

Chakras

The original purpose of yoga asanas was to reach in from the outside to affect the inner channels, or nadis, through which prana and our thoughts travel, linked together. Our yoga practice loosens up chokepoints in the inner channels, where they twine around each other and form the circular-shaped “wheels,” or chakras.

This article presents a summary of the different chakras, including their ancient names, general location, and function—according to traditional Indian and Tibetan sources. These sources often differ from each other in specific details; these differences often have a specific purpose and are not just mistakes.

A Little about Chakras

The word *chakra* in Sanskrit means “wheel,” and the Tibetans also use their word for “wheel”—which is *korlo*—for the chakras. The Sanskrit word comes from the root $\sqrt{\text{kir}}$, which means “to do or make.” We see this root in the very common Sanskrit word *karma*, or *action*, and in English words such as *create* and *cereal* (a food that has been grown or made).

The *cha* part of the word *chakra* is what we call a “reduplication” or repetition of the *kar* part of the word—the implication being that a wheel is something that keeps “doing” something over and over again.

There is a central energy channel that closely follows the path of the spine through the body. Inside this channel runs inner wind or energy, called *prana* in Sanskrit and *lung* in Tibetan. At certain points along this channel, smaller channels branch out.

If we could look down a person’s spine from the top of their head and see the central channel, we would see the smaller channels branching off like spokes of a wheel. This is why they are called “chakras” or wheels.

Chakras are created by the chokepoints mentioned above, which themselves are caused by the two side channels as they twine around the central channel. One of the goals of the yoga asanas is to open up these chokepoints, freeing the energy trapped within the chakras.

The Root Chakra

“Root Chakra” is the English name for the Muladhara Chakra. The Sanskrit word *muladhara* is made up of two parts: *mula* and *adhara*. *Mula* in Sanskrit means *root*, and the corresponding Tibetan is *tsa*. The same Sanskrit root appears in the English *mural*,

meaning a “painting on a wall,” since a wall was a strong foundation or root for a building.

Adhara, or *ten* in Tibetan, means *basis*. This ultimately comes from the Sanskrit root \sqrt{dhir} , which means “to hold firm.” This same root is found in the very common Sanskrit word *dharma*, which can mean “spiritual way” but has the more basic meaning of a *thing*: anything that “holds” its own essence. We find this root in the English words *tree* (a firmly-rooted plant); *true* (firm); and *farm* (a holding of land).

The general location of the Root Chakra is in the perineum, or area of the groin, between the two legs. This chakra is generally related to sexual energy, especially in its spiritual form as a pure form of inner wind which can greatly aid in transforming the body into light.

In the Tibetan tradition, this energy is connected to the Chakra of the Secret Place (*Sang Ne Kyi Korlo*), which is also known as the Chakra of Maintaining Bliss (*De-kyong Gi Korlo*). This chakra is said to be located four fingerwidths down the spine from the navel chakra, which would mean that it corresponds to the next chakra, the one called the “Seat of the Self.”

The Chakra of the Seat of the Self

The Chakra of the Seat of the Self is called *Svadhithana Chakra* in Sanskrit. The word *svadhithana* is made of two parts, *sva* and *adhitha*. *Sva* means *its own*, or *self*, and is found in the English words *self* and *suicide*. *Adhitha* means a *seat* or *place* where something stays, and its root is found in the English words *stay* and *station*.

This chakra is generally located near the base of the spine and broadly speaking is connected with the same energy as the Root Chakra and the Chakra of the Secret Place.

The Chakra of the City of Jewels

The Chakra of the City of Jewels is called *Manipura Chakra* in Sanskrit. The word *manipura* is made of two parts: *mani* and *pura*. *Mani* means a *jewel*, and may be related to the English word *mane*, in the idea of an “ornament upon the neck.”

Pura means *full*, and is found in the English *full* and *ball*. In olden times it very commonly meant “full of people,” and thus *a town* or *city*. We see it at the end of many Indian town names, such as *Singapore* (*City of the Lions*).

This chakra is located at the level of the navel, and is related again to sexual energy and its pure form of inner fire; imagine the spark of fire within a ruby. The Tibetans call this chakra the Chakra of Emanation (*Trulpay Korlo*), since inner fire is the source from which the great bliss of enlightenment emanates.

The Unstruck Chakra

The Sanskrit name for the Unstruck Chakra is *Anahata Chakra*. Again, *anahata* is made of two words, *an* and *ahata*. *An* is a form of *a*, which is the negative in Sanskrit: *not*. We find it at the beginning of English words such as *atheist* (not believing in God) and *apathetic* (not passionate).

Ahata means *struck* or *beaten* in the sense of hitting a drum or a bell. It comes from the Sanskrit root \sqrt{han} , which means *to smite*. This root is found in the Sanskrit word *ahinsa* (*non-violence*) and the English word *gun* (an instrument for violence).

The Unstruck Chakra is found at the level of the heart, and the general idea is that the beating of the heart is something which occurs from the heart itself, and not because someone has struck it like a drum.

The Tibetans call this chakra the Chakra of All Things (*Chukyi Korlo*), since within it lies a tiny drop where all our karmas are stored, and from which all things in our world, and ourselves, emanate. This chakra is thus related with the creation of the world, and is also the place where we first experience ultimate love.

The Chakra of Purity

The Sanskrit name for the Chakra of Purity is *Vishuddhi Chakra*. The Sanskrit root here is \sqrt{shudh} , meaning *to purify*. This is probably related to English words meaning *to shine*, such as *shine*, *sky*, and *scintillate*.

The Tibetans call this chakra the Chakra of Experience (*Longchu Kyi Korlo*). The point is that this chakra is located at the level of the throat or base of the neck, and the inner winds related to it play a role in the experience of food and drink—the beginning of the process where these substances are purified for use by the body.

The Chakra of Command

The Sanskrit name for the Chakra of Command is *Ajnya Chakra*. The word *ajnya* comes from the root \sqrt{jnya} , which means *to know*; the prefix *a-* makes it *to inform* or *to command*. We see this same root in the English *know* and *ignorant* (where the prefix *i-* is negative).

The Tibetans call this chakra the Chakra of the Third Eye, or literally “The Chakra between the Two Eyebrows” (*Min-tsam Gyi Korlo*). Sometimes it is said to be located more generally in the middle of the forehead.

This chakra plays a major role in allowing us to focus or direct our mind on an object, and it is commonly used for this purpose throughout Tibetan Yoga.

The Chakra of a Thousand Petals

The Sanskrit name for the Chakra of a Thousand Petals is *Sahasrara Chakra*. The word *sahasrara* has two parts, *sahasra* and *ara*. *Sahasra* means *a thousand*, and *ara* means *a spoke* of a wheel, or petals of a chakra.

The Tibetans refer to this chakra as the Chakra of Great Bliss (*Dechen gyi korlo*). The name derives from the sensation one feels when special substances at this chakra melt down during successful yogic practice.