the second chakra – "*Honor One Another*" - by rising above the negative judgments about others and asking the question, "What am I supposed to learn from this challenging relationship?" (Myss, 1996a, p. 131, Myss, 1996b). The important understanding of the second chakra is that when a "difficult" person enters one's life, that person is actually functioning as a teacher who will impel a person to deal with whatever needs to be healed so that they can evolve spiritually (Myss, 1996b).

The Third Chakra

The third center is known as the "Personal Power" chakra and it's located at the solar plexus (Myss, 1996a, p. 167). The element associated with this chakra is fire. The first chakra is related to matter (earth element) and the second chakra is related to movement (water element). When matter and movement are combined, like rubbing two sticks together, a spark that can ignite a fire is created. This is the spark that ignites one's power so that they can assert themselves in the external world and get their needs met (Judith, 1999, Rama, et al., 1976). The third chakra connects one's energy to their stomach, pancreas, upper intestines, liver, and adrenals (Myss, 1996a). The animal associated with this chakra is the ram because it is associated with Agni, the Hindu god of fire. Rams are known for their physical strength, energy, endurance, and sheer power. As fighters they charge opponents head-on and don't back down easily (Johari, 2000, Judith, 1999).

In terms of relationships, the first two centers are concerned with the group and one-to-one relationship, respectively. But the focus of the third chakra is on the individual self. This is the center of individual identity, personal ego, uniqueness, strength, power, self-assertion, accomplishment, and self-esteem (Kilham, 1994, Hover-Kramer, 2002). “Developmental tasks (of this center) relate to industry, ability to get things done, and self-identity as opposed to role confusion (Hover-Kramer, 2002, p. 58). How a person feels about themselves, whether they respect themselves, their level of self-understanding, acceptance, and connection with their self all play out in this chakra. If we don’t value ourselves it can be a challenge to make healthy decisions (Myss, 1996a). Instead, as Myss (1996a) points out, “we will direct all of our personal power for decision-making into the hands of someone else: someone whom we want to impress, or someone before whom we think we must weaken ourselves to gain physical security” (p. 169).

For example, when a person goes on a starvation diet or changes their hairstyle to either gain the approval of someone else or to avoid criticism they are violating their sense of self. Similarly, if a person keeps a job that they hate or stays with a partner that they don’t respect because of the financial rewards, they are allowing themselves to be controlled by another person. The negative beliefs that underlie these actions could be “I’m less valuable than other people;” “Others know more about my wellbeing than I do;” or “I can’t make it on my own.” On an energetic level, according to Myss (1996c), giving up one’s power in this way is like “taking a knife and cutting your abdominal area and allowing the energy to pour out... you are de-energizing yourself!” (tape #2). On an emotional level, when a person feels violated or disempowered they can become “distrustful, oversensitive to criticism, inappropriately angry or incapable of feeling angry... volatile, or emotionally numb” (Prendergast, 2000, p. 53).

The flip side of allowing other people to control our lives is to step into our personal power and establish our own sense of authority. The solar plexus is a transformative center. On a primitive/instinctual level, the third chakra is about obtaining food. On a physical level, through digestion, it transforms food into flesh. On a pranic level it transforms matter into energy. Thus, both physically and energetically this chakra fuels our ability to take action in the world. On a psychological level the theme of getting nourished is also present and it manifests as the desire to tackle life’s challenges and get one’s needs met. Unlike earth and water, which move down and in, fire moves up and out. This center has to do with effectively asserting one’s power in a constructive way (Ballentine, tape#8, 1992, Kilham, 1994). According to Rama, et al. (1976) unresolved conflicts at this center can seriously distort one’s expression of power:

When the psychological issues related to this chakra have not been brought into consciousness and resolved, then the resulting conflict will lead to a preoccupation with control and the exertion of power over other people. The issue becomes one of domination versus submission. Such a person may be given to a tyrannical kind of assertiveness, spending all his time and effort in extending his personal power. Or he may be just the opposite: submissive and cowed. More often, however, he will alternate between the two, depending on the situation... (Such individuals) are unable to see other people as peers, but judge everyone as either superior or inferior. They cast others into the roles of either authority figures or underlings (p. 240).

One of the major obstacles that can block a person from taking charge of their own life and asserting their power is that they have been dominated by group thought (1st chakra issue) or the influence of other people (2nd chakra issue) throughout their life. We are all born onto families and most families want to pass on their survival skills to their children. For example, a mother may say to her son, "Get a good education, become a doctor or lawyer, and marry a nice woman - that's the key to a happy life son." But for some people, tribal or group advice may be incomplete. This particular son may accomplish all the things his family expected of him and yet encounter a deep sense of emptiness in his life. In result, he may long for more meaning – he may feel the urge to get to know himself better, think for himself, find his own voice, make his own decisions, assert his own power, and solve his own problems. In result, his sense of value is no longer tied to his capacity to please others, but rather it hinges on his ability to honor his own distinct sense of self (Myss, 1996c). According to Myss (1996a), this person has begun to embody the sacred truth of the third chakra, which is to "Honor Oneself" (p. 194). The act of honoring oneself is fundamental to increasing one's personal power and thus developing the primary strengths of the third chakra: self-esteem, self-respect, self-responsibility, ambition, assertiveness, and initiative (Myss, 1996).

Low self-esteem, lack of self-responsibility, and oversensitivity to rejection or criticism can lead to a blockage of the flow of energy in this chakra (Myss, 1996a). This can result in disorders such as indigestion, diabetes, and peptic ulcer (Ballentine, 1999). Furthermore, the adrenals are related to the third chakra. Adrenals have to do with "mobilizing the fire" of the third chakra (Ballentine, tape #8, 1992). However, if a person is constantly feeling threatened because they haven't adequately worked through their first chakra survival issues then their adrenals can become overworked and in result the person will feel "burned out" (tape #8). The adrenals have the capacity to "step up the flame" for emergencies, but when this stress becomes habitual, especially when there really is no emergency, one will eventually experience adrenal exhaustion (tape #8.).

The Fourth Chakra

The fourth center is known as the heart chakra and it's located in the center of the chest. The element connected with this chakra is air, which is associated with lightness, openness, freshness, spaciousness, and breath (Judith, 1999). The fourth chakra connects one's energy to their heart, breasts, lungs, thymus gland, and circulatory system (Ballentine, 1999, Myss, 1996a). The animal associated with this center is the musk deer. This deer is enchanted by the smell of musk and runs wild looking for its source. Ultimately, the deer exhausts itself because the source of the musk is in its own navel. Humans, who carry the supreme truth within themselves, are similar to the musk deer in the way they also run in search for spiritual answers outside of themselves (Johari, 2000).

As one's consciousness moves from the third to fourth chakra things change significantly. Anatomically, the diaphragm creates a line that separates the lower three chakras (which are more concerned with primitive/instinctual matters, material issues, and external power) from the more evolved consciousness of the higher chakras. This transition marks a shift away from the domination of instinctual pulls to the potential for love, compassion, unique expression, intuition, wisdom, presence, and connection with the Divine (Ballentine, tape #8, 1998, Rama, et al., 1976). Ballentine (1999) comments at length on the importance of this transition:

The notion of moving energy up is an important aspect of the chakra system of energy dynamics. Without the insight and awareness that comes with the activation of the higher chakras, you will be ruled by instinctual use of your personal energy. If the captain is not steering this ship from the bridge, where he can see clearly and make informed decisions, then it will revert to automatic pilot. The lower chakras are designed to channel energy into biological necessities, and will do so until a switch is flipped for manual override.

The higher centers need to be "turned on" enough to allow you to observe, understand, and learn from your experiments in living. Otherwise you are doomed to repetitive habits governed by biological imperatives. This doesn't mean that the life of the body is inferior... But without a larger awareness it becomes instead a nightmare of wrenching compulsions, a windstorm of frightening and unpredictable forces, and a struggle for survival ruled by the law of the jungle. (p. 421).

The fourth chakra is the nurture center. Located in this area are the lungs, heart, and breasts. The lungs give oxygen to the blood, the heart nourishes the body, and the breasts are structured exclusively for providing nourishment to the infant (Rama, et al., 1976). Clearly, this area of the body is about giving and nurturing. Furthermore, the arms extend from this part of the body. From an interpersonal perspective, the arms can be used for holding and hugging or for setting boundaries through the act of pushing other people away. From a transpersonal perspective, arms can be used to release material objects in

favor of putting one's attention on the development of their higher consciousness. (Ballentine, tape #8, 1992, Ballentine, 1999).

The fourth chakra is where we experience emotions and feelings for other people. It's at this fourth center that a feeling component is integrated into one's experience. Strongly felt emotions are typically accompanied by physical sensations in the heart and chest area. For example, strong positive feelings for another person may be described as "heartfelt," while a painful emotional loss is often referred to as a "heartache" or "broken heart" (Rama, et al., 1976, p. 244).

Instinctual influences from the three lower chakras, such as fear or sexual desire, also play a role in emotions. When a majority of the energy is tied up with issues at the lower chakras and minimal energy is able to elevate, and thus be experienced through the heart, then a person will have less feeling. The person may appear emotionless, ruthless, or even "heartless" (Rama, et al., 1976, p. 250). Their internal experience may encompass shame, self-hatred, bitterness, rage, and alienation. The beliefs that influence their lives may include "I'm bad;" "I'm unacceptable;" "I'm broken;" "I'm inferior;" and/or "I'm unlovable" (Prendergast, 2000).

The fourth chakra is where we experience love. Love comes in many shapes and forms, including compassion, kindness, care for self and others, generosity, and forgiveness. Love is an extremely powerful force and thus we learn about it in stages, which follow the map of our chakras. We first learn about love on a tribal level, from our family members. This type of love is shared among one's family and typically comes with the expectation of loyalty to the tribe. As energy elevates to the second chakra we begin to experience love through friendships and intimate relationships. At this stage, love extends beyond the tribe (Myss, 1996a). "We express love through sharing and caring for others to whom we are not connected through blood" (p. 199). As the third chakra opens up, "we discover love of external things, of our personal, physical, and material needs, which may include athletics, academics, fashion, dating and mating, occupation and home, and body" (p. 199).

While the lower three chakras relate to love in the external world, fourth chakra love is not contingent on external forces (Myss, 1996a). Judith (1999) discusses this quality of the fourth chakra:

In the fourth chakra, love is not dependent on outside stimulation, but experienced within as a state of being. In this way it radiates outward, bringing love and compassion to whatever comes into our field. It is a divine presence of empathic connection, rather than an extension of our need or desire... Love can emerge with the deep sense of peace that comes from lack of need, with a joyous

acceptance of our place among all things, and the radiance that comes from inner harmony. Unlike the changing nature of the second chakra with its transitory passions, love from the heart is of an enduring quality, eternal and constant (p. 193).

The spiritual truth that is waiting to be woken up in this chakra, is “Love is Divine Power” (1996a p. 198). Myss (1996a) points out that “Love in its purest form - unconditional love - is the substance of the Divine, with its endless capacity to forgive us and respond to our prayers” (p. 198-9). Our hearts are designed to express love, compassion, and forgiveness - it is against our true nature to violate this. Myss further points out that the path to connecting with our heart energy is through self-love. Self-love comes through forgiveness of other people because “our wounds do not hurt the people who hurt us, they only hurt us” (p. 204).

Self-love is also developed when a person seeks to discover what it is that they love, what makes them happy, and what they need to do to keep themselves emotionally balanced (Myss, 1996a). It's not uncommon for people to nurture others, take care of others, and put others needs ahead of their own. But fourth chakra self-love is about honoring one's own emotional needs and having the strength to follow one's own heart. The majority of illnesses that we see in our culture are diseases in the fourth chakra. Heart disease, breast cancers, asthma, and bronchitis are major disorders that occur, in part, because we don't pay attention to our heart's guidance and we don't forgive people from our past (Myss, 1996b).

The Fifth Chakra

The fifth center is known as the throat chakra and, as such, its location is the throat. The element associated with this chakra is ether, also known as *akasha* – the void, emptiness, nothingness - which encompasses all existence (Johari, 2000). This is the medium in which sound moves (Ballentine, 1999). The fifth chakra connects one's energy to their throat, thyroid, pharynx, larynx, mouth, and jaw (Myss 1996a, Ballentine, 1999). The animal associated with this center is the elephant, who embodies the teachings of patience, self-confidence, memory, and synchronicity with the natural world (Johari, 2000).

A major theme of the throat chakra is expression. The throat chakra is special in that it holds information from each of the other chakras. Sixth and seventh chakra energy flows down through the throat on its way to the trunk of the body. Root, sexual, solar plexus, and heart chakra energy flow up to the head by way of the throat (Eden, 1998). “Within the sacred container of the throat chakra, all of this energy and information is

‘metabolized’ - broken down and put back together into a form that becomes your unique expression in the world” (p. 156).

The power of the throat chakra is most obvious in the act of speaking, the most characteristic form of expression in humans (Kilham, 1994). Within the throat chakra lies the thyroid gland, which regulates metabolism. Metabolism involves the processes of catabolism and anabolism. Through catabolism certain substances are broken down to release energy. Anabolism takes less complex substances and builds new tissue from them. The two most common issues people have related to this chakra are that either they can’t speak up or they talk too much. Speaking up is anabolic – it’s about bringing things together and expressing them. Keeping quiet is catabolic – it relates to receiving and assimilating. When the throat chakra is balanced and developed it can profoundly effect one’s timing, tone, articulation, influence, and ability to access one’s truth while speaking (Eden, 1998). Blocked energy in this chakra can result in thyroid issues, TMJ, laryngitis, goiter, and stiffness in the neck. As Ballentine points out, when expression issues are resolved, thyroid issues often resolve as well (Ballentine 1999, Ballentine, tape #8, 1992).

When the flow of energy is either insufficient or impaired in the throat chakra various types of holding back occur. This can manifest as hesitancy in speech, unwillingness to share intimate thoughts, aversion to sharing feelings, and/or reluctance to speak up at all. The super-ego, typically in the form of an internalized critical parent, acts to limit spontaneity, playfulness and any other form of self-expression (Hover-Kramer, 2002). Typical negative beliefs in this center include “No one listens to me;” “I can’t speak my truth;” and “I always say the wrong thing” (Prendergast 2000). Psychotherapy, in a setting that feels safe, spacious and non-judgmental, can be instrumental in helping an individual develop some distance from their inner critic and get back in touch with their lively and creative self-expression (Hover-Kramer, 2002).

Sounds can be described as wave-forms that vibrate at particular frequencies. When two wave-forms of similar frequency oscillate at the same rate it is called *rhythm entrainment*, *sympathetic vibration*, or more simply, *resonance*. “Two oscillating vibrations, *if they are near enough to each other in frequency*, will eventually entrain” (Judith, 1999, p. 249). Anyone who walks into a clock shop and notices how all the pendulums on the grandfather clocks swing in unison can observe an example of rhythm entrainment. People who live together become entrained to each other’s rhythm. When women live together long enough they tend to menstruate at the same time. When partners live together for a long time their speech tends to exhibit similar rhythms (Judith, 1999).

Rhythm entrainment also happens when one wave triggers a vibration in a resting source. For example, if two nearby violins are tuned to concert pitch, the D string on one violin

will vibrate just by playing the D string of the other violin. Based on this same principle, the Transcendental Meditation Society believes that the brain-wave rhythms created by TM mantra meditation can have a positive influence on the world. They tested this theory in Atlanta, Georgia, where nightly at a certain time all participants meditated. It is documented that during that hour crime was significantly decreased. This idea of resonance is an important concept for understanding the fifth center. Our own vibrations can influence the vibration of others. It's our choice as to whether we want to contribute harmonious or disharmonious vibrations to those around us (Judith, 1999).

When we resonate with something we experience alignment with it. From Myss's (1996a) perspective, the challenge of the fifth chakra has to do with aligning one's willpower and spirit to the will of God. She points out that Buddha, Jesus, and other great teachers embodied this state of consciousness – "complete union with Divine will" (p. 219). Discussing the sacred truth of this center, Myss (1996a) says,

The fifth chakra is the center of choice and consequence, of spiritual karma. Every choice we make, every thought and feeling we have, is an act of power that has biological, environmental, social, personal, and global consequences. We are everywhere our thoughts are and thus our personal responsibility includes our energy contributions.

What choices would we make if we could actually see their energy consequences? We can approach this kind of foresight only by abiding by the sacred truth Surrender Personal Will to Divine Will. The spiritual lessons of the fifth chakra show us that actions motivated by a personal will that has trusted in Divine authority create the best effects (p. 220-1).

It is at the fifth chakra – the area of the body from which we express ourselves – where the issue of honesty comes into focus. Lying to other people or to ourselves chokes our throat chakra (Myss 1996a, 1996b). Myss (1996a) discusses this issue:

Understanding the energy consequences of our thoughts and beliefs, as well as our actions, may force us to become honest to a new degree... Genuine, complete healing requires honesty with oneself. An inability to be honest obstructs healing as seriously as the inability to forgive. Honesty and forgiveness retrieve our energy – our spirits – from the energy dimension of "the past" (p. 221).

In short, opening oneself up to guidance from the Divine and keeping the Divine in mind when making decisions and taking action in life can significantly benefit the health of one's fifth chakra. And this is a crucial step along the path of aligning oneself with the Divine (Myss, 1996a).

The Sixth Chakra

The sixth center is known as the third eye chakra. It is located between the eyebrows and slightly above the bridge of the nose (Eden, 1998). There are no elements or animals that go along with the highest two centers because they lead a person beyond all forms of matter (Rama, et al., 1976). This chakra connects one's energy to the brain, neurological system, pineal gland, eyes, ears, and sinuses (Myss, 1996a, Ballentine, 1999).

Consciousness located at this center involves introspection or the capacity to see within. The third eye contains the capacity to "see" in a way that is unattainable by the physical eyes. At this center one has the capacity for deeper vision. This is the realm of intuition, inner knowledge, and wisdom (Rama, et al., 1976, Myss, 1996a). Confining one's capacity for knowing to just the external world of material phenomena blocks the energy at this center. In result, one can suffer from migraines, visual problems, insomnia, and sinusitis (Ballentine, 1999).

This center is the home of the intellect, but that doesn't mean this center needs to be overcrowded with thoughts. The capacity to access subtle knowledge and inner-based perceptions is also contained in this center (Eden, 1998). As Eden (1998) points out,

The flaw that many of us have at the level of the sixth chakra is that we are so filled with our abstractions, mental constructs, and fantasies that more refined processes get crowded out... Seeing the color of energy, hearing guidance from another plane, and being in telepathic rapport with others are all natural ways the sixth chakra can sense the world. Individuals who are mentally brilliant and very strong on the intellectual side of the sixth chakra often neglect its psychic side (p. 159-60).

All of our positive and negative beliefs are governed by the sixth chakra (Prendergast 2000). This center also involves our psychological ability to evaluate these beliefs. It is at this chakra that we are able to discriminate between truth and illusion. The sacred truth of the sixth chakra is "*Seek Only the Truth*" (Myss, 1996a, p. 239). This is what drives us to continually try to discern the difference between what is false and what is true, which are the two forces we face in every moment (p. 239).

The Seventh Chakra

This center is known as the "crown chakra" and its location is the top of the head. The seventh chakra is the contact point to the life force that flows into the human energy system from the universe. This flow of energy is distributed throughout the body through the lower six chakras. It also nourishes the body, mind, and spirit. The seventh chakra influences the central nervous system, the muscular system, and the skin (Myss, 1996a).

Religious art typically highlights the crown chakra with light or a halo. In the Jewish tradition, a yarmulke is worn to acknowledge this center of consciousness. The Hopi Indian tradition also places special value on this center. They believe that a baby's soft spot is an "open door" in which the infant receives life and communicates with the creator (Rama, et al., 1976, p. 271). The yogic tradition holds a similar perspective on the infant's soft spot. However, their belief is that this "door" can be reopened through the attainment of the highest state of enlightenment (p. 271).

This center is described as "transpersonal" because it is the place in which one connects to a higher power that is beyond their personal self (Hover-Kramer, 2002). For most people the flow of energy to their seventh chakra is not that strong. But when the energy flow to the crown is achieved "the illusion of 'individual self' is dissolved" and "one retains nondual consciousness" (Johari, 2000, p. 149). This is the center of cosmic consciousness, a state of direct awareness and integration with what is commonly referred to as the Creator, the Divine, God, or Tao (Kilham, 1994). The person becomes realized, "one with the cosmic principles within the body that govern the entire universe" (Johari, 2000, p. 149). It's the energy of the seventh chakra that motivates us to find the Divine in all aspects of life (Myss, 1996a). Discussing this point, Myss (1996a) states,

The seventh chakra is our connection to our spiritual nature and our capacity to allow our spirituality to become an integral part of our physical lives and guide us. While our energy system as a whole is animated by our spirit, the seventh chakra is directly aligned to seek an intimate relationship with the Divine... The seventh chakra represents our connection to the transcendent dimension of life (p. 265).

Myss (1996a) teaches that the sacred truth of the seventh chakra is "*Live in the Present Moment*" (p. 267). She advises that the way to wake up this chakra is to bring our energy into present time. We have a choice in each moment – we can focus our life force on the deceased and the old memories of how we think life should have been different for us or we can focus our energy on ourselves. We need to recognize that our life force is not meant to be used to keep our history alive. Myss (1996b) says, "Release the dead and all that haunts you. Yesterday is gone!" She further recommends closing every day asking, "What am I holding onto that I should have let go of?" (Myss, 1996b).

Each chakra governs certain beliefs. However, Prendergast (2000) states that the crown chakra "functions beyond beliefs" and that at this level "Personal identity is seen to be a mental construct" (p. 55). The closest thing to a belief at this level is the sense of "I am" (p. 55). Prendergast also notes that Kundalina Yoga traditions typically designate the opening of the seventh chakra as having the highest value. However, he points to sages

such as Ramana Maharshi and Jean Klein who have taught that in order for one to find true freedom in daily life their focus will need to be in the heart chakra (p. 55).

CONCLUSION

The chakras govern various aspects of the human process. They also function as databases that hold information about a person's experience. Life energy flows up and down the chakra canal in the body. Painful emotional experiences can block these energy centers, creating limitations and the development of dysfunctional beliefs and attitudes about oneself and the world. The chakra system provides a valuable map of the human energy system, which can be utilized in the psychotherapy process for healing and growth.

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