

# CHAKRA YOGA

*A Beginner's Guide  
to Chakra Healing*



Alanna Kaivalya, Ph.D.



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This book is not a replacement for qualified yoga instruction, and any practices done must be learned completely under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher.

Always consult with a healthcare professional before beginning a new physical practice.

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## Introduction



### **The Body as Truth Teller**

As a diligent, hard-working, undergraduate student, I was on course overload and under financial distress. My best friend and I decided to share an apartment together about three miles off campus and shared everything until one day something shifted and she flew off the handle and decided to move out. Her sudden decision and unkind words left me stunned, heartbroken, and without a roommate to share bills and food costs. This placed a huge burden on my shoulders and it was with this heavy heart that I went to work.

My physics professor had agreed to hire me as her personal assistant to earn some extra cash, and I went to meet her at the university lounge to go over some research documents, but I just couldn't focus on the task at hand. My astute professor took one look at me and inquired about what had happened, but she asked a very important question, "How do you feel?"

My response was to go into the whole story about how my roommate had apparently turned on me and was stiffing me with the bills by leaving so suddenly without time to find another roommate. On top of it, I'd lost my best friend. So she repeated her question, "How do you feel?"

I didn't even know how to respond. No one had ever asked me that before, let alone a physics professor. At that point, I was adept at calculus, cosmogony and Newton's Laws of Motion, but emotions? Feelings? Forget it. She pressed on, and eventually I was able to share with her that my stomach felt tied up in knots, there was a pain in my chest, it was hard to breathe and my throat felt tight - choked up. She looked at me and in a completely serious manner, said, "Well, those are your chakras."

This was a stunning comment, particularly coming from my trusted professor. She went on to explain to me how they worked, where in the body they were located, and how they created physical manifestations of emotional activity. It was both shocking and fascinating. And, it was the impetus for me to continue to learn more about the chakras. Not only in order to understand my own health and well being, but eventually to share this information with others because so many are intrigued by these sacred energy centers ([get your free guide to the seven chakras here](#)).

In fact, one can hardly walk into a yoga studio these days without seeing a poster of the chakras. Students are heard chanting seed mantras, and yoga clothing often features T-shirts with chakra symbols. The chakras have crossed over the realm of mere metaphysics to practical application, and people are interested.

It's no wonder, because these energy centers are so grounded in material reality. In fact, everyone has already had an experience of the chakras. Anytime a broken heart is suffered, and there is a crushing pain inside the chest, this is a physical manifestation of the emotional experience as embodied by the *anahata* (heart) chakra. When we are choked up, it's how our body communicates the physical experience of having a hard time expressing ourselves. Anyone who travels extensively knows how being un-grounded manifests in constipation, which is an expression of the *muladhara* (root) chakra. None of these can be explained by western medicine, but all are understood through the subtle workings of energy within our body.

We've all had concrete experiences of our bodies expressing our internal struggles, patterns and beliefs, and understanding the chakras can help us to decode and demystify these experiences which ultimately leads to more balance and well being. It's a little like learning the language of your foreign best friend. Things get lost in translation or miscommunicated until this language barrier is overcome. Once we understand how our bodies are giving us clues as to what we need to pay attention to, we can address the underlying and root causes of the issues that come up.

Our bodies carry the full expression of the truth we hold inside. All our beliefs and experiences are stored in our body and show up as our hunched posture, chronic lower back pain and constant stomach upset. This system asks us to dig deeper to find the true underlying causes of all the physical expressions of our life. Once found, we either address it or fully understand it, and ultimately bring about desired transformation.

### **Things are Never What they Seem**

Back in 2003, I had the great misfortune of being in two car accidents inside of 24 hours. Both left me wounded physically and emotionally, and I then spent two long years on the road to full recovery. Many of my issues were beyond the scope of traditional healing, and I sought alternative care for most of my treatment. One week, deep into my road to recovery, my insightful massage therapist asked me why I thought the accidents had occurred to me at that particular time, and what I was supposed to learn from them. The thought had never crossed my mind in such a way. I had always believed that the accidents were external circumstances and bad luck, and actually felt incredibly helpless in the wake of the trauma.

His question inspired a better understanding of the underpinnings of yoga philosophy which encourage us to see everything as purposeful and completely relevant. Not only that, but also as manifestations of our own inner consciousness. Reflection revealed that these accidents were powerful forces that



stopped me in my tracks - because previously I had been a workaholic with a reckless abandon who often failed to take care of herself. The experience required a deepening of my yoga practice, and taught me how to modify for a variety of injuries, which in turn allowed me to help students better. None of these things would have been learned without the trauma. Sometimes it is the most traumatic events in our lives that inspire the most growth.

Through the chakras, we see not only where pain, tension, or unhelpful patterns are held but *why*. Imagine unlocking the mysteries of your own body rather than feeling like an inactive passenger. Imagine using the body as a trail guide for further spiritual growth and activation. This is the power we gain through further understanding of this system and the tools of our yoga practice.

### **Chakras and Yoga**

There is evidence of the chakras throughout yoga philosophy and possibly the most salient reference is found in the text *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. This text describes the physical means through which a yoga practitioner might achieve a state of yoga, samadhi, or enlightenment. As the practitioner works on this goal, the chakras must be addressed. Because the body is composed of several layers, the chakras can be tackled on a variety of levels, all of which result in strengthening, balancing or “unblocking” the energy center, ultimately resulting in a state of wholeness.

We can think of the chakras like platforms on a vertical subway where each stop represents a different very important destination. Even though chakras are ordered vertically, it is important to realize that this doesn't represent a hierarchical structure. Just because one chakra is situated above another doesn't make that level of existence “better” than the one below it. Each one supports the next, and ultimately, health and balance are required in all seven in order for us to feel as if we're on top of the world, so to speak ([get your free guide to the seven chakras here](#)).

The chakras lie along a central channel of energy known as *sushumna nadi*. Nadis are energetic pathways in the body that cover every arc and angle of our being, similar to our arterial and venous structures. Being that nadis are purely energetic, however, means that instead of carrying blood, they carry energy, or what is referred to in the yogic system as *prana*. Prana is life force, or vital energy - it is the animating force in a body that differentiates it from a cadaver. We draw in prana primarily through breath, but also through things like good food and good company. When prana flows cleanly through our body, then it also flows cleanly through this central channel and through each of the seven chakras. But, this is often not the case. Energy gets blocked and stagnated, and the nadis become twisted and knotted. We feel this in our body as tightness, aches and pains. Through practices such as yoga asana, pranayama and meditation, we help to correct these gnarls so that energy runs more fluidly.

While there are rumored to be 72,000 nadis in the body, yoga practitioners focus their efforts on moving energy through three primary channels: the *sushumna*, or central channel, and the *ida* and *pingala* nadis.

The *ida nadi* is the feminine, or lunar channel that originates and terminates on the left side of the body. The *pingala* is the masculine or solar channel that originates and terminates on the right side of the body. Each channel spirals around the *sushumna*, and at each point they cross, we find a chakra. The end points are the left and right nostrils, which is why much of pranayama or breath practice is focused on moving prana through one or the other of the nostrils. This produces a heating or cooling effect depending on whether breath moves through the left or right nasal passage.

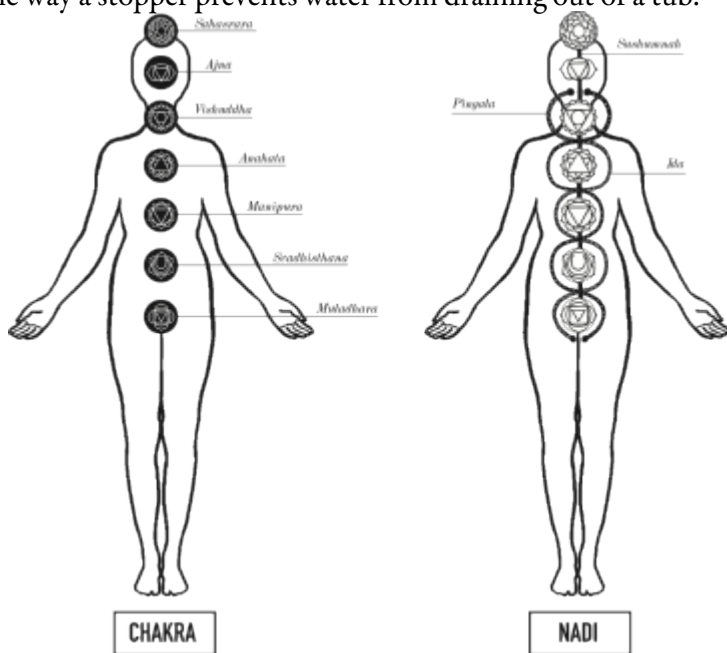
This subtle anatomy sets the condition for the understanding of the chakras, because we must know how to move energy. Energy is moved in a variety of ways, and yogis have many tools - such as

asana, meditation, pranayama, chanting - to direct the energy into healthy patterns that allow us to create health on every level.

### The Cosmic Tour Guide

Through the various practices of yoga, we clear our energy channels to a point where prana runs in a balanced fashion through both the right (pingala) and left (ida) nadis. When this occurs, then energy starts to move up the central channel that runs straight up and down the midline of the body. The central channel is known as sushumnah nadi, or ray of light. Only when energy is balanced on the right and left sides does energy move up the center, and even before this occurs, we need to prepare ourselves fully for this ascent of consciousness.

During our preparation, a metaphorical serpent, known as kundalini lies coiled three and a half times at the base of this central channel preventing energy from prematurely rising, similar to the way a stopper prevents water from draining out of a tub.



*Image by: Emma Segal*

In the 1971 movie, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, Augustus Gloop is seen drinking from the river of chocolate while his mother, Mrs. Gloop warns him to be careful. Sure enough, Augustus falls in and the current of the river sweeps Augustus into the “central channel” - the tube that draws the chocolate up into the chocolate room. Because of Augustus’ hefty size, he is stuck and we see Willy Wonka licking a lollipop in anticipation commenting to Augustus’ frenzied mother, “The pressure will build. The pressure will build.” Eventually it does, and Augustus is shot up the tube into the chocolate room. Then of course, the Oompa Loompa’s do their song and dance and whisk Mrs. Gloop off to retrieve her son.

This metaphor is akin to the process that happens in our own energetic body once we start to take our yoga practice more seriously and create balance in our system. When energy is balanced, it begins to build pressure and heat under Kundalini until she awakens and makes the journey up the shushumna nadi, which is the representation of our own ascent of consciousness. As the snake rises up the channel, so does our awareness. This process requires proper preparation, and kundalini only begins her ascent when we are fully capable of making this elevating journey with a heightened level of presence and awareness.

As the journey continues, we get a chance to evaluate our life-experience at each of the seven chakra centers, learning valuable lessons and creating stability so that we can better enjoy our lives on a consistent basis ([get your free guide to the seven chakras here](#)). All of us experience tightness, uptightness, irregularity, patterns of stress, unhealthy conditioning, chronic pain and sickness at some point in our lives. When we understand how our energetic body works, we decode the important communication from the body and understand the messages and lessons encoded in our own structure. This lays the groundwork for the important work we do as yoga practitioners which leads to us leading lives of joy and ease.

### **The Power of Asana Practice**

Millions of people engage in asana practice on a fairly regular basis in the West. As a physically-focused culture it's no wonder that this practice seems to be the most common entry point for those coming to yoga. It's not just an entry point, however, it is actually a way to gauge and understand our experience as human beings and as yogis.

Asana practice does have a profound effect on the physical body. Yogis often find they are stronger, leaner and more flexible. But, this isn't the extent of the benefits of this seemingly physical practice. It has an even deeper effect on our physiological, energetic and emotional bodies. People widely experience elevated mood states after practice, as well as clarity and peace of mind. Emotional stress is potentially elevated, and our process of decision making generally comes without so much toil and difficulty. We feel better about ourselves, and as a result, people feel better about being around us. Significant others are often telling their yogi partners, "Honey, maybe a yoga class is just what is needed tonight." Because, they know that after class, their partner is going to be more relaxed, less reactive, and easier to be around. Wow! What a tremendous benefit just the practice of asana has on our everyday lives and our psyche.

When we do physical movements to open parts of our body, it has a far deeper effect. We can't open the upper back and chest without that having a deeper effect on the metaphorical opening of the heart. Many of us would describe a person with a rounded upper back and hunched shoulders as being: withdrawn, depressed, sad, protective of themselves, unable to open up. Rarely do we look at someone with this physical condition and say, "Gosh, that person has a really tight and hyper-kyphotic thoracic spine." So, there is already a recognition that the way we hold and move our body has a deeper effect than simply on a physical level.

We tap directly into this when we work with the chakras. Furthermore, we *understand* it better. We communicate back and forth with our bodies on a moment to moment basis Without this

knowledge, the communication happens, but in foreign languages without any translation. Once we understand how the chakras work, not only do we learn how to understand the communication from our body and what it needs, we learn how to talk back to it and communicate a truth of health and well-being.

### **Say What?**

One of the fundamental practices of hatha yoga is developing the art of deep inner listening, also known as *nada yoga*. It is through this listening that we eventually hear the most subtle sound (yogis call it Om) emanating through the universe and through our bodies. Part of the way we begin to practice this deeper listening is to tune into the messages our bodies send us all day every day. The mind is so loud that it easily overrides any subtler messages that come from within us. Yogic practices help us to go beyond the constant chatter of the mind in order to listen to the hidden messages of the body.

This book presents basic ideas about each chakra and gives an overview of their essence and how we relate to each of them, but also, how we relate back. There are descriptions of practices that help each chakra, but ultimately, it is our own perceptive ability to listen in to what our body or circumstance is asking for in order to align ourselves with health and happiness. So, we must learn to read between the lines and not see every potential malady, trauma, or pain as a problem, but rather a message to inspire and move us forward. Every challenge is a road map with clear instructions on how we get home.

The cornerstone of this book are the principles of yoga. This is a yoga book, and we happen to find the mystical symbols of the chakras within our beloved yoga practice as an essential tool on our path. They guide us like teachers out of the darkness and into the light. And just like teachers, it is our duty as good students to *listen* to them.

### **Kundalini Rising Practice**

In order to encourage kundalini's ascent up the shushumna nadi, we need to dedicate ourselves to a spiritual practice, or *sadhana*, which is qualified by consistency and an uplifted intention. By doing your yoga practice on a daily basis—naturally, and not obsessively—you enjoy direct absorption in the wonder that is this life. While all yoga practices - meditation, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, etc. —help to encourage the awakening of our consciousness, asana is a particularly powerful tool to create the framework in both the body and mind that leads to the experience of yoga.

The sun salutation is a staple of asana practice, and given its homage to the sun— both external and internal via the pingala nadi—it is a great way to generate heat in the body. It's burning, or *tapas*, that let's kundalini know we're serious about our yoga endeavors. With the heat, awakening begins, and we have the strength and vitality to be fully conscious participants in the dialogue with our own bodies.

### **Sun Salutations**

Sun salutations are thought of as a complete yoga practice, and are done as a *vinyasa*, or conscious movement that coincides with the breath and an uplifted intention. This means that the breath flows in a consistent pattern, as does the movement, and there is no stopping or pausing of either. It may take some time to build this consistency, but that's what makes it a great practice.

It is possible to do 1, 3, 5, 10 or however many sun salutations that time allows. Follow up this sequence with a nice, long *shavasana*, or corpse pose.

1. Stand in Tadasana, Mountain Pose



2. Inhale, Reach arms up: Urdhva Hastasana
3. Exhale, Fold Forward: Uttanasana





4. Inhale, Elongate the spine: Ardha Uttanasana



5. Exhale, step or jump back to: Chaturanga Dandasana



1. Inhale, pull chest forward and up to upward facing dog:  
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana



2. Exhale, press back, hips high, to downward facing dog:  
Adho Mukha Svanasana



3. Hold here for 5 complete breaths
4. Inhale, jump forward and elongate spine: Ardha  
Uttanasana



1. Exhale, fold forward: Uttanasana



2. Inhale, reach arms up: Urdhva Hastasana

3. Exhale, stand in mountain pose: Tadasana



## Chapter One: Root Chakra



### **Root Chakra: Finding Solid Ground**

Location: Base of spine, seat, legs, feet

Bija Mantra: Lam

Sanskrit Name: Muladhara (root place)

Many people have dreams where they are flying. Soaring above the earth, with friends and family down below. Does anyone in those dreams actually land? Is a runway cleared, and a graceful touchdown occurs, or is it more like a crash and burn? Maybe some of us just wake up to realize that there is nowhere to fly off to — our life is right here where we left it. Being a yogi means getting into our life, and remaining rooted to the family, friends, and support system we've created. It also means realizing our innate humanness which has the distinct quality of consciously bringing about change when we focus on it.

The muladhara chakra's element is earth, so we often talk about feeling grounded and stable when the energy is flowing properly at this juncture. Some issues we run into here are feelings of being "stuck in the mud" or complete helplessness. It is when life spins

out of control and our most basic needs aren't met — food, shelter, financial stability, connection to family — that signals creep up from this place to challenge us to stand firm, and to stand up for what we need. The root chakra is our base, our foundation, and unless we stand on our own two feet, the rest of our journey is rocky and unstable.

It would be an arduous process to try and list all the complications, maladies or illnesses that accompany each chakra. It does tend to be very location specific, making it easy to target which chakra is affected by a particular situation. For example, with the root chakra, issues that plague the lower extremities, eliminatory organs, or challenges with balance typify the physical manifestations of a lack of harmony at this chakra. The process of working with the chakras requires us to tune in more closely to locate the symptom so that we accurately trace it back to the cause. For example, someone with a recurring knee issue has a root chakra that needs attention, as does someone who has difficulty regulating bowel movements. Issues in these chakras can also be reflected by our behavior, too, so we need to understand the chakra's function in our lives to know where to go with our yoga practice to optimize health.

The root chakra's main function is to ensure stability, groundedness and security in our lives. Anytime these things go out of whack — we lose our jobs, we're staring at a minuscule bank balance, we have a rocky relationship with our parents (anyone?) — then we have evidence of an external expression of our internal energetic system, and in particular, with the root chakra. The person who always borrows money, the abused child, the one who looks at the world like it's against them, these are classic root chakra-based symptoms. Problems in this area don't need to be as extreme as that. In yoga, we want to maintain a system of balance, so even a minor disturbance that shows up in our physical body can be a clue that we've got to pay more attention to the way we budget our grocery bills, how we stand up to our boss on a daily

basis, and quelling the urge to speak to our mother by simply picking up the phone.

At some point, we need to recognize that there is something bigger at work here. Call it what you will—spirit, source or soul—there is a deep intuition within all of us that points us toward exactly what creates more freedom and joy. It's just that so many of us are so bent on ignoring the signs that we get used to our symptoms and find ways of bracing (or medicating) against the discomfort, all the while using more energy than we need to, and feeling exhausted at the end of each day.

Our yoga practice gives us freedom, particularly when we use it to engage in reversing the patterns of exhaustion and discomfort. When a parent or the bank calls, we have a resource to stay grounded and centered even when the call is not going well. We pay attention to our breath, root down more firmly into our feet, and perhaps even put our hands on our thighs to awaken the energy. It's not that this cures the imbalance of this chakra, but even the small things we do in our practice sends a clear signal to our body that at least, we're working on it.

### **Roots Of Our Lives**

Everyone has family. More and more, the face of the family unit is changing, but the expectations behind it remains the same. These are the people we are supposed to call upon, no matter what. Nothing is more important in regard to the root chakra as family. It's the root to our very own tree. That said, family is notoriously complicated, no matter who in your life you consider to be your family. There is a delicate balance to be struck because these are the people we didn't necessarily choose. Friends are slowly cultivated over time and many cups of tea. Family is foisted upon us and we have to figure out how to build relationships with them. This does not necessarily mean that our family is perfect, or that we *make* them perfect with our actions. Nor does it mean that they suddenly live up to our expectations. What it does mean is that addressing the root chakra helps to undo whatever is stored in our

body as a result of family interactions, so that we are free of any undo stress, tension or energetic blockages. This does pave the way for smoother (less reactive) interactions with family in the future. Everyone benefits from that.

### **Account of an Imbalanced Yogi**

While working in a distant country, I met a charming mother of three whose life from all external viewpoints seemed to be what most would consider “perfect.” Her family was beautiful and athletic, and everyone had dinner together every day. She was caring and nurturing and hosted me during my time at the yoga studio near her. I got to see some of the intimacies of her life and how it revolved around the needs of her family.

One afternoon, she shared with me a story of a family vacation. As she shared precious details, I noticed she was holding her stomach. I asked her about this, and her voice became suddenly hushed. “We were there for 5 weeks, and for that entire time, I didn’t have a bowel movement.” Trying to disguise my shock, I just wanted to make sure I had heard correctly, so I said, “Five weeks, and not once did you go to the bathroom?” She confirmed that I had heard correctly and told me that she had to stop eating the last 2 weeks she was there and her stomach felt as hard as a rock. It wasn’t until she returned home that she was able to finally relieve herself, but the experience left her scared to travel.

Maybe most surprisingly, she didn’t share her suffering with her family. She kept quiet and continued to feign enjoying the vacation for their benefit. Even upon returning home, she never said a word. This was surprising considering family relationships usually mean 24 hours a day are spent together...how did they not notice? She was very good at hiding.

Eventually she also shared with me that her husband was having an affair. She said it so quietly I barely heard her. Even though she knew, she never confronted him about it. Of course it bothered her, but she kept sticking to her story that her family would be happiest if she just kept it under wraps. Under the guise of



protecting her family and putting their welfare above all else, she was harboring deep misery and grief. She would come daily to yoga practice, and despite her strength and flexibility, balance poses eluded her. Working one day on natarajasana (king dancer pose), she fell out of it and exclaimed, “ooh!” in the quietest yelp I’ve ever heard. I went to her and she whispered in a frustrated tone that she was just never able to do this pose, or any pose on one foot for that matter. She thought there must be something wrong with her foot.

### **Standing Tall**

Truth is, there was nothing wrong with her foot. Perhaps what troubled her was the ability to stand up for herself. This manifested in a physical form, but also caused her deep pain in her life. Two years later, when I returned to teach in her area she was a changed woman. She’d mustered the strength to stand up to her husband and confront him and his infidelity. She had become a yoga teacher, moved into her own apartment and bought a new wardrobe. Her kids were happy sharing time with both of them, and she enjoyed her newfound independence. Her voice was louder and her yoga practice had evolved to include many standing poses. When I left her, she was working on an advanced variation of natarajasana.

The muladhara chakra requires us to stand up for ourselves—sometimes weathering storms we want to avoid, or standing still in the face of situations we usually run from. When scenarios manifest in our legs, feet, eliminatory organs or we develop balance issues, these are all be signs that our muladhara chakra is flagging us to take charge of our lives and find some literal balance. The root chakra also plants a desire to connect with mother—earth, or the nurturing aspect within ourselves. When we nurture ourselves through the challenges of the root chakra, we have the stamina to stand on our own to feet as we walk forward in the world.

### **Root Chakra Practice**

A practice for the root chakra focuses on standing postures (including balances), as well as seated asanas. We also incorporate

the bija mantra, *LAM*, into our practice to heighten the effect of the physical asanas on the energetic components of our body. With the following practice, we set an intention a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am stable.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands on the legs. Say the bija mantra, *LAM*, three times, first placing the hands on the feet, then on the lower legs, then on the upper thighs.
1. Come to stand in mountain pose, or Tadasana. Bring the hands to prayer, close the eyes and concentrate the energy in the feet and legs.
2. **Triangle Pose (trikonasana):** Step open wide to the right, and bring the feet about 3 1/2' apart. Turn the right toes to the back of the mat, left toes turn in slightly. Bring the arms up to shoulder height, reach to the right and place the right hand on the shin. Extend left arm to sky and gaze upward. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on the other side. Optional: Chant Lam on exhale, silently or out loud.
1. **Warrior 2 Pose (virabhadrasana 2):** Turn right foot toward back of mat, turn left foot in slightly. Bring arms up to shoulder height, gaze right. Bend right knee over right ankle. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on the other side. Optional: Chant Lam on exhale, silently or out loud.
2. **Straddle Forward Fold (prasrita padottanasana):** Turn feet in, outsides of feet parallel to each other. Place hand on waist, inhale lift chest, exhale fold forward and place

hands on floor (or on blocks). Bring fingertips in line with toes, if possible. Reach crown of head toward floor while keeping legs strongly engaged. Stay for 5 breaths.

Optional: Chant Lam on exhale, silently or out loud.

3. **Fierce Pose (utkatasana):** Stand at the front of the mat in Tadasana. Make sure that the feet and knees are together. Bend knees and sit back (as if sitting in a chair) and reach the arms up over head. Squeeze knees together and rock the weight into the heels. Stay for 5 breaths. Optional: Chant Lam on exhale, silently or out loud.
4. **Tree Pose (vrkshasana):** Stand at the front of the mat in Tadasana. Hug right knee to chest, place right foot on inside of left thigh. For a modification, you can keep right toes on the floor and turn the leg out, heel to the inner left ankle. Bring hands to prayer or extend hands up over head. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on other side. Optional: Chant Lam on exhale, silently or out loud.
5. **Twisted Star Pose (Parivrtta Tarasana):** Sit on the floor with feet together, legs in a diamond shape. If it's challenging to sit tall, place a block or blanket under the seat. Place the right hand behind the seat, place the left hand on the right knee, twist to the right. Gaze over the right shoulder and keep the spine elongated. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on the other side.
6. **Humble Star Pose (Tarasana):** With the legs still in a diamond shape, grab ankles. Fold forward and try to put the forehead on the soles of the feet. As the mind rests in the seat of the first chakra, allow the thoughts to still and quietly say LAM on the exhale. Stay for 5 breaths.
7. **Shavasana (corpse pose):** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel entirely supported by the earth.

## Chapter Two: Sacral Chakra



### **Sacral Chakra: Emotional Balance**

Location: Sacrum, Lower Belly, Sexual Organs

Bija Mantra: Vam

Sanskrit Name: Svadhistana (her favorite standing place)

The sacral chakra is located below the belly button, in the area of the lower abdomen and the sacrum. It includes the sexual organs, and is dominated by the element of water. Like the mandala image of the chakra (pictured above), imagine the pelvis as a bowl of water that we want to keep upright and fairly still. This is not only beneficial for our posture and the support of our lumbar spine, but also a great metaphor for the power of the sacral chakra.

This energetic center governs our ability to taste life, to have zest and passion for all our experiences. This is the storehouse of our creativity and the birthplace of our procreativity (children, or projects!). We also engage in intimate relationships on this level of consciousness, and let's be honest, nothing stirs the waters like our intimate partners. Intimate partnership at any stage of the game is

a wild ride; from the initial interest to getting to know each other and building trust to a commitment and potentially a disastrous end, intimate partnerships are often the crucible by which we learn the most about ourselves.

Intimacy is challenging for most everyone because the real trick to intimacy is that the relationship is only as deep and honest as you are with yourself. The measure of depth occurs with the depth that you allow yourself to be seen and witnessed by the other. The measure of honesty is only as great as the amount of honesty you have with yourself. Intimacy requires great trust and faith both in oneself and in the other—to be accepted by them, and accept ourselves in the process.

The greatest gift we give the beloved is knowledge of the self. Often, we only come to know ourselves in light of the presence of someone else! When we engage in an intimate partnership, things come up from within us that would never arise if we were on our own. It takes the mirror of relationship to see ourselves clearly, and extraordinary presence of mind not to blame the other for what we see. Often, when we don't like what the mirror shows us, we turn it around, and blame our partner for the image. True intimacy requires us to stand in front of the mirror, accept and love ourselves for who we are...so that our partner may also accept and love us.

The blame game starts resentment. Resentment breeds contempt. When we harbor contempt for someone else, there is little chance of salvaging the relationship. This requires great personal work, and even though we are with someone else on the journey, the work is ultimately our own.

Of course, nothing like intimate partnerships bring up a wide array of emotional states and circumstances. It is said that the measure of our anger and hurt is only in proportion to the measure of our love. If this is the case, then understanding how emotions dominate the second chakra is key to bringing about balance in this area.

### **From Intimacy to Emotion**

Many people think of the sacral chakra as the sex chakra. It is, but it is so much more than that. This energetic center houses our emotions and is thought to be responsible for all of our emotional reactions in life. As human beings, emotions are a natural part of who we are. The challenge is not with the emotions themselves, but rather with the way they often play out. Emotions tend to dominate circumstances, color our interactions, or get wildly out of control so that we are no longer able to see the forest for the trees.

Working with the second chakra allows us to express our emotions freely without them spinning out of control. Naturally, any emotion we experience lasts only 60 - 90 seconds. So, why is it that we often feel them for much longer than that? The reason is because we continue to relive the experience that brought up the emotion by replaying it over and over in our mind.

Interestingly, the mind does not know the difference between a real and an imagined experience. When we take ourselves through an event over and over again, this rehashing causes our mind (and body) to react as if it was happening over and over in real life. This is particularly important with traumatic events, as this process essentially re-traumatizes us, and cements the emotional response in our minds.

Anything we do repeatedly becomes a habit. The way we write, the way we walk, or the way we think. If we relive an experience and cement an emotional response alongside that experience, then anytime a similar experience arises, we get the same emotional response. I'll give you an example. Many of us have experienced a bad breakup. I know in high school, I went through an awful breakup and spent weeks in my room crying about it, blaming the person for leaving and swearing to myself I would never love again. Of course, we all know how that works out, don't we? Eventually, someone else showed up that interested me enough to pull on my heartstrings. But, instead of allowing myself the beautiful

experience of falling in love, I went back to my old break-up story and recapitulated the cycle of trauma and sadness, convincing myself it would be less painful to never love again.

I share this story because I imagine on some level, it sounds familiar. We have all been hurt in some way by another person, and oftentimes the ones we love hurt us the most. When we relive the hurt, we hurt ourselves over and over, long after the other has left.

This vicious cycle accounts for most of our reactions. If we responded in a certain way to an event as a youngster, that response is cemented in the mind, and then a similar event—even now as an adult!—perpetuates the same response. Wouldn't it be nice to free ourselves of this cycle and *choose* how to react to our present circumstances, without the hinderance of our story and without expectations?

I say, Hell yes.

When we allow our emotions their free and natural reign, we experience the fullness of life in all its glory, pain, wonder and awe. That is a life fully lived. When we recapitulate our stories, we lock ourselves into an emotional spiral that prevents us from feeling anything else. We can't feel the joy of a new relationship if we're locked in the story of a past one. We can't experience the wonder of a new love without wondering when it will end like the last one. We live in fear when we allow the mind to take our emotions hostage.

To free ourselves from this cycle the most important thing to do is remain in the present moment and allow yourself to feel everything *fully*. And then, move on. Continue to stay present in every moment, and every moment unfolds fresh and new for you. Without expectations, you are in a position to be constantly surprised at what life offers, and by what you offer back.

### **Emotional Freedom**

Cultivating emotional freedom in terms of the second chakra is both an inside job and an outside practice. When we are

destabilized in this area, we may experience things such as sacral instability, reproductive issues, hip tightness or hyperlordosis (sway back posture). But, of course, the imbalance may run more deeply and arise as emotional issues like depression, anxiety, or moodiness. While we can address all of these symptoms in a variety of ways, looking at the chakra associated with them gives us access to the root cause of the disturbance, hopefully giving us a new way to reclaim health and balance.

### **Sacral Chakra Practice**

A practice for the sacral chakra focuses on hip opening postures such as bound angle (baddha konasana), pigeon (kapotasana variation) and forward folds. We also incorporate the bija mantra, *VAM*, into our practice to heighten the effect of the physical asanas on the energetic components of our body. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am enough.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands on the legs. Say the bija mantra, *VAM*, three times, first placing the hands on the lower belly, then on the lower back, then on the sacrum.
1. Come to all fours in a table-top position with the wrists stacked underneath the shoulders, and the knees directly under the hips.
2. **Cat-Cow Pose:** Inhale, arch the back as the chest drops, head and tailbone lift. Exhale, round the back and look toward the belly button. Continue this movement five



times with the breath. Optional: Chant VAM on exhale, silently or out loud.

- 1. Hero Pose (Virasana):** From hands-and-knees position, bring knees together and point toes behind you. Grab a block, blanket or small pillow(s) and place it between the ankles. Sit on the block, and adjust the height so there is no discomfort in the knees whatsoever. You may also choose to simply sit in a chair or cross legged on the floor as an alternative. Sit up tall, spine lengthened, take five deep breaths. Optional: Chant VAM on exhale, silently or out loud.
- 2. Bound Angel Pose (Baddha Konasana):** From hero pose, extend legs forward, sitting flat on the floor. Hug knees into chest, and allow knees to fall open, bringing the bottoms of the feet together. Hold the feet and open the balls of the feet to the sky, like opening a book. Fold forward, keeping the shoulders down away from the ears. Stay for five breaths. Optional: Chant VAM on exhale, silently or out loud.
- 3. Head-to-knee Pose (Janu Sirshasana):** Sit up tall, extend legs forward. Hug right knee into chest, and allow right knee to fall open. Bring right ball of foot to the inside of the left thigh. Turn torso to face left leg, and fold forward over left leg. Hold for five breaths before switching to the other side. Optional: Chant VAM on exhale, silently or out loud.
- 4. Pigeon Pose (Kapotasana variation):** Hug knees to chest, cross ankles, and roll forward onto hands and knees. Bring right knee between hands, and reach left leg backward. To increase the stretch, dial right shin up to parallel of the front of the mat. Ensure left toes point directly behind you, with both hips facing forward. Modify by placing a blanket or bolster underneath the seat (if there is space

between the seat and the floor). Stay for five breaths before switching to the other side. Optional: Chant VAM on exhale, silently or out loud.

5. **Twisted Star Pose (Parivrtta Tarasana):** Sit on the floor with feet together, legs in a diamond shape. If it's challenging to sit tall, place a block or blanket under the seat. Place the right hand behind the seat, place the left hand on the right knee, twist to the right. Gaze over the right shoulder and keep the spine elongated. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on the other side.
6. **Humble Star Pose (Tarasana):** With the legs still in a diamond shape, grab ankles. Fold forward and try to put the forehead on the soles of the feet. As the mind rests in the seat of the first chakra, allow the thoughts to still and quietly say VAM on the exhale. Stay for 5 breaths.
7. **Shavasana (corpse pose):** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the dynamic fluidity fostered by the breath within the body.

## Chapter Three: Solar Plexus Chakra



### **Solar Plexus Chakra: Empowerment**

Location: Solar plexus, stomach, middle back, digestive tract

Bija Mantra: Ram

Sanskrit Name: Manipura (jewel in the city)

The manipura chakra is located at the solar plexus, where the ribs join on the front of the body, and right at the center point of the spine on the back of the body. The element of this chakra is fire, and it rules our digestive fire and organs of digestion, too. This is, indeed, a fiery location as it houses our ego and how we present ourselves to the world. Some of us have too much fire in that regard, others too little. Ideally, we have enough flame to light the world (and ourselves) in a warm, caring manner.

The solar plexus chakra is correlated with the sense of sight. Through our egos, we constantly seek for new things, looking for new opportunities and seeing the world around us. Oftentimes, this looking outward puts us in a comparison mindset, and that spurs competition with others. Consider the way that social media

is dominated by only positive posts. We see this and draw the conclusion that since our friends *seem* to be doing so well, we obviously need to step up our game in some way—make more money, more friends, more notoriety. Anytime we perceive that others have more, do more or *are* more, then it makes us think as if we are *less*.

The opposite, of course, is also true. If we compare ourselves to others and see their faults, misgivings and what they lack, then it once again puts a rift between us and them. Ultimately in yoga, we look to bridge these divides and recognize that we are all equal and awesome in our own ways. This doesn't mean that everyone is nice or that no one does harm—some are mean and some are unkind—but it does mean that we want to get to the place that we recognize the *humanness* in all others around us.

This is a difficult task for everyone, but made particularly difficult by the digital world we live in. Not so long ago, our interactions with others required in-person contact, or at least a phone call that established a tone of voice and better understanding. Not so much anymore! With our constant busyness and drive for ambition and success, compounded with the age of the internet, much of our interaction is not face-to-face, but rather through the interface of a screen.

### **The Critical Importance of Connection**

One of the most important components of connection—which is a critical thing for all of us as humans—is the ability to cultivate and feel empathy. Empathic connection, which is the ability to *feel* into another's experience, is dependent on face-to-face interaction. Mirror neurons in our brain fire at the sight of another's face, fueling in us the same reaction that we see the other experiencing. This is why it is so difficult to witness another's painful experience, particularly if we are deeply emotionally connected to them. It is almost as if we feel it ourselves. Empathy is at the heart of all of our connections to others, but if we never *see* them, well, we are lost.

Connection is how we thrive. It is how we grow, love and trust ourselves, others and the world around us. Without connection, we are isolated, and this swiftly becomes a negative cycle for the energy of the third chakra. Disconnection leads either to isolation, where without others to give us context and feedback, we spiral out of control and believe we have all the answers (egomania). Or, on the flip side, disconnection can lead one to feel so lonely that it is as if he or she is adrift on a sea with no one to see or save them.

Neither is good for us.

The ego is meant to thrive through vast connections with others. Our ego is how we interact with the world, and somehow, the fallacy that it should be “destroyed” has crept into spiritual understanding. This is definitely not the case! In fact, we *need* our ego to live our life. However, what we don’t need is an ego that is disconnected from its ability to *see* others and how we may serve them with our extraordinary skills and individuality.

Each one of us is unique, and each one of us has a specific way in which we tend to the world. Whether it be as an accountant who does the taxes for the dentist who shines the teeth of the school teacher who teaches the kids more than world history...all of us are a link in a vast network that essentially supports one another, one way or the other. This interconnectedness fosters empathic connection. It allows us to see how important we are in the lives of others, and how critical it is that we allow ourselves to shine brightly.

While we hope for the ego to shine, we don’t want it to shine so brightly that others are blinded or burned by our light. This is egotism or arrogance, where we feel we are more important than others. In this case, we stop at nothing to gain power. This sets us apart from others, and causes disconnection. But, the opposite is also true. We don’t want our ego to be so dim or dull that shyness or self-confidence prevents us from participating in life. In denying others our own light, we leave them in the dark, too.

We don't want to be overpowered, or underpowered, we want to be *empowered*.

Empowerment means to be powered from within. There is a part of us that desires to participate fully in life, to engage in our own story, and to play a role in this wild world of ours. We each have something to offer, and when we offer it from an empowered state, we offer it freely. When the third chakra is balanced, our gift to the world—ourselves—becomes a perfect, wholehearted offering. And, in this way, we highlight our humanness, bridge divides, establish connections and create strong bonds of empathy with those around us.

### **Solar Plexus Practice**

A practice for the solar plexus chakra focuses on twisting postures such as seated spinal twist (marichiasana) and supine spinal twist (jathara parivrttasana) and core strengthening postures such as plank pose (palahakasana). Use of the bija mantra, *RAM*, heightens the cleansing and empowering effect of the physical asanas on the energetic components of our body. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am empowered.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands on the legs. Say the bija mantra, *RAM*, three times, first placing the hands on the solar plexus, then on the middle back, then on the upper belly.
1. **Seated Cat-Cow Pose:** Sit up tall, with the hands on the knees. Inhale deeply and arch the back, looking up. Exhale,

rounding the back, looking toward the navel. Breathe through the nose and continue this seated version of cat-cow for five breaths. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.

2. **Seated Spinal Twist:** While in sukhasana, place left hand on right knee, and right hand on floor behind seat. Twist right, gazing over right shoulder. Stay for five breaths before switching to the other side for another five breaths. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
3. **Modified Superman Pose:** Come to hands and knees. Reach left arm forward, and right leg directly backward. Engage core to maintain stability. Stay for five breaths. Place hand and foot down. Reach right arm forward and left leg backward while engaging core for stability. Stay for five breaths. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
4. **Plank Pose:** From hands and knees position, ensure shoulders are directly over wrists with hands shoulder distance apart. Extend left leg back, toes on the floor. Extend right leg back to meet left, coming into a full plank position. Make sure body is in a straight line from crown of head to heels. Engage abdomen and hold for five breaths. Modify if necessary by placing knees on floor. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
5. **Side Plank Pose:** From hands and knees position, turn right foot out to the right. Lift left arm to sky, turning the torso up to the left. Extend left leg, placing inside of left foot on floor. If desired, straighten bottom leg into the full expression of side plank pose, either placing right foot just behind the left or stacking the feet. Stay for two to three breaths. Come to all fours, and repeat on other side. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
6. **Revolved Child's Pose:** Come to hands and knees. Drop left shoulder and ear to the floor, reaching left hand to the

right side. Keep the feet pressing onto the earth, to ensure the hips do not twist. Stay for five breaths. Repeat on other side. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.

7. **Supine Spinal Twist:** Roll over onto your back and hug knees to chest. Extend left leg onto the floor. Drop the right knee to the left side as you reach right arm behind you. Stay for five breaths. Repeat on opposite side. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
8. **Hug-Knees-to-Chest:** Hug your knees to the chest and do a few circles in both directions with the knees, massaging the spine. Optional: Chant *RAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
9. **Shavasana:** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the light of the third chakra spread through the body with each breath.



## Chapter Four: Heart Chakra



### **Heart Chakra: Compassion**

Location: Heart, Chest, Lungs, Shoulders, Arms, Respiratory and Cardiovascular Systems

Bija Mantra: Yam

Sanskrit Name: Anahata (un-struck)

The anahata chakra is located at the heart, and the extension of it are the arms and the legs. This chakra's element is air, and it rules our respiratory and cardiovascular system. The heart chakra sits at the center of the chakra system, with three chakras below it and three chakras above. The bottom three are "worldly" chakras whose elements are earth, water and fire; while the upper three chakras all have the element of ether, since they are considered "heavenly" chakras. Essentially the heart is the toggle switch between our own earthly and heavenly existence. It mediates the relationship between both realms.

The heart chakra is correlated with the sense of touch. It is through our hearts that we *feel* the world. When we create with our hands, we offer our love with our creation. Think of cooking for someone you love—it's not just about the food, but about the attention and care you put into the meal. Somehow, it makes the food taste better! When we do the work of our heart, everyone benefits. We benefit because the love moves through us as it makes its way out to those we serve.

Love is a difficult thing to define, particularly in English, as there is only one word for it. We use the word love to say, "I love you," but also to say, "I love chocolate." These are two completely different sentiments. In the language of yoga, Sanskrit, there are 54 different ways to say "love." Each word expresses a different quality of love, because we love in so many different ways: we have love for a parent, for a child, 80's movies, and our love for our pet. The quality of love contained within the heart is singular: it is unconditional. It is the type of love that we offer to any and all beings, regardless of their relationship to us. It is felt as compassion, and expressed as kindness. When it is stifled, it turns to fear, guilt, and the inability to forgive.

### **Breaking Through Limiting Beliefs**

All of us have experienced a broken heart at one point or another. No matter the relationship type (romantic, parental, familial, friendship), when things fall apart, our heart may break. This core wound often feels painful. We may experience shortness of breath, or actual pain in the chest as a result. A broken heart is an emotional injury that develops scar tissue just as a real injury does. If left untended, any injury does not heal properly, and the scar tissue that is originally laid down to protect the wound eventually gets in the way of healthy movement and expression.

We want to avoid this when it comes to our heart.

Though it hurts, and though it is often agonizing, the only way to recover from a broken heart is to *keep loving*. Just like physical therapy begins at the earliest moment to ensure tissues recover

properly and with full range of motion, emotionally, we need to do the same. The only way not to be bound up by emotional scar tissue is to keep the heart open. It staves off debilitating fear and immobilizing guilt. The therapy that gets this done? Forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the remedy that allows us and others to move on and continue living life with courage and compassion. Forgiveness requires acceptance of all that is, and all that was, for it can be no other way. We cannot change the past, but we do have control over *this moment*. In this moment we are capable of choosing to be free of the hurt, fear, and anger that threatens to shut our heart down and prevent us from walking freely forward into life.

It isn't easy. But, it is worth it. Forgiveness does not mean continuing a toxic relationship, letting a harmful pattern continue or playing martyr in the situation. Forgiveness means *acceptance*, which allows everyone to move forward with clarity in the best possible manner. As much as forgiveness may be for someone else (as in, you forgive someone else for hurting you), it is mostly for us. Harboring anger, judgement or fear toward another is like drinking hemlock while thinking the other person will die.

The poison of fear is harmful to our own body. And, likely, the other person in the scenario is entirely oblivious to this toxicity within us. It is as much about freeing ourselves from the hurt and anger as it is about setting the other person free from it. We cannot expect our forgiveness to change the other person's behavior. What we do expect is that our forgiveness changes our own emotional field, and allows us to behave differently moving forward. This is personal, internal work, and it is critical if we are to continue the work of the heart, which is unconditional love and compassion.

We get messed up when we think we must limit our love, or retract it in any way. We misunderstand when we think it is our job to love "another," or think that they "should" love us. None of these scenarios is true. Eventually, through our sacred practices that help to balance the chakras, we realize that there is no separation between us and anyone or anything else.

Unconditional love is oneness. In true unconditional love, the “other” is lost and we are one. You cannot “unconditionally love” someone else, you can only *be the love itself*.

### **Heart Chakra Practice**

A practice for the heart chakra focuses on backbends such as cobra pose (bhujangasana) and bow pose (dhanurasana), as well as chest openers. Use of the bija mantra, *YAM*, heightens the cleansing and empowering effect of the physical asanas on the energetic components of our body. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am loved.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the right hand over the heart. Say the bija mantra, *YAM*, three times, connecting with the resonance of the sound in the chest.
1. **Simple Yogic Breath:** With the right hand over the heart, and the left hand on the belly, inhale as you feel the air move from the nostrils, down the back of the throat. Let the breath expand the chest, and then move all the way down to the abdomen. Exhale, feel the air leave from the belly first, then the chest, and finally back up and out of the nostrils. Take five more attentive breaths in this manner. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
2. **Table Top:** From Sukhasana, place the hands on the floor behind you, fingers facing forward. Place the feet on the floor, hip distance apart. Press into hands and feet as you

lift the hips into table top pose. Drop the head back if you are comfortable doing so. Feel the front of the chest and shoulders opening with each breath. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.

3. **Cobra Pose:** From table top pose, sit down, and then come to lie on your belly on the floor. Point the toes directly behind you, legs actively engaged. Place the hands under the shoulders. Use the strength of the back to lift the head, chest and shoulders into cobra pose. Avoid pressing into the hands to lift higher. Draw the tailbone toward the heels as you engage the abdomen for support. Stay for five breaths. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
4. **Locust Pose:** Interlace the fingers behind the back. Try to press the palms toward one another. If this is too difficult, use a strap, or simply repeat cobra pose. Inhale, lift everything up off the floor: legs, knees, thighs, chest, shoulders and head. Stay here for five breaths. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
5. **Bow Pose:** Bend the knees, reach back to grab the ankles. If this is too difficult, simply bend the knees and reach the hands backward without grabbing the ankles. In either case, lift up off the floor into bow pose. Stay for five breaths. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
6. **Child's Pose:** Place hands under shoulders, and press seat back onto heels, forehead rests on the floor. Feet together, knees apart, allow the torso to fall between the thighs. Relax in child's pose, and reach arms forward. Turn the palms up in a simple gesture of offering and receptivity. Stay for five breaths. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
7. **Revolved Child's Pose:** Press onto hands and knees. Drop left shoulder and ear to the floor, reaching left hand to the

right side. Keep the feet pressing onto the earth, to ensure the hips do not twist. Stay for five breaths. Repeat on other side. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.

8. **Hug-Knees-to-Chest:** Press up onto hands and knees, cross the ankles, and roll over to sit. From here, lie down on your back. Hug your knees to the chest and do a few circles in both directions with the knees, massaging the spine. Optional: Chant *YAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
9. **Shavasana:** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the light of the heart chakra spread through the body with each breath.

## Chapter Five: Throat Chakra



### **Throat Chakra: Communication**

Location: throat, neck, cervical spine, jaw, tongue, teeth, ears, hearing, thyroid

Bija Mantra: Ham

Sanskrit Name: Vishuddha (purity)

The vishuddha chakra is located at the throat and neck, and incorporates our hearing and thyroid gland, as well. This chakra's element is ether (or, space), and it rules our communication and listening abilities. The throat chakra represents the first of the "heavenly" chakras, and as such, it is meant to communicate our connection to ourselves and our highest intentions. The Sanskrit for this chakra, vishuddha, translates as *purity*, which indicates that our system of communication ideally expresses our highest truth.

The throat chakra is correlated with the sense of hearing. It is through this chakra that we take on information and hear the words of others. In this day and age of information onslaught, we often take on information that brings us down. Think of how

inundated we are by negative news feeds, and toxic journalism that soils our sense of self. In order to uphold this chakra's balance, we must carefully curate the information we take on, and what we listen to.

This is not a suggestion to hide our head in the sand and avoid news at all costs...but must we be overwhelmed by it? It is one thing to remain educated, it is quite another to allow these sources of information to lead us into fear or closed-mindedness. This holds true for communication we receive from individuals. Harmful communication from others is some of the most psychologically damaging stuff around. The negative voices in our head often repeat the words of those who hurt us, and create a cycle that is challenging to recover from!

But, not impossible.

### **Keeping Ourselves Pure**

Others say what they say. Ultimately, we have no control over that. What we *do* have control over is our own level of purity and consciousness...our own level of *worthiness*. To know we are worthy keeps the energetic field of this chakra resonating at a level that negativity cannot stick. Imagine a sponge. If a sponge is dry, it soaks up whatever sappy mess is thrown at it. However, if a sponge is already wet, it cannot take on any more liquid.

Basically, we need to stay saturated with our own worthiness and higher truth. This ensures that no matter what life throws at us, we remain steadfast in our own belief about ourselves. The more we immerse ourselves in positive internal communication, the less that outside forces effect us. This is not a suggestion to start using chintzy positive affirmations all the time ("I'm smart, I'm funny, and gosh darn it, people like me!"), but rather a notification of the following:

No one else can *make* you feel anything.

If someone else's words or actions have an affect on you—and they do, we're all human—that effect is determined by the contents of our own mind. Wayne Dyer says it best when he talks



about karma. He says, “How people treat you is their karma. How you react is yours.” This empowers us to start getting to the heart of our own reactions and ensure that they line up with our beliefs. If we believe ourselves to be wholly worthy of love and belonging, then we react from a place of love and belonging. If we believe ourselves to be unworthy of love and belonging, then we react from a place of unworthiness.

Our greatest work in terms of our throat chakra is to fill ourselves up with beliefs that support our health, wellness, personal growth, unlimited capabilities...our *worthiness* of all that is good and beautiful in life. Every single one of us is deserving of these things. It is high time we start telling ourselves that!

While it is certainly a good idea to continue to curate the communication coming our way, the best practice for elevating and balancing our throat chakra involves our internal communication. We lock in positive changes in this regard in three ways: through what we think, what we say and what we *do*. It is not enough to simply think good thoughts or say positive affirmations out loud. We must *behave as if the best of what we believe about ourselves is already true*. Because, it is.

Our belief is fostered by that threefold mechanism of thought, word, and deed that sets it into place. As we start filling ourselves up with the thoughts, words and actions of whole-hearted purity, then that is how we move into the world. Coming from this saturated place, the world can spin on, and we remain steadfast in our lightness and self-worth.

### **Throat Chakra Practice**

A practice for the throat chakra focuses on simple neck stretches, chanting, and the restorative pose, legs-up-the wall (Viparita Karani). Use of the bija mantra, *HAM*, heightens the cleansing and empowering effect of the physical asanas on the energetic components of our body. The chanting practice balances all seven chakras, and allows you to be in perfect alignment with

your highest truth. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am worthy.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands on the neck. Say the bija mantra, *HAM*, three times, connecting with the resonance of the sound in the throat.
1. **Simple Neck Stretches:** While sitting in a comfortable cross-legged position, tuck the right hand under the seat, palm down. Tilt the head to the left, drawing left ear down toward left shoulder. With head tilted, rotate chin upward, and then downward, finding many different areas of stretch on the right side of the neck. Repeat on other side. Finish neck stretches with three slow circles of the head in one direction, and then the other. Optional: Chant *HAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
2. **Chanting the Chakras:** While in Sukhasana, close the eyes and place the hands on the legs. Take a deep breath, and chant *LAM* for the root chakra out loud on the exhale. Place one hand on the sacrum, and one on the lower belly. Take a deep breath and chant *VAM* for the sacral chakra out loud on the exhale. Move the hands to the solar plexus and the mid-back. Take a deep breath and chant *RAM* for the solar plexus chakra out loud on the exhale. Place the hands on the heart. Take a deep breath and chant *YAM* for the heart chakra. Place the hands on the throat. Take a deep breath and chant *HAM* for the throat chakra. Place

two fingertips on the third eye. Take a deep breath and chant *OM* for the third-eye chakra. Put one hand on the crown of the head and press down slightly. Keep the mouth closed, and chant *MMMM* on the exhale as you feel the resonant vibration of the hum throughout the body. Repeat this process as many times as you like.

3. **Legs-up-the-wall Pose:** Find an available spot on a wall. Sit next to it, and lie down on the floor, seat on the wall, torso extended perpendicular away from it. Roll onto the back, and extend legs up the wall. Stay for as long as you like. This is a deeply restorative posture for the entire body, especially the throat chakra. Optional: Chant *HAM* on exhale, silently or out loud.
4. **Shavasana:** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the light of the throat chakra spread through the body with each breath.

## Chapter Six: Third Eye Chakra



### **Third Eye Chakra: Intuition**

Location: between the eyebrows, pineal gland, sinuses

Bija Mantra: Om

Sanskrit Name: Ajña (command)

The third eye chakra is located at between the eyebrows and represents our sense of intuition, or inner knowing. This chakra incorporates our pineal gland, sinuses and eyesight, as well. The element of this chakra is ether (or, space), as the medium of intuition is higher consciousness. The name for this chakra, ajña, translates as *command*, indicating that we ideally take our life's instructions from the wisdom presented to us at this level of consciousness..

Intuition is essentially our sixth sense. It is our sense of inner knowing, or higher wisdom, that comes from a place other than our thinking mind or ego. When the mind's chatter is loud and overwhelming, we cannot access this voice. It is still, and small, and the thoughts of the thinking mind and ego drown it out. This prevents us from receiving the messages that are meant for us, that help to guide us in the right direction, or that lead us out of dark

places. The ego is so convinced that it has all the answers, it never relaxes enough to let these more inspired answers through.

If we develop the ability to “open” our third eye, we see our lives with much greater clarity. By accessing this energetic center, we develop the skill of *viveka*, or perfect discernment. Viveka is a highly sought after yogic quality. In fact, it is said that all the yoga practices are done in order for us to achieve this quality within ourselves. Viveka allows us to make great choices for ourselves in every moment of every day.

Every single choice we make has both good and bad consequences. No matter how hard we try, we cannot escape this inevitable truth. As humans, we just don’t know the extent of the impact of every choice we make. But, we are able to do our best. Knowing that every choice has both positive and negative outcomes, then doing our best means that *we always choose to lean toward the light*.

Every choice is a step forward on our spiritual path if we make it one. Despite the unknowable outcome of the choice, if it is one that allows us to lean a little more toward the light, toward our truth, toward joy, love, compassion and contentment, then it is the right choice for us. Each one of us must make these infinite choices individually, based on our own internal drives and energetic qualities. No one may tell us what choice is right, and there is never one “right” way to do anything: live, behave, act, pray, eat, practice, emote, work...you name it. There is *only the right way for us*.

### **Leaning Toward the Light**

In order to bring our intuition forward, we must allow the ego and mental chatter to soften and slide to the background. When the ego rests, the intuition is easily accessed. You may find that it comes as a subtle sensation—a good one telling you you are moving in the right direction, or a bad one telling you to steer clear and go the other way. It may arise as a small word or phrase. Our intuition speaks softly and simply, keeping the message clear. You may hear or “see” one word: perhaps “Yes” or “No” to indicate the

choice to be made next. Or, a phrase may bubble up from within you that only you understand.

Our intuition is an incredibly simple communication device from our higher self that shows us the clear way forward on our spiritual path as we pursue our soul's growth. To access it, we need a technique that allows the mind and ego to rest, so that our inner guidance comes through. There are many practices that allow for this, and the best of them is meditation. Meditation is the yoga practitioner's best friend when it comes to allowing the mind to get quiet to reveal our inner wisdom. Few things are as powerful as meditation, but our asana practice, or pranayama may also help to do this. Ultimately, it takes stillness for intuition to come forth.

Intuition is a force in our lives, and each of us has access to it. The more we connect to this inner guidance, the easier it becomes to consistently make choices that foster our soul's growth...that keep us leaning toward the light.

### **Third Eye Chakra Practice**

A practice for the third eye chakra focuses on kapalabhati (skull-shining breath) and meditation which allows for our intuition to come forward. Use of the bija mantra, *OM*, heightens the affects of our meditation, and allows for the energy of all the chakras to be focused at the third eye center for maximum effect. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Begin seated. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am guided by intuition.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands softly in the lap as you prepare for meditation practice. Say the bija mantra, *OM*,

three times, connecting with the resonance of the sound in the body. You may also turn your internal gaze (with the eyes closed) to the third eye, as you imagine it opening.

1. **Kapalabhati Breathing:** Close the eyes, as you remain in your comfortable seated position. Take three steady, even breaths. Inhale to a comfortable level and then exhale by sharply contracting abdominal muscles in and up in a short, sharp, forced exhalation. This is a similar action to blowing the nose. Pay no attention to the inhale, simply relax in between pumping the exhale and that relaxation draws in breath. Repeat 10 times if you are new to the practice, and up to 30 times if you are familiar with the practice. Finish each round by exhaling completely, then take three steady even breaths. Do two to three rounds.
2. **Simple Meditation Practice:** Make sure that your seat is comfortable. The seat must be comfortable, in order to be held for long periods of time in meditation. Ensure the spine is upright, refrain from leaning against something or lying down. Remain completely still and quiet once the seat is chosen. Allow for insights to arise — shifting results in avoidance of what comes up. This requires discipline and focus, stay with it. Focus on the breath, and let everything else go. Place your attention on the tip of the nose, and simply watch the breath move in or out. If you lose your attention, just bring it back to the breath. The more you keep bringing your attention back to the breath, the easier it is to eventually keep it there. -----  
Initially, meditation will be full of everyday distractions: itches, phones ringing, insightful thoughts. Over time, distractions will dissipate or become less important. Meditation practice involves becoming comfortable with all the discomforting distractions that may arise. Let them go, and remain focused on the breath. As you remain

focused, allow for insights, sensations or simple feelings to arise, knowing that all is in your highest good. Receive these communications with gratitude, and honor them by following their lead as soon as your meditation practice is finished.-----Remain in meditation practice for as long as you like: one minute, five minutes, ten minutes, or even twenty minutes will do. The more consistently you practice, the more connected you get to your intuition.

3. **Shavasana:** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the light of the third eye chakra spread through the body with each breath.



## Chapter Seven: Crown Chakra



### **Crown Chakra: Connection**

Location: crown of the head, pituitary gland, brain

Bija Mantra: Om (silent Om, vibration is felt within the body)

Sanskrit Name: Sahasrara (thousand-petaled lotus)

The crown chakra is located at the very top of our head and represents our connection to the source. This chakra incorporates our pituitary gland, and our brain. The element of this chakra is ether (or, space), as the medium of cosmic connection is made through this element. Whether we are connecting to another, to ourselves, or to the source, this chakra presides over how that connection is made. Similar to the way we plug in our phones at night in order to recharge them, we are fed by these intimate connections. When we are disconnected—from ourselves, from others or from the source—we become depleted.

In fact, as humans, we *need* connection.

It is vital for our intrinsic health and well-being. Without it, we suffer physical, psychological, emotional and mental consequences. Disconnection occurs when we feel isolated, or limit our whole-hearted interactions with others. Social media, and the internet are sometimes more isolating than connecting. It is important that we

see another person's face and witness their joy at participating in life with us. We must be able to hug our friends and look into the eyes of those we love. Clicking "like" and texting each other on the couch limits that connective tissue between humans. Strengthening this connective tissue is like creating a lifeline to health and well-being.

We strengthen our connection to others by finding ways of interacting in person with those we love (using digital connection to bridge the gaps when necessary). We strengthen our connection to ourselves and the source through our spiritual practices. Perhaps the most important type of spiritual practice to strengthen our internal connection is ritual.

Ritual is a practice that human beings have used for millennia all over the world as a way to bridge the gap between our inner experiences and our outer reality. It helps us to feel like an intrinsic part of something bigger than ourselves, and to participate in the spiritual reality that we feel and experience, but cannot necessarily see. In modern, Western culture, much of our participation in this kind of ritual has been lost and as a result, we suffer from a disconnection of spirit and soul.

To reconnect ourselves, we must create rituals that are potent and powerful for us as individuals. The ritual must reflect what is alive and real for us on the inside. We bring it out through the ritual in order to participate in our own spiritual reality...to bring our spirit to life!

Ritual is simple, profound and deeply transformational. There is a reason that every human culture has developed rituals...they work! When it comes to strengthening our bond between ourselves and our source, few things come close to the power of ritual to do this. This connection reminds us that we are not alone, that we all have a purpose, and that our work as individuals here on this earth plays an integral role in the balance of life.

### **Crown Chakra Practice**

A practice for the crown chakra focuses on ritual and meditation to clear the path for consistent connection with source. Use of the bija mantra, *OM*, heightens the affects of our ritual practice, and allows for the energy of all the chakras to be focused through the crown chakra for maximum effect. With the following practice, we set an intention with a brief invocation.

1. Create a sacred space with a candle, a comfortable cushion on your mat for sitting, a stick of incense, and any other sacred items that are important to you (crystals, picture of a loved one, divination cards, etc). Place these items in a careful way in your space. Light the candle and the incense. Circle the incense around yourself three times to clear your energy, then come to sit on your cushion.
1. Close the eyes and turn the attention to the breath. Clear the mind, and say the following invocation out loud:

*I am connected.*

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (called Sukhasana) and place the hands softly in the lap as you prepare for meditation practice. Say the bija mantra, *OM*, three times, connecting with the resonance of the sound in the body.
1. **Simple Meditation Practice:** With the eyes closed, sitting comfortably, turn your attention to the breath. Focus on the breath, and let go of all other distractions. As you breath in, imagine a white light moving from the crown of the head, down the spine, into the tailbone. As you exhale, imagine the white light moving from the tailbone back up to the crown of the head. Continue this visualization and feel this white light purifying and balancing all the chakras

as it moves up and down. -----Remain in meditation practice for as long as you like: one minute, five minutes, ten minutes, or even twenty minutes will do.

2. When you are ready to close the meditation, bring the hands to prayer at the heart and chant Om out loud three times. Place your right hand on your heart, and gently bow your head. Take a moment to notice how you feel. Before lifting your head, bring a small smile to your lips, and then finally look up. Snuff the candle, and prepare for shavasana.
3. **Shavasana:** Lie on the ground, with feet apart, and hands turned palms up by the side. Tuck shoulders underneath the body to open the chest. Close the eyes and feel the light of the third eye chakra spread through the body with each breath.

## Conclusion



The seven energy centers offer us a profound, yet simple communication system with our body, mind and spirit. Through using the practices found in this book, you have the tools necessary to bring balance and well being to these areas of your energy field. Creating balance in your energetic system fosters health and wellness on every level, and shifts your perception of life as you become more connected to yourself through the practice.

Working with the chakras is a lifelong endeavor. There is no point at which we simply get to “check the box” and consider ourselves “done” with the work. Life continues to happen, new tensions or tightnesses crop up in our body and our psyche. We are triggered by new experiences and suddenly relive old wounds. This is the simple fact of being human.

Luckily, there is a toolkit for us to use to work with ourselves, minimize the imbalance and get better at smoothing out our rough

edges. Yoga doesn't make your life better, *it makes you better at your life.*

Continue the journey, and realize the balance and connection you have always wanted for yourself!

## About the Author



Alanna believes yoga is for everyone and each student can develop the self-empowerment needed to embark on a personal journey to meaningful transformation. On this principle she founded **The Kaivalya Yoga Method**, a fresh take on yoga emphasizing the individual path while honoring tradition. Teaching students since 2001, teachers since 2003, Alanna has written and developed teacher trainings worldwide for top studios and independently. In 2015, she debuted a [comprehensive 200hr-online teacher training with YogaDownload.com](#). She holds a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies with an Emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, has authored numerous articles and two books: *Myths of the Asanas*, an accessible practitioner’s guide to stories behind beloved poses; *Sacred Sound*, a yoga “hymnal,” illustrating

the role of chant and mantra in modern practice. Her third book, *Yoga Beyond the Mat*, is a guide to making yoga your complete spiritual practice. She lives in New York City with Roxy the Wonderdog. Find out more about her at [alannak.com](http://alannak.com).





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