



## The Skeptics SA guide to Chakras

Chakras are claimed to be spiral centres of energy, and the word is derived from the Sanskrit for ‘a wheel’ reflecting the claim that, like wheels, they are circular in shape, with spokes radiating out from a central point; on this basis they are also known as, ‘channel wheels’. They are said to be centres in, or on the body, about the size of the palm of an average hand, although the Crown Chakra is said to be much larger. The chakras are said to be the means by which a form of energy called the ‘life-force’ is received by the body, and then transformed and distributed by the various chakras throughout the whole body.

“They are invisible to ordinary sight, but clairvoyants describe them as small depressions in the bodies of spiritually undeveloped persons, but as larger coruscating and blazing whirlpools in more highly developed individuals.” (*Dictionary of the Occult*, p 56.)

There is no evidence however, that the originators of these concepts ever viewed chakras in this precise manner. Rather they referred to them as padmas, (lotuses), thus, for instance, the Crown Chakra is referred to as the ‘Thousand Petalled lotus’. They are said to have an important role in all aspects of physical, mental and emotional health, as well as in the spiritual development of the individual.

Various teachings give varying numbers, but the most common claim is that there are seven principal chakras. They are:

- 1 The Base Chakra (located at the base of the spine, between the anus and the genitals)
- 2 The Spleen Chakra (located just below the navel)
- 3 The Solar Plexus Chakra, located 8–9 centimeters above the navel, controls the digestive process
- 4 The Heart Chakra, located near the centre of the chest, controls the operation of the heart and the circulation of blood
- 5 The Throat Chakra, located where the throat and chest meet, controls the lungs and respiration, as well as the vocal chords, the ears, nose, and the throat
- 6 The Brow Chakra, located in the centre of the forehead
- 7 The Crown Chakra, located on the top of the head.

Each chakra is said to have a specific role in controlling various physical, spiritual and metaphysical abilities. So for instance, the Crown Chakra, which controls our consciousness, is said to provide us with our awareness of the physical world and also to have an important role in spiritual development. When this chakra is fully developed it grants the individual access to transcendental levels

of wisdom and understanding, enabling them to attain an insight into spiritual dimensions. It is even claimed to be the realm of the fount of universal wisdom and knowledge, the god-head itself. The physiological roles of the other chakras are:

- The root and belly chakras are related to generative and sexual functions
- The heart chakra
- The throat chakra
- The Brow, or ‘third eye chakra’ is related to vision, the eyes, and the pituitary gland
- The Crown Chakras is related to the brain, and especially the pituitary and pineal glands.

To better understand the concept of chakras one must first examine the underlying principles upon which the theory is based. Very early, humans developed the idea that within all life forms there existed a life-force. Many different ideas evolved concerning the actual nature of this mysterious energy, but it was generally accepted that it was a ‘subtle’ form of energy, (that is, it was invisible and undetectable by humans), and that it originated in the heavens.

While this energy was invisible and undetectable by humans, in much the same way that the force of the Moon could cause the tides to

wax and wane, one could perceive the influences of this force. It was believed that, to some degree, this force influenced everything in heaven and on earth, both animate and inanimate; however, because it was primarily a life-giving energy, its influence was greatest in all living creatures, especially amongst humans.

One of the earliest ideas seems to have been that this energy was somehow contained within the blood, then later the idea evolved that this energy was contained in the air. Humans noted the power of the wind to move objects, so it made sense to them that air contained some mysterious life giving power. Humans also made an early connection between breathing and the air. It must have seemed logical to make a connection between air and life, for they would have observed that when one stopped breathing they died.

Later, when humans developed the idea of deities this supreme power was perceived as having first created the cosmos, producing order from the former chaos, then it created the gods. Because the gods were so much closer to this creative animating energy source, they too possessed this mysterious energy, and so had the power to create life. Most creation myths of the past claimed that the gods had used their power to create life upon the Earth by taking some inanimate material, clay is usually mentioned, shaped it into humans and animals then, breathing into it they made it alive. This idea is expressed in Genesis 2:7 'Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils

the breath of life.' Even today, we still use the term, 'the breath of life,' to refer to life.

To the ancient Greeks this energy was known by various names, *Nous*, *Apeiron* or *Pneuma*. *Nous* was the purest, most powerful substance in the cosmos, possessing universal knowledge, with power over all living things. *Apeiron* was the fifth element, able to take on the properties and shape of any substance. It gave life to the cosmos, to all the heavens and the worlds within them (Anaximander). The *Logos*, or *Pneuma*, (literally meaning, the 'breath of life'), the substance mentioned in the New Testament, (John 1), was believed to be a universal substance animating the whole universe. Other cultures also formed a similar belief, giving this substance different names; for the Chinese it was *ch'i*, for the Japanese *ki*, and for the Hindus and the Buddhists this energy was *prana*.

The Hindu religious texts, the *Upanishads*, dating from around the 7th – 8th century BCE, first mentioned the existence of this cosmic energy called *prana*, which was received by all living creatures upon the Earth; however it was not until sometime between the second century BCE and the second century CE that the first mention was made of 'chakras'.

*Prana* was perceived as a special form of energy that originated in the cosmos and was radiated down to Earth. It seems likely that such a belief was based upon the observations of sunlight. Early humans realised that sunlight was necessary for the survival of human life and nature, and they conceived the idea that

sunlight contained a special element, a form of life-giving energy, which had the ability to animate inanimate materials.

While the Hindus saw it as a form of cosmic energy, the Buddhists tended to view it more as a life-current contained in the air around us, and that, as we breathed, we drew this force into our body. This latter idea is expressed more fully in Yoga where it is believed that because of the way we breathe, most of the pranic energy is wasted when we exhale. To preserve the energy they use a breathing technique, *pranayama*, where the breath is held, allowing the vital energy to be fully absorbed.

As part of their concept of *prana* it was believed that it was drawn into the body by the chakras, whirling vortexes of energy, rather like whirlpools sucking in the energy and from that point it is distributed through the body, and, much like blood distribution it 'flows' through special 'channels'.

In Chinese Acupuncture these channels were known as meridians, in Hindu and Tantric teachings they were called *nadis*, invisible channels that carried the energy throughout the body. Like many primitive theories of life the Indians, as well as the Egyptians, the Greeks and most ancient cultures, located the centre of consciousness in the heart; so it was that this pranic force was centred in the heart, which was said to be the centre of 72,000 *nadis*, and it was into the heart that all our senses withdrew during sleep.

It was taught that the *prana* 'flowed' from heaven into the individual and then through

these channels. The body not only needed a constant input of prana, but it was necessary for this energy to always be able to flow freely and unrestricted throughout the body. However sometimes physical, emotional and mental disorder could interfere with this flow, creating temporary imbalances in the energy field that could cause sickness, or even death. From such ideas evolved various forms of healing including Ayurvedic Medicine and particularly Pranic Healing, a specific healing art that used the prana as a healing force to restore balance to the body.

The problem is that chakras are a metaphysical concept with no actual physical reality. As such they contradict the fundamental empirical theories of Western medicine.

Not only is prana invisible, it is also undetectable. Despite an awareness of all known forms of energy, modern science has been unable to detect the so-called prana; neither can the nadis be detected.

However it is not only modern science that has problems with the concept of chakras. The most serious doubts and discrepancies as to their existence and form comes from the very basic Hindu and Buddhist teachings on chakras themselves.

Within these ancient teachings have evolved a variety of divergent claims about chakras, thus, for instance, within Tibetan Buddhism, one finds claims that there are either four, five, seven, or even ten chakras. One finds many other discrepancies. Shakta claims there are seven chakras; Laya-Yoga: seven major

chakras and six minor chakras; Sant-Mat: six chakras; Pranic healing: nine main chakras, and many minor chakras. The Tibetan theory of four chakras accords with the most ancient teachings in the *Brahma-Upanishad* which described the four 'places' occupied by the *purusha* (soul): the navel, heart, throat, and head. However Hindu teachings has added extra chakras.

Chakra theory becomes increasingly complex due to the numerous variations in the theory. One variation suggests that we possess a sub-system of central nadis, 'a universal energy stream'. According to this theory the principal nadi channels heavenly energy, prana, or according to Taoism, Heavenly ch'i or Universal Yang, from the Crown Chakra to the Base Chakra.

Connected to this central system is another nadi that connects the Base Chakra to the soles of the feet, allowing us to absorb the Earth Ch'I, the Universal Yin. According to the New Agers this is what makes you feel so good when you walk barefooted, for you are able to absorb the Yin energy of Gaia, (Mother Earth).

To further confuse the issue there is a third nadi, the Conception Channel that is connected to and receives ch'i from both the navel and genital energy centres.

There is considerable dispute even amongst believers as to the exact location of these chakras. Some claim that they are located within the physical body, while others claim they are of an etheric nature, located outside the body.

The former view is that they are located on, or just in front of the spine, even though their energy is received and transmitted from the front of the body. According to the latter theory, the Lesser Chakras are located on the edge of the auric sheath, 9–10 centimeters from the body, while the Greater Chakras are located on the outer edge of the Aura, some 45 centimeters from the body. There are other areas of disagreement. Shyam Sundar Goswami claims that the Muladhara or Base Chakra is incorrectly named, for it is actually the Perineum Centre, part of the central sub-system.

There are also serious discrepancies with respect to the Crown Chakra, which is considered to be the most important of all the chakras. According to some 'chakra authorities' the Crown Chakra is located at the top of the head, just above the ears; however, other famous teachers, such as Goswami and Sri Aurobindo claim it is located above the head. Goswami goes even further, claiming that, in the position where others locate the Crown Chakra, is another body, called the Nirvana chakra, even more confusingly he claims that located between the Crown and Nirvana Chakras is another chakra, which he calls the Guru Chakra.

The fact that, even amongst so-called 'chakra experts' there are so many different opinions as to their numbers, and locations, strongly suggests that chakras exist only in the imagination of believers, that they are nothing more than a metaphysical belief that has no substance in reality.