

## **Origins of the Chakras by Simon Heather**

In this article I am attempting to go back to the original sources of information about the chakras. At the end of the article I have included a guide to the meanings of the Sanskrit words used.

The Sanskrit word 'chakra' means 'wheel' or 'discus' and implies something that is turning or spinning. Chakras are energy centres that interpenetrate the physical body.

The chakras are first referred to in the Yoga Kundalini Upanishad that is part of the Krishna Yajur Veda, said to be written between 1,400BC and 1,000BC. Other sources put the dates for the Upanishads as between 800BC and 400BC.

Later Upanishads were written down between 200BC and 200AD, namely Shri Jabala Darshana Upanishad, Cudamini Upanishad, Yoga Tattva Upanishad, Yoga-Shikka Upanishad and Shandila Upanishad. These refer to chakras, the five elements and bija mantras.

### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad**

In the Yoga Kundalini Upanishad it says that there are six chakras plus Sahasrara the crown chakra. This Upanishad is divided into sections with various headings.

#### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad - Introduction**

"The Chakras are centres of Shakti as vital force. These are the centres of Prana Shakti manifested by Pranavayu in the living body."

"Glory to Mother Kundalini who, through Her Infinite Grace and Power, kindly leads the Sadhaka from Chakra to Chakra and illumines him and makes him realise his identity with the Supreme Brahman!"

#### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad - The Rousing of The Kundalini**

"Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini, the serpent-power or mystic fire is the primordial energy or Shakti that lies dormant or sleeping in the Muladhara Chakra, the centre of the body. It is called the serpentine or annular power on account of serpentine form. It is an electric fiery occult power, the great pristine force which underlies all organic and inorganic matter. "

"A wise Yogi should take the Kundalini from the Muladhara to the Sahasrara or the thousand-petalled Lotus in the crown of the head. This process is called Shakti-Chalana."

"The Kundalini should pass through the Svadhishthana Chakra, the Manipura Chakra in the navel, the Anahata Chakra in the heart, the Vishuddha Chakra in the throat, and the Ajna Chakra between the eyebrows or the Trikuti."

#### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad -The Samadhi Yoga**

"After that, it pierces all the six lotuses or the plexus. Then the Kundalini Sakti is happy with Siva in Sahasradala Kamala, the thousand-petalled lotus. This should be

known as the highest Avastha or the state. This alone is the giver of final beatitude. Thus ends the first chapter.”

### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad -The Six Chakras**

“There are six chakras. Muladhara is in the anus. Svadhishthana is near the genital organ. Manipuraka is in the navel. Anahata is in the heart.”

“The Vishuddhi Chakra is at the root of the neck. The sixth Chakra, the Ajna is in the head (between the two eyebrows)”.

“After gaining a knowledge of these six Mandalas or spheres, one should enter the Sukhamandala, drawing up the Vayu and sending it upwards”.

“After knowing Vayu, the above-mentioned Bindu and the Sattva-Prakriti as well as the six Chakras, one should enter the sphere of happiness, Sahasrara or the Sukha-Mandala.

### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad - Yoga and Its Consummation**

“Yoga is the art of uniting the individual soul with the Supreme Soul, of uniting the Kundalini Sakti lying dormant in the Muladhara Chakra with Siva in the Sahasrara Chakra. By convention, all practices that help the attainment of this goal are also called Yoga.”

### **Yoga Kundalini Upanishad - The Gradational Ascent of the Mind**

“The Chakras are centres of Shakti as vital force—in other words, these are centres of Pranashakti manifested by Pranavayu in the living body, the presiding Devatas of which are the names for the Universal Consciousness as it manifests in the form of these centres. The Chakras are not perceptible in the gross senses. Even if they were perceptible in the living body which they help to organise they disappear with the disintegration of organism at death.”

“The mind of a worldly man with base desires and passions moves in the Muladhara and Svadhishthana Chakras or centres situated near the anus and the reproductive organ respectively.”

“If one’s mind becomes purified the mind rises to the Manipura Chakra or the centre in the navel and experiences some power and joy.”

“If the mind becomes more purified, it rises to the Anahata Chakra or centre in the heart, experiences bliss and visualises the effulgent form of the Ishta Devata or the tutelary deity.”

“When the mind gets highly purified, the meditation and devotion become intense and profound, the mind rises to Vishuddha Chakra or the centre in the throat and experiences more and more powers and bliss. Even when the mind has reached this centre, there is possibility for it to come down to the lower centres.”

“When the Yogi reaches the Ajna Chakra or the centre between the two eyebrows he attains Samadhi and realises the supreme Self or Brahman. There is a slight sense of separateness between the devotee and Brahman.”

“If he reaches the spiritual centre in the brain, the Sahasrara Chakra, the thousand-petalled lotus the Yogi attains Nirvikalpa Samadhi or superconscious state—He becomes one with the non-dual Brahman. All sense of separateness dissolves. This is the highest plane of consciousness or Supreme Asamprajnata Samadhi. Kundalini unites with Siva.”

Yoga Kundalini Upanishad - <http://www.yoga-age.com/modern/end.html>

### **Yoga Sikha Upanishad**

The Yoga Sikha Upanishad refers to each chakra having a number of petals.

“For all those who have a body, their body is the temple of Shiva. It can give them occult powers. The triangular part in between the anus and penis is called the mooladhara. This is the place where Shiva lives as a life giving force. There the Parashakthi called Kundalini lives. From there wind is produced. The fire is also produced from there.” (First Chapter)

“From there only the sound ‘Hamsa’ and the mind are also produced. This place which would give whatever is asked for is called Kamakhya peetam (the seat of passion). In the edge of the anus is the Swadisthana Chakra with six petals. Near the belly is the Mani Poora Chakra with its ten petals.” (First Chapter)

“In the place near the heart the Anahata Chakra with its 12 petals exists. And, Hey Lord Brahma, this is called the Poorna Giri Peeta. In the depression in the throat, Vishudhi Chakra with its 16 petals exists. Hey lord of Lords, that is the Jalandara Chakra. In between the eyelids is the Agna Chakra with its two petals. Over that is the Maha Peeta called Udayana.” (First Chapter)

Yoga Sikha Upanishad - <http://www.celextel.org/108upanishads/yogasikha.html>

### **Dhyana-Bindu Upanishad**

Dhyana-Bindu Upanishad also refers to the chakras, the chakra petals and bija mantras.

43. “Muladhara is the first Chakra. Svadhisthana is the second”.

44. “Between these two is said to be the seat of Yoni (perineum), having the form of Kama (God of love). In the Adhara of the anus, there is the lotus of four petals.”

48. “The Chakra Svadhisthana is spoken of as the genital organ itself. The Chakra in the sphere of the navel is called Manipuraka, since the body is pierced through by Vayu like Manis (gems) by string.”

49-50(a). “The Jiva (ego) urged to actions by its past virtuous and sinful Karmas whirls about in this great Chakra of twelve spokes, so long as it does not grasp the truth.”

50(b). “Above the genital organ and below the navel is Kanda of the shape of a bird’s egg.”

51. “There arise (from it) Nadis seventy-two thousand in number. Of these seventy-two are generally known.”

52-53. “Of these, the chief ones are ten and carry the Pranas. Ida, Pingala, Susumna, Gandhari, Hastijihva, Pusha, Yarasvini, Alambusa, Kuhuh and Sankhini are said to be the ten (these are the names of the various nadi).”

54-55(a). “This Chakra of the Nadis should ever be known by the Yogins. The three Nadis Ida, Pingala and Susumna are said to carry Prana always and have as their Devatas, moon, sun and Agni.”

55(b)-56(a). “Ida is on the left side and Pingala on the right side, while the Susumna is in the middle. These three are known to be the paths of Prana.”

95. “Above the aforesaid triangle, one should meditate on the five Bija (seed) letters of (the elements) Prithvi (Earth), etc., as also on the five Pranas, the colour of the Bijas and their position. The letter ‘Ya’ is the Bija of Prana and resembles the blue cloud. The letter ‘Ra’ is the Bija of Agni, is of Apana and resembles the sun.”

96. “The letter ‘La’ is the Bija of Prithvi (Fire), is of Vyana and resembles Bandhuka flower. The letter ‘Va’ is the Bija of Jiva (or Vayu), is of Udana and is of the colour of the conch.”

97-99(a). “The letter ‘Ha’ is the Bija of Akasa, is of Samana and is of the colour of crystal. Prana stays in the heart, navel, nose, ear, foot, finger and other places, travels through the seventy-two thousand Nadis, stays in the twenty-eight Crores (thousands) of hair-pores and is yet the same everywhere. It is that which is called Jiva.”

Dhyana-Bindu Upanishad - <http://www.celextel.org/108upanishads/dhyanabindu.html>

### **Yoga Tattva Upanishad**

Yoga Tattva Upanishad refers to the chakras, the five elements and the bija mantras. In this text the areas governed by the elements is slightly different from the chakras associated with them.

83(b). “There are the five elements: Prithvi, Apas, Agni, Vayu and Akasa.”

84-87(a). “To the body of the five elements, there is the fivefold Dharana. From the feet to the knees is said to be the region of Prithvi (Earth), is four-sided in shape, is yellow in colour and has the Varna (or letter) ‘La’.”

“Carrying the breath with the letter ‘La’ along the region of earth (viz., from the foot to the knees) and contemplating upon Brahma with four faces and four mouths and of a golden colour, one should perform Dharana there for a period of two hours. He then attains mastery over the earth. Death does not trouble him, since he has obtained mastery over the earth element.”

87(b)-90. “The region of Apas (Water) is said to extend from the knees to the anus. Apas is semi-lunar in shape and white in colour and has ‘Va’ for its Bija (seed) letter.”

“Carrying up the breath with the letter ‘Va’ along the regions of Apas, he should contemplate on the God Narayana having four arms and a crowned head, as being of the colour of pure crystal, as dressed in orange clothes and as decayless; and practising Dharana there for a period of two hours, he is freed from all sins. Then there is no fear for him from water and he does not meet his death in water.”

91. “From the anus to the heart is said to be the region of Agni (Fire). Agni is triangular in shape, of red colour and has the letter ‘Ra’ for its (Bija) seed.”

92-93(a). “Raising the breath made resplendent through the letter ‘Ra’ along the region of fire, he should contemplate on Rudra, who has three eyes, who grants all wishes, who is of the colour of the midday sun, who is daubed all over with holy ashes and who is of a pleased countenance.”

94(b)-96. “From the heart to the middle of the eyebrows is said to be the region of Vayu (Wind). Vayu is hexangular in shape, black in colour and shines with the letter ‘Ya’ . Carrying the breath along the region of Vayu, he should contemplate on Ishvara, the Omniscient, as possessing faces on all sides; and practising Dharana there for two hours, he enters Vayu and then Akasa.”

97-98(a). “The Yogin does not meet his death through the fear of Vayu. From the centre of the eyebrows to the top of the head is said to be the region of Akasa (Ether or Space), is circular in the shape, smoky in colour and shining with letter ‘Ha’ .”

Yoga Tattva Upanishad - <http://www.celextel.org/108upanishads/yogatattva.html>

### **Jabala Darsana Upanishad**

“Sage, also it is necessary to chant the *pancha bhootha* mantras (mantras of the five elements) viz., Ham, Yam, Ram, Vam and Lam. It is said that this very great *Dharana* destroys all sins.”

“In the body up to the knee is the aspect of the earth, from there till hip it is the aspect of water, up to the heart is the aspect of fire, up to middle of eyelids is the aspect of air and then up to the middle of the skull is the aspect of the sky.”

“In the aspect of earth *Brahma* has to be placed, in the aspect of water *Vishnu* should be placed, in the aspect of fire *Rudra* should be placed, in the aspect of air *Iswara* should be placed and in the aspect of sky, the *Sadashiva* should be placed.”

Jabala Darsana Upanishad -

[http://www.arunachala-ramana.org/upanishads/jabala\\_darsana\\_upanishad.htm](http://www.arunachala-ramana.org/upanishads/jabala_darsana_upanishad.htm)

### **Sanskrit Names of the Chakras and their Meaning**

Sahasrara - 'thousandfold' or 'infinite', hence 'Lotus of the Thousand Petals'.  
Ajna - 'to command' or 'summoning'.  
Vishuddha - '*shuddha*' or *shuddhi*' means 'to purify', hence 'absolutely pure'.  
Anahata - 'unstruck', 'unbroken' or 'wheel of the unstruck sound'.  
Manipura - '*mani*' meaning 'jewel' and '*pura*' meaning 'city'.  
Swadhisthana - 'One's own abode' or 'Sacred Home of the Self'.  
Muladhara - '*mula*' meaning 'root' and '*adhara*' meaning 'foundation or base'.

### **The Meaning of the Sanskrit Words**

Adhara - Foundation; base which supports.  
Agni - Fire.  
Akasa - Ether.  
Asamprajnata Samadhi - Is a form of deep meditation without content.  
Avastha - State, condition, position, situation; applied to the four states of consciousness.  
Bandhuka Flower - Has a bright red flower.  
Bindu - Seed.  
Brahma - Creator God.  
Brahman - Is the one supreme, universal Spirit, the origin of the phenomenal universe.  
Chakras - Spiritual centres in Sushumna Nadi.  
Devasas - The divine guardian spirits of sacred palaces eg.- forests, caves, mountains.  
Dharana - Practice of concentration; sixth of the eight fold path in ashtanga yoga.  
Five Pranas - The five Pranas - Prana, Apana, Udana, Vyana and Samana.  
Ida - The Nadi that runs on the left side of Sushumna.  
Ishta Devata - The God that one prays to most.  
Iswara - God, Supreme being, creator of the world, its ruler and also destroyer.  
Jalandara Chakra - see below.  
Kama - Passion, desire.  
Kamakhya Peetam - Seat of Pasion/Desire.  
Kanda - The source of all Nadis.  
Kundalini - see below.  
Maha Peeta - Great dot or place of the Third Eye.  
Mandalas - Means 'circle'. Diagrams that have spiritual and ritual significance.  
Nadi - Astral tube that carries Prana.  
Nirvikalpa Samadhi - This is the highest transcendent state of consciousness.  
Pancha Bhoota - Pancha indicates five, Bhoota means elements.  
ParaShakti - Divine (Para), Primordial cosmic energy (Shakti).  
Pingala - The Nadi that runs on the right side of Sushumna Nadi.  
Poorna Giri Peeta - The mountain leading to perfection - associated with the heart chakra.  
Pranavayu - see below.  
Rudra - God associated with wind or storm – another name for Shiva.  
Sadhaka - Spiritual aspirant.  
Sadashiva - Ever-auspicious Shiva.  
Sahasradala Kamala - Another name for Sahasrara the seventh chakra.  
Samana - see below.  
Sattva Prakriti - see below.  
Shakti Chalana - Arousing the Kundalini and sending it to the crown chakra.  
Shiva/Siva - Meaning "auspicious one" is a major Hindu deity is the destroyer of evil.

Sukhamandala - Sphere of happiness, Sahasrara or Crown Chakra.

Trikuti - Means "the confluence of the three". The Third Eye Chakra where the three main nadis converge.

Udayana - A terrestrial lord.

Vayu - see below.

Varna - Meanings include "kind, sort, character, quality."

Vishnu - Hindu God who sustains creation, "the All-Pervading One".

Yogin - One who is devoted to Yoga.

### **Five Pranas**

Vayu is the word for air and is one of the five great elements. The Sanskrit word 'Vāta' literally means "blown", 'Vāyu' "blower", and 'Prāna' "breathing."

Prana, apana, udana, samana and vyana. Pranas are the vayus that carry out the functions of life. They are distinct from the body. Indian philosophy maintains that life is something different from matter. Life is maintained by various pranas.

Prāna - Governs the beating of the heart and breathing. Prana enters the body through the breath and is sent to every cell through the circulatory system.

Prana Vayu governs the region from the abdomen or diaphragm to the base of the throat. The "seat" of the prana vayu is the heart, and this vayu ensures that the heart goes on beating. It is associated with the element of air.

It works to maintain the proper temperature of the body relative to the environment, and sustains the vital organs, particularly the heart. Though its seat is in the heart, it moves through the centre of the body in a downward direction from the base of the throat to the navel, as well as from the navel back up to the throat.

Apāna - Governs elimination of waste products from the body through the lungs and excretory systems.

Udāna - Governs sound production through the vocal apparatus, as in speaking, singing, laughing, and crying. Also it represents the conscious energy required to produce the vocal sounds corresponding to the intent of the being.

Samāna - Governs the digestion of food and cell metabolism (i.e. the repair and manufacture of new cells and growth). Samana also includes the heat regulating processes of the body.

Vyāna - Governs the expansion and contraction processes of the body, e.g. the voluntary muscular system.

### **Jalandara Chakra**

Another name for the Throat Chakra where the Jalandhara bandha is applied. 'Jala' – means network; 'Dhara' to hold; 'Bandha' – contraction. This bandha constricts the network of nadi at the neck and arrests the downward flow of energy.

### **Kundalini Shakti**

Kundalini literally means coiled. The kundalini is said to be an unconscious, instinctive, libidinal force or Shakti, lies coiled at the base of the spine. It is envisioned either as a goddess or as a sleeping serpent, hence the term 'serpent power'.

Kundalini is described as being coiled up at the base of the spine, usually within muladhara chakra. The image given is that of a serpent coiled three and a half times around a smoky grey lingam. Each coil is said to represent one of the three gunas, with the half coil signifying transcendence.

Ramana Maharshi says that the kundalini energy is nothing but the natural energy of the Self, where the Self is the universal consciousness (Paramatma) present in every being, and that the individual mind of thoughts cloaks this natural energy from unadulterated expression.

### **Sattva Prakriti**

Prakriti means "primal motive force". It is the essential constituent of the universe and is at the basis of all the activities of the creation. It is composed of the three gunas which are tendencies or modes of operation, known as -

sattva - balance, order, purity, goodness, light and harmony.

rajas - change, movement or dynamism

tamas, negative, lethargic, dull, slow darkness, delusion, or ignorance.

### **Simon Heather**

Simon Heather is one of the leading teachers of sound healing in the UK and is author of 'Reclaiming Your Sacred Spirit – The Essential Guide to Healing the Chakras'.

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