

Chapter One

The System of the Chakras

The Functions of the Chakras or Centres

The centres or Chakras are seven in number —

- (1) The thousand-petalled lotus on the top of the head.
- (2) In the middle of the forehead — the Ajna Chakra — (will, vision, dynamic thought).
- (3) Throat centre — externalising mind.
- (4) Heart-lotus — emotional centre. The psychic is behind it.
- (5) Navel — higher vital (proper).
- (6) Below navel — lower vital.
- (7) Muladhara — physical.

All these centres are in the middle of the body; they are supposed to be attached to the spinal cord; but in fact all these things are in the subtle body, *sūkṣma deha*, though one has the feeling of their activities as if in the physical body when the consciousness is awake.

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Chakras

The thousand-petalled (head) lotus	Chakra or centre of the higher will and knowledge
The lotus in the forehead	Will, vision, mental dynamism
The lotus in the throat	Expression — external mind
The lotus of the heart	Emotion, dynamic vital feeling (behind the heart is the seat of the psychic being)
The lotus of the navel	Higher vital
The lotus of the abdomen	Lower vital
The lotus at the end of the spine (Muladhara)	Physical consciousness

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In the process of our Yoga the centres have each a fixed psychological use and general function which base all their special powers and functionings. The *mūlādhāra* governs the physical down to the subconscious; the abdominal centre — *svādhiṣṭhāna* — governs the lower vital; the navel centre — *nābhīpadma* or *maṇipūra* — governs the larger vital; the heart centre — *hrīpadma* or *anāhata* — governs the emotional being; the throat centre — *viśuddha* — governs the expressive and externalising mind; the centre between the eyebrows — *ājñācakra* — governs the dynamic mind, will, vision, mental formation; the thousand-petalled lotus — *sahasradala* — above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at its highest opens to the intuition through which or else by an overflowing directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact.¹

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I never heard of two lotuses in the heart centre; but it is the seat of two powers, in front the higher vital or emotional being, behind and concealed the soul or psychic being.

The colours of the lotuses and the numbers of petals are respectively, from bottom to top: — (1) the Muladhara or physical consciousness centre, four petals, red; (2) the abdominal centre, six petals, deeper purple red; (3) the navel centre, ten petals, violet; (4) the heart centre, twelve petals, golden pink; (5) the throat centre, sixteen petals, grey; (6) the forehead centre between the eyebrows, two petals, white; (7) the thousand-petalled lotus above the head, blue with gold light around. The functions are, according to our Yoga, — (1) commanding the physical consciousness and the subconscious; (2) commanding the small vital movements, the little greeds, lusts, desires, the small sense-movements; (3) commanding the larger life-forces and the passions and larger desire-movements; (4) commanding

¹ In a draft of this letter Sri Aurobindo wrote in the opening paragraph: "I have often written of the centres — but without using the Sanskrit names which are intelligible only to Hindus. They are the same but our interpretation and application is not quite identical. We relate them to the psychological levels or planes." — Ed.

the higher emotional being with the psychic deep behind it; (5) commanding expression and all externalisation of the mind-movements and mental forces; (6) commanding thought, will, vision; (7) commanding the higher thinking mind and the illumined mind and opening upwards to the intuition and overmind. The seventh is sometimes confused with the brain, but that is an error — the brain is only a channel of communication situated between the thousand-petalled and the forehead centre. The former is sometimes called the void centre, *śūnya*, either because it is not in the body, but in the apparent void above or because rising above the head one enters first into the silence of the self or spiritual being.

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There is one centre below the navel (lower vital), another at the navel (central vital), another in the chest (emotional vital, heart centre), another in the throat (physical mind), another above the head (higher consciousness); besides these there is the centre in the forehead (mind, will, vision) and one at the bottom of the spine (muladhara, physical centre). The working in each will be according to the nature of the centre.

The Chakras in Reference to Yoga

One can speak of the chakras only in reference to Yoga. In ordinary people the chakras are not open, it is only when they do sadhana that they open. For the chakras are the centres of the inner consciousness and belong organically to the subtle body. So much as is active in ordinary people is very little — for in them it is the outer consciousness that is active.

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The centres of consciousness [*are meant by the term “centres”*], the chakras. It is by their opening that the Yogic or inner consciousness develops — otherwise you are bound to the ordinary outer consciousness.

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One does not pass through the psychic centre or any centre [during the sadhana]. The centres open under the pressure of the sadhana. You can say that the Force descends or ascends into a centre.

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The spine is the support of the centres and it is through the spine that in the Tantric sadhana the Kundalini rises.

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Allow me to state my difficulty [with the idea that the “spirit entity” is lodged in the pineal gland]. How the devil can a spirit entity be enclosed in a material gland? So far as I know the self or spirit is not enclosed in the body, rather the body is in the Self. When we have the full experience of the Self, we feel it as a wide consciousness in which the body is a very small thing, an adjunct, or a thing contained, not a container. What then is this spirit entity? There can be a small formation which stands for the Self or Spirit, like the Upanishad’s Purusha no bigger than a man’s thumb. Is this the spirit entity? But even then in which sense, in what relativity of space can it be said to be *in* the very material pineal gland? A spirit confined in a gland and dislodged from it by a pistol shot is a kind of language which I buck at. A spirit touching grey brain matter and so entering into contact with universal mind and touching white matter and so entering into contact with loftier spiritual realities is also too weird a conception for my intelligence. What happens to it when it has no matter to touch? Dissolution? laya?

When we speak of the Purusha in the head, heart etc., we are using a figure. The Muladhara from which the Kundalini rises is not in the physical body, but in the subtle body (the subtle body is that in which the being goes out in deep trance or more radically, at the time of death); so also are all the centres. But as the subtle body penetrates and is interfused with the gross body, there is a certain correspondence between these chakras and certain centres in the physical proper. So figuratively we speak of the Purusha in this or that centre of the body. Owing to this correspondence, again, when the Ananda or anything else

comes down into the being, it is the subtle body that it pervades, but it communicates itself through it to the gross body and its consciousness, so that it is felt as if pervading the body. But all that is very different from saying that the spirit is lodged in a gland. The gross body is an engine, a means of communication and action of the spirit upon the world and it is only a small part of the instrumentation. It is absurd to make so much of it as all that. It is a sort of false materialism intended to placate minds that have a scanty knowledge of science. But what is the use of that? Everybody now knows that science is not a statement of the truth of things, but only a language expressing a certain experience of objects, their structure, their mathematics, a coordinated and utilisable impression of their processes — it is nothing more. Matter itself is something (a formation of energy perhaps?) of which we know superficially the structure as it appears to our mind and senses and to certain examining instruments (about which it is now suspected that they largely determine their own results, Nature adapting its replies to the instrument used), but more than that no scientist knows or can know. If the Radhasoami affirmations [*mentioned by the correspondent*] are meant to be another kind of language expressing certain psycho-physical experiences, I have no objection. But why all this pineal glandism and talk about entities and bullets?

N.B. If I say the Purusha is in the heart, do I mean it is there in the physical heart, tumbling about in the flow of the blood or stuck in the valves or muscular portions and when a bullet is lodged in the heart it jumps with an Ooah! and tumbles down dead or goes off skating and swimming into some grey or white matter worlds beyond? Certainly not. I am using a significant language which expresses certain relations between the psychic consciousness and the physical of which we become aware by Yoga.

The Centres and the Planes

Each centre of the system (*cakra*, *padma*) represents or centralises a plane of experience and each is supported on the spine

which is the support of the nervous energies. When the serpent Energy from above and below have free passage through the centres (which is represented by the spine appearing like a serpent) then they open and there is the free wideness of the universal or infinite consciousness on all these planes.

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All the centres above the Muladhara are connected with the higher worlds above the physical, with the vital, mental, psychic and still higher worlds — the Muladhara and below with the physical and subconscient worlds (subconscient physical and sub-physical). The whole physical body of course belongs to the earth-world, but it is connected through these centres with the other worlds.

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According to our system the three lower centres are the vital, the lower vital and the physical — but the planes are quite different. The three lower planes are mind, life and matter and it is true that the human mind confines itself to these three activities. But it is not true that its activities are confined to the vital and physical things.

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What is the fourth centre? In our system the fourth centre is the heart and the Divine is there in the psychic, behind the heart. But the fourth of our seven planes is the supramental which is far above the head, but can be communicated with through the seventh centre, the Sahasradala padma.

The Mind Centres

This must be the psychicised higher mental being — the position above the head points to that. In other words, you have become aware of your higher mental being which is in contact at once with the Divine above and with the psychic behind the heart and is aware of the Truth and has the psychic and spiritual insight and view into things.

Above the head extends the higher consciousness centre, sahasradala padma. But usually there is partial working of the forehead centre also when the sahasradala opens.

The ordinary mind is at the highest the free intelligence, receiving perhaps intuitions and intimations from above which it intellectualises. It is on the surface and sees things from outside except in so far as it is helped by intuition and other powers to see a little deeper. When this ordinary mind opens within to inner mind and psychic and above to higher mind and higher consciousness generally, then it begins to be spiritualised and its highest ranges merge into the spiritual mind-consciousness of which this higher mind can be a beginning. This merging is part of the spiritual transformation.

For the mind there are many centres: (1) the sahasradala which centralises spiritual mind, higher mind, intuitive mind and acts as a receiving station for the intuition proper and overmind, (2) the centre in the forehead for inner thought, will and vision, (3) the throat centre for the externalising or physical mind.

The Sahasradala or Sahasrara or Crown Centre

The thousand-petalled lotus is above the head. It is the seventh and highest centre.

Usually those who take the centres in the body only, count six centres, the Sahasrara being excluded.

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It is evidently the sahasradala padma through which the higher intuition, illumined mind and overmind all pass their rays.

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The sahasradala commands all between the ordinary mind and the supermind — therefore its opening necessarily takes long. But opening by itself only creates a connection or communication — to dwell in that centre, one needs to have overpassed the mind and be able to live mainly in the spiritual self.

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The Supramental is not organised in the body so there is no separate centre for it; but all that comes from above the Mind uses the Sahasrara for its transit and so opens something there.

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The centre at the crown must be part of the *sahasradala*, the centre of communication direct between the individual being and the Infinite Consciousness above. There is not supposed to be any other main centre of dynamism between that and the Ajna Chakra. But there can be many nerve-centres in various parts of the body, apart from the six or rather seven main centres.

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The crown centre open removes the difficulty of the lid between the ordinary mind and the higher consciousness above. If the ajnachakra also is open, then it is possible to have a clear communication between the higher consciousness and the inner mind and the outer mind (throat centre) also. That is the condition for the realisation of knowledge and the mental illumination and transformation. The heart centre commands the psychic and vital — that opening enables the psychic influence to work in the vital and ends in the coming forward of the psychic being.

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It [*the opening at the top of the head*] is the Brahmarandhra through which there is the communication between the higher consciousness and the lower in the body. It is a passage, not a centre. The centre is the thousand-petalled lotus just above the head, at that part.

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The crown is the place of passage between the body consciousness with all it contains of mind and life and the higher being above the body. It is there that the two consciousnesses begin to meet.

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The brain is only a centre of the physical consciousness. One feels stationed there so long as one dwells in the physical mind or is identified with the body consciousness, then one receives through the sahasradala into the brain. When one ceases to be stationed in the body, then the brain is not a station but only a passive and silent transmitting channel.

The Ajnachakra or Forehead Centre

There are different centres in the body which are represented in vision by these lotuses — one is between the eyebrows in the forehead, a centre of inner consciousness, will and visions — that is opening in you.

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If the forehead centre opens, it is fairly certain that the crown centre must have opened sufficiently at least to allow the passage of the higher force which is above it. The psychic is a different matter — it stands behind the centres and the time of its opening varies with different people — in fact it is not so much the opening of a centre as the coming forward of the psychic being.

The usual rule in this Yoga is from above downwards. There may be variations in the preparatory stage. There may for instance be a partial opening first of the heart centre. The higher vital centre may become active first also, but that means much struggle and difficulty.

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The psychic being is behind the heart-centre — the centre between the eyes is that of inner (occult) thought, will and vision. This inner or occult vision is called by ordinary people psychic vision.

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It [*the centre between the eyebrows*] is the centre of the inner mind — therefore also of the inner mental will and inner mental vision.

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The centre of vision is between the eyebrows in the centre of the forehead. When it opens one gets the inner vision, sees the inner forms and images of things and people and begins to understand things and people from within and not only from outside, develops a power of will which also acts in the inner (Yogic) way on things and people etc. Its opening is often the beginning of the Yogic as opposed to the ordinary mental consciousness.

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In the forehead between the eyes but a little above is the Ajna-chakra, the centre of the inner will, also of the inner vision, the dynamic mind etc. (This is not the ordinary outer mental will and sight, but something more powerful, belonging to the inner being.) When this centre opens and the Force there is active, then there is the opening of a greater will, power of decision, formation, effectiveness beyond what the ordinary mind can achieve.

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The centre Ajnachakra is in the place I indicated [*in the previous letter*], but the pressure can be felt in all the forehead and the eyebrows also or anywhere there. It radiates from the centre.

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The forehead centre is that of inner mind and vision. It is really through that inner vision that one sees the lights — the open eyes are only a channel for seeing them outside as well as within.

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The pressure from within upon the forehead centre begins very often after the pressure from above on the forehead — something of the Force has come in sufficiently to exercise this second pressure. That on the back must be a direct pressure on the psychic region (if it is in or near the middle of the back) mainly to prepare the action in the heart. When the centres begin to open, inner experiences such as the seeing of light or images through the subtle vision in the forehead centre or psychic experiences

and perceptions in the heart, become frequent — gradually one becomes aware of one's inner being as separate from the outer and what can be called a Yogic consciousness with all its deeper movements develops in the place of the ordinary superficial mental and vital movements.

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A third eye does open there [*in the centre of the forehead*] — it represents the occult vision and the occult power which goes with that vision — it is connected with the Ajnachakra.

The Throat Centre

The throat centre is the centre of the physical mind, the external will and the expression.

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Yes [*the throat centre is the physical mind centre*]. It is the centre of externalisation, — speech, expression, the power to deal mentally with physical things etc. Its opening brings the power to open the physical mind to the light of the divine consciousness instead of remaining in the ordinary outward-going mentality.

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Yes, it is so — it is the physical mind that acts like that [*rising up from the throat centre to cover the mind*]. The centre of the physical mind or externalising mind is in the subtle body in the throat and connected strongly with the speech — but it acts by connection with the brain. All forces that want to cover the consciousness rise up to do it, covering and acting on the mind centres if they can — because otherwise the covering is not complete.

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Speech comes from the throat centre, but it is associated with whatever is the governing centre or level of the consciousness — wherever one thinks from. If one rises above the head, then

thought takes place above the head and one can speak from there, that is to say, the direction of the speech is from there.

The Throat Centre and the Lower Centres

The throat centre is the externalising (physical) mind, the heart is the emotional mind and beginning of the higher vital. If the heart centre is dominated by the physical mind to any extent, it will necessarily be open to the outer attacks that affect the physical and nervous consciousness. The heart has to be in connection with the psychic and the higher consciousness.

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The centre in the throat is that of the physical mind and all between it and the centre in the heart is the joining place of the mind and the vital-emotional being. If the pain is of the nerves, then there must be some resistance and difficulty there which should go with the full opening.

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The heart is the centre of the emotional being, the highest part of the vital. The navel is the centre of the dynamic and sensational vital (this is the source of pride, sense of possession, ambition, anger and other passions — but it expresses them often through the heart centre). The centre between the navel and the Muladhara commands the lower vital (physical desires, small greeds, passions etc.). The throat centre is not the vital — it is the physical mind, the expressive externalising consciousness. What you feel may be the vital taking hold of the physical mind and using it for expression.

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The physical mind centre is in the throat and mouth — the vital physical is between the two lowest centres — the material consciousness is in the *mūlādhāra*.

The Heart Centre

The heart is the centre of the being and commands the rest, as the psychic being or chaitya purusha is there. It is only in that sense that all flows from it, for it is the psychic being who each time creates a new mind, vital and body for himself.

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There is one centre for the heart, although it is a double centre, in front the emotional, behind the psychic.

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The apex of the psychic and emotional centre (like the apex of all centres) is in the backbone, the base in front in the middle of the sternum.

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The physical heart is in the left side, but the heart centre of Yoga is in the middle of the chest — the cardiac centre.

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I do not quite understand what you mean by soul. The psychic being (which is the soul) does not make centres for itself in the Adhar — the centres are there. The psychic being can take control of the centres that are already there — the heart and the navel centre and the two below the navel. Also the mind and vital are not abolished — they are brought under the psychic influence and psychicised, or they are occupied by the higher consciousness from above and transformed into its instruments.

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The heart-centre is the emotional centre. The navel is the main vital centre. In the abdomen is the lower vital centre. It is in these two that there is the origination of desire — but desire rises and becomes emotional in the heart and mental in the higher centres above.

The Navel and Abdominal Centres

The navel is the chief vital centre below the emotional — there is another centre of small vital movements below it, between the navel and Muladhara.

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The navel is the vital centre in the physical body but the natural seat of the vital is in the vital sheath of the subtle body, which sheath it pervades; but for action through the gross body it is centred at the navel and below it.

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A centre may be opened and still there may be resistances in that part of the nature. If the vital were clear of all difficulties one would be on the point of Yogic perfection. Below the navel is the physical vital.

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The navel is the seat of the central vital, below it is the lower vital. It must have been the resistance of the lower vital to the fire that you felt.

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The feeling you have of coming down to the navel corresponds to the actual fact of a change of the centre of consciousness, which one speaks of as a lowering of the consciousness. In this stage of sadhana one must keep always above until one is seated for good in the above-head position and the higher consciousness has pervaded the lower centres and fields down to the Muladhara and the whole body.

The Muladhara

The Muladhara is the centre of the physical consciousness proper, and all below in the body is the sheer physical, which as it goes downward becomes increasingly subconscious, but the real seat of the subconscious is below the body as the real seat

of the higher consciousness (superconscious) is above the body. At the same time, the subconscious can be felt anywhere, felt as something below the movement of the consciousness and, in a way, supporting it from beneath or else drawing the consciousness down towards itself. The subconscious is the main support of all habitual movements, especially the physical and lower vital movements. When something is thrown out of the vital or physical, it very usually goes down into the subconscious and remains there as if in seed and comes up again when it can. That is the reason why it is so difficult to get rid of habitual vital movements or to change the character; for, supported or refreshed from this source, preserved in this matrix your vital movements, even when suppressed or repressed, surge up again and recur. The action of the subconscious is irrational, mechanical, repetitive. It does not listen to reason or the mental will. It is only by bringing the higher light and force into it that it can change.

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The Muladhara is the centre of the physical consciousness, but the legs below represent the special field governed by it — as distinct from the mental and vital parts in the body. So when there is working there, it means a working in the physical proper itself. Of course the physical is half-subconscious, but the field of the subconscious proper is below the feet, just as the field of the superconscious is above the head.

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The lowest centre at the bottom of the spine [*is the sex centre*]. It contains many other things, but also it is in its front the support of the sexual movements.

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It [*the end of the spine*] is the place of the physical centre which is also the sex-centre. The apex of it is at the end of the spine and it projects forward from there — commanding the organ and its action.

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The sex centre is the physical centre — it [*the physical centre*] happens to be the centre for sex and physical propagation also, but it is not separately and solely the centre of sex. If that were so, there would be no centre governing the physical consciousness, but only a centre governing the sex organ.

No Subconscious Centre

There is no subconscious centre. Its plane is below the feet as that of the superconscious is above the head.

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No, the subconscious is too vague to have a centre. It has a level — below the feet as the superconscious is above, but from there it can surge up anywhere.