EXCERPTS FROM

AWAKENING THE CHAKRAS: THE SEVEN ENERGY CENTERS IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

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1

An Inward Eye

Meditation on the flame of a lamp produces a state of mind called witness consciousness. This witness of the self is ageless and timeless, that essence which survives all transformations of personality, all emotional storms, all changes of thought, all experience. . . . The witness is centered in the region of the third eye.

Harish Johari, *Dhanwantari*

SANTOSH PURI'S ISLAND AND NARMADA PURI

The ancient Indian city of Haridwar is called the gateway to the gods. Not far from it the Ganges River, Mother Ganga, splits into seven fingers that spread over a vast flat expanse of the North Indian plain. A few miles north of the city, not far from Seven Rishis Road, heavily populated with meandering orange-garbed sadhus, you can stand beneath a strip of trees on the west side of the river and look northward at the front range of the majestic Himalayas in the distance. When you look east, you see the nearest channel of the river and then an island, a vast expanse of rock, gravel, and driftwood that has floated downriver and found a calm resting place. When you sit by the bank to take in the spectacle of that vast landscape,

from time to time someone might walk past you along the dirt footpath that runs alongside the river.

Just downstream, the nearest channel flows wide and shallow and you can cross through it onto the island. Until some years ago a slender sadhu named Santosh Puri lived on the island. Naked except for a covering of ash on his body, he was a *naga baba,* an ascetic renunciate who milked his cows for food, and depended on "what the Ganga brings" for his firewood and other necessities of life. *The Ganga* was an expansive term that meant not only the river but also anything brought to him by divine fortune. A naga baba makes the ultimate nonmaterialistic statement. He possesses nothing but a container that can serve to carry water, milk, or food or be used as a begging bowl; a loincloth to tie around his waist when he goes into town; and perhaps a blanket to protect against cold or rain. In the naga baba's view, all material desires are futile distractions that come between himself and God.

On the island near Seven Rishis Road, a small collection of naga babas lived for short or longer periods. In 1969, a twenty-four-year old German woman went to India on a spiritual quest and ultimately found her way to that island. She instantly perceived Santosh Puri to be her guru, and devoted herself to following his path of austerity. For an entire year there was no conversation, no discussion, no eating together. Her only words in his presence were the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*. They communicated nonverbally, slept next to the river, and cared for Santosh Puri's holy cows. Often he sat up meditating in the middle of the night. At 2:00 a.m. every day he rose in the darkness and carried out religious observances. Again and again he tried to send his self-declared disciple away, for a woman was not part of his plan for a life of celibacy and austerity. Although she experienced many daunting challenges and nearly died several times, the woman's spiritual energy did not waver. Eventually Santosh Puri stopped objecting to her presence, acknowledged his love for her, and gave up his vow of celibacy. They married and had three children. As the years went by she became the venerated Mataji mentioned in the preface and the introduction. Her book *Tears of Bliss: A Guru-Disciple Mystery* is a heart-moving testimony describing the dedication and austerities of a spiritual renunciant.[1]

Many of Mataji's struggles during her early years on the island were at the first-chakra level: sheer physical survival, life or death. She seems to have willingly accepted her hardships such as living on her own in caves and going without food

for long periods. Perhaps in a sense, Mataji's choices were soulfully linked with her guru's name, Santosh, which means "contentment; self-sufficiency." Usually (but not always) he modeled contentment with a shield of wisdom for almost every circumstance. In his complete surrender to God's will, a humble and ego-freeing pathway was etched into the depths of his character. We can only surmise that he was awake in higher-chakra consciousness, as he possessed a remarkable acceptance of difficult circumstances that could not be changed, and an overall spirit of peace or contentment even in the face of great hardships.

Another female guru, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, claims that "It's when you are free from selfishness . . . when you are not thinking about yourself in a selfish way, that you experience the tender shoots of contentment growing inside your heart."[2] Her understanding is like a magnifying glass that enables us to contemplate Santosh Puri's brave choices and our own selfish or selfless, worldly or spiritual nature.

THE SEVEN CHAKRAS ON THE ISLAND

"When you go to India to discover more about chakras, be sure to talk with Mataji," Pieter told Kooch and Victor in late 2013 before they boarded an airplane for Delhi. Following his advice, they went to her ashram just north of the ancient holy city of Haridwar, and conversed with her in its flower-laden outdoor pagoda built on top of Sri Santosh Puri's last resting place, where he was buried sitting upright in a full lotus position.

Mataji taught that chakras are the five elements in action, teachings that are beautifully represented in plate 1: Seven Cosmic Energy Centers. Muladhara, the first chakra, is connected to earth, the sense of smell, and the importance of security (food, shelter, and work). Svadhisthana, the second chakra, is connected to the water element, the life-giving forces, and the sense of taste. Meditating on the second chakra teaches us about the importance of family and the emotional web of our own life. Manipura, the third chakra, relates to the fire element and sense of sight. It is the seat of ego. Name, recognition, and honor are important here. Anahata is the fourth chakra and it is linked to the element of air and the sense of touch. It is located in the heart region, where we can feel unselfish love and compassion.

Vishuddha, or the fifth chakra, is connected with the *akasha* (or space)

element and the sense of sound. Higher teachings such as discipline and self-control are linked with this center. In the Ajna, or sixth, chakra, one goes beyond ordinary thinking, and can enter into deep states of meditation. When someone (mostly yogis or people on an spiritual path) opens the Sahasrara, or seventh, chakra, self-realization and communion with the divine spirit is said to be attained.

When we go back in time and look closely at life on Santosh Puri's island, we can envision the higher workings of the chakras. Santosh Puri disdained the glamour- and celebrity-consciousness of the second chakra. He seldom left the island; indeed, one year when the Ganges flooded, everyone else evacuated the island but he found a perch high in a tree and watched the flood waters sweep past him below. He never allowed any honor or reverence to be shown to him. His vow of celibacy was a second-chakra event, and so too was giving up the vow, marrying Narmada, and raising a family. As for the third and sixth chakras, he expressed a gentle yet fierce strength by living a life of radical renunciation with his third eye wide open to see beyond worldly understanding.

The fourth chakra is visible in his and Narmada's selfless care for each other, their family, and their cows. But it went further. They cultivated a loving attitude toward everyone. Despite possessing almost nothing, their ideal was to eat only after they had fed the cows and at least ten other people. They did not congratulate themselves on being spiritually minded—it was their humble life.

"Everyone was welcome at Babaji's duni," says ashtanga yoga teacher Narayan Puri. (*Babaji* is a term of respect used for those whom others consider great gurus. A *duni* is a sacred firepit in which the flame is never allowed to go completely out.) Narayan Puri continues:

> People of all religions, races, castes and creeds came to be in his presence; Sadhus from different . . . orders, high-ranked Pandits sitting next to low or out-caste workers, criminals beside policemen and merchants . . . Muslims, Hindus and Christians, as well as the dogs and the cows. All enjoyed being near Babaji. . . . One time a Brahmin priest asked Babaji, "Why do you let all these strange people stay at your duni? You are a Hindu, a Sannyasin." Babaji just smiled and said, "I am no Hindu, no Muslim, no Christian. I am a fakir, a yogi. I have no temple; the Ganga is my temple." . . . He lived in Atman consciousness, All is ONE.[3]

3

The Polarity Principle

Qualities such as fear, passion, anger, greed, malice, jealousy, envy, selfishness, and sloth constantly spoil body chemistry. When . . . these negative qualities begin to influence the cells of the body, the spine becomes tense and the body's natural radiance is lost.

Harish Johari,
Ayurvedic Massage

Not many people can be buried underground or in an airtight compartment underwater for two weeks and live to tell the tale. Fewer yet have done so while being hooked up to a battery of medical biofeedback instruments that show heart rate, breathing, and other vital signs.

Pilot Baba is one of those few. When voluntarily buried, he goes into *nir-vikalpa samadhi* (a state of dissolution of the self-conscious self) and the medical instruments flatline as if he were dead. When he comes out of that state, the instruments return to normal, and he continues to walk among the living.

One of Pilot Baba's insights echoes that of the Western psychoanalyst and sociologist Erich Fromm. Both noted that many aspects of who we are can take either positive or negative forms. We may choose to live in ways that are either

caring or careless. We may act in ways that encourage our growth and development, or ways that are harmful to our self, others, or our communities. Since we can't do much about our genetic makeup, it's vital to treat both ourselves and those around us in ways that encourage our—and their—positive potentials. Which potentials we develop affect the directions in which our lives unfold.

Tantra yoga and the study of chakras encourages us to look deeply at both the positive and negative aspects of ourselves. When we label some thoughts, attitudes, and actions negative because they bring some kind of harm to us or others, that's basic ethics. But most of us also think of many qualities as negative that harm no one—except for the harm we do to ourselves by thinking of them that way. Sometimes they are a source of useful energy. In *Awakening Shakti,* author Sally Kempton explains:

> The word *tantra* [has] two roots. *Tan* means "to expand or develop." *Tra* means . . . "to save, liberate, or redeem." . . . Tantra is a series of practices and teachings that help us realize that the world is filled with divine energy. . . . It is also a series of tools . . . that we can use both to liberate ourselves from illusion and to make our worldly lives more beautiful, abundant, and skillful.[1]

Tantra is a spiritual path that embodies the principles of the chakras that will unfold in these pages. It teaches the discrimination and discipline required to comprehend and maintain the delicate balance between the poles of positive and negative energy needed to harness the will to awaken in higher awareness. Johari gave this advice to help us understand how to take the better road: "When you are judging an action yourself, you have to ask yourself if the action is good for you, good for the people around you, good for humanity in general, and good for planet Earth. If it is, then go ahead; otherwise refrain from the action."[2] Of course, you can only really know whether something is good for you, others, or the Earth if you are a keen observer of your own motives and inclinations. In Johari's words,

> To live in constant awareness means that one should know what is happening inside, because the world outside is viewed by an individual according to

> his or her state of mind. When one is sad, the world outside appears to be quite different than when one is happy. Every individual is restricted by many individual strings, which comprise one's frame of reference. One's state of body chemistry provides the mood, feeling-tones, or emotional nuances with which to view the world outside.[3]

Swami Muktananda adds, "Simply witness the different thoughts as they arise and subside . . . no matter how many worlds of desires, wishes, and positive and negative thoughts your mind creates, you should realize that they are all a play of consciousness. . . . Your goal is not to battle with the mind, but to witness the mind."[4]

BEYOND THE WORLD OF BLACK AND WHITE

Simple cause-and-effect thinking—*THIS* action *HERE* causes *THAT* effect *THERE*—usually leaves many things out. Often the omissions are far more important than we realize. Swami Prajnapad claims, "In nature, action and reaction are continuous. Everything is connected to everything else. No one part, nothing, is isolated. Everything is linked, and interdependent."[5]

Undulating waves of causes and effects infuence each other and react back on us. Everything from a single action to an entire life, in both its essence and details, is a complex fabric for which Viennese psychologist Max Wertheimer used the term *gestalt,* described in English as meaning a "pattern, whole, or configuration."[6]

So-called knowledge comes in at least four forms: accurate, inaccurate, confused, and irrelevant. In practical terms, knowledge is *accurate* (true) to the degree that action based on it has the results that we think it will. It is *inaccurate* (false) to the degree that such action has results different from those that we expect. In that case we think we know what's going on but our thoughts are wrong. Knowledge is *confused* to the degree that it is a more or less tangled mixture of the accurate, inaccurate, and irrelevant. Big problems result from the fact that most people think their knowledge is true when much of it is actually confused, false, irrelevant, or all of the above.

When we act in a way that helps or harms someone or something, our mind stores memory traces or impressions of that event as a collection of neural

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First or Muladhara Chakra

The Root Chakra

In the first chakra we learn to be and feel more secure as we integrate the forces of thinking and doing, mind and body.

A person who is dominated by the Muladhara Chakra is obsessed by the desire to find security. . . . Like the element earth they are solid and strong, endure all kinds of hardships, and are productive.

Harish Johari and Will Geraets,
The Wisdom Teachings of Harish Johari on the Mahabharata

First or Muladhara Chakra Correspondences

Key phrases: Security, survival needs, root of inner being
Physical location: Near base of the spine/tailbone area
Endocrine gland: Adrenals
Astrological link: Mars
Day of the week: Tuesday
Element: Earth

Sense: Smell

Sanskrit Derivation: mula (root); *adhara* (support)

Massage: Feet, calves

Leela Game of Self-Knowledge: First row—Genesis, Maya, Anger, Greed, Physical Plane, Delusion, Conceit, Avarice, Sensual Plane*

THE ESSENCE OF THE FIRST CHAKRA: LAIR OF THE COILED SERPENT OF KUNDALINI

The core of the first chakra is physical survival. Physiological needs for breathable air, water, and food are primary. Located near the tailbone of the spine, the Muladhara Chakra is also connected with bodily comfort and psychological development. It is where we awaken to a basic sense of ourselves as separate individuals and to our connections with others. Paiently and persistently, its energy enlivens our desire to be in this world. On good days, it sharpens the zest for life that keeps us yearning to smell the roses, mobilizing our will power, determination, and willingness to reach out and accomplish. On bad days, our insecurities, fears, and defenses may dominate. Ruled by down-to-earth, practical concerns, this chakra, like the underground forces that sustain a tree, is linked with the element earth. For all these reasons, it is called the root chakra.

Embracing life is a first-chakra anchor. We start by finding food and shelter. We go on to meeting psychological needs such as feeling secure and confident. As these transient and eternal desires become aligned and fulfilled, we try to balance our animal and spiritual nature. With perseverance, this can help us find harmony in a sometimes alienating and disharmonious world.

When you quiet your mind and guide your root chakra's energies wisely, it can harness internal forces needed to tap into the energies of the higher

*Leela, The Game of Self-Knowledge, a game played with dice, has a game board that takes players row by row and by upward arrows and downward snakes through seventy-two squares from lower to higher states of consciousness with each throw of the dice. The first row and its nine squares, for example, correspond with qualities of the first chakra. This ancient game and an accompanying book with the same title were extensively researched and then produced by Harish Johari through Inner Traditions International publishers. (The children's game Chutes and Ladders is a deteriorated form of this ancient tool for expanding consciousness.)

chakras. Whether you are an idealist, a skeptic, a visionary on a transcendent journey, or just trying to make it through each day as best you can, this chakra is allied with powerful forces that can inspire you to overcome obstacles. Naturally aligned with soul purpose, it can support a quest to take tangible steps to fulfill your deeper potential and accelerate your personal evolution. But when this chakra is discordant, it can incite needless frustrations, anger, mental stagnation, fear, obliviousness to mind-body connections, and problems in relating to others.

All this may sound like the effects of an unpredictable throw of the cosmic dice, but for the most part you can choose to take charge of the directions in which you move, mature, and evolve. After all, the rousing forces associated with the first chakra, symbolized in myth and legend by the planet Mars, are like a double-edged sword that symbolizes your power to fight for right or wrong, honor or disgrace, compassion or cruelty. Whether you face a physical, verbal, emotional, or financial threat, your first-chakra survival reactions are triggered. When you reach for the sword, you may win or lose, bludgeon or be bludgeoned, stand or fall. A major task is learning to meet an attack of any kind intelligently rather than ignorantly. If you are secure in your first-chakra energies, when you are insulted, ridiculed, or slighted by others, you'll know that they, not you, are the ones with problems. Waking up this chakra's positive potentials helps enhance confidence, inward strength, and self-awareness. These qualities, points out Swami Satyananda Saraswati, can lead to "awakening of things from the unconscious field of existence which one may not have had prior conscious knowledge of."[1]

India's spiritual masters claim that in the first chakra a psychospiritual energy called Kundalini lies dormant, sleeping coiled like a snake at the base of the spine. Believed by yogi Gopi Krishna to be the driving force behind inspiration and genius, Kundalini energy is said to flow through our bodies in spiritual channels or lines called *nadis*. Each chakra is believed to be an intersection point where many nadis come together. Working with these conduits of the life force (especially the two nadis that are said to originate in the first chakra, the lunar channel, cool like the moon, called the Ida Nadi, and the solar channel, hot like the sun, called the Pingala Nadi) stimulates the Kundalini force. Also, balancing these contrasting feminine and masculine energies creates a strong inner foundation that is said to strengthen each of the higher chakras' potency. But when we

First or Muladhara Chakra

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asked spiritual master Pilot Baba if it was necessary to understand the nadis to work effectively with one's own chakras, he shook his head. "If your focus is on how to work in practical, useful ways with your own chakras," he replied, "it is not necessary."[2]

In tantra yoga, Kundalini is viewed as a form of cosmic energy that is present in some form in all living beings. When we work on ourselves through meditation, breath work, and yoga, our first-chakra energies naturally activate the awakening of our Kundalini. Then as we work with each of the remaining six chakras, we increase the potential for Kundalini energy to rise up the spine. As this occurs, our abilities and inclinations usually become infused with a spiritual dimension. Moving our energies away from the first chakra's obstacles toward its opportunities is a gentle way to stir the movement of our Kundalini and illuminate our consciousness. At its best, when the sleeping Kundalini force rises, it produces an alchemical transformation in our mind that turns base earthly elements (or you could call them "tendencies" or "inclinations") into a golden key that opens inner doors to more spiritual consciousness.

FIRST-CHAKRA POSSIBILITIES

OPPORTUNITIES	OBSTACLES
Awakening Kundalini	Ignorant, lacking attentiveness
Grounded	Distracted, flighty
Comfortable in your body	Defensive
Secure, self-sufficient	Needy, insecure
Friendly disposition	Anxious disposition
Uninhibited, straightforward	Inhibited, indirect
Sense of self-worth and value	Low self-esteem
Self-determining	Dependent on others
Courageous	Fearful, timid
Able to let go when appropriate	Grasping, hoarding
Responsible	Blames others, irresponsible
Does what is needed, perseveres	Puts off action, gives up easily

THE MENTAL PATHWAY FOR WORKING WITH FIRST-CHAKRA ENERGIES

The Bright Side of the First Chakra

Gifts and Strengths: Responsible, confident, with the ability to get what one needs and to help others do the same.

As your first-chakra qualities develop in positive ways, you feel increasingly worthy, self-reliant, grounded, connected with your body, and happy to help others. You enjoy the challenge of new adventures and alternatives, and are comfortable either alone or in a crowd. You are open to hearing the opinions and attitudes of others, including their political and religious beliefs, yet you think for yourself (or you feel good with the leader of your choice). All things considered, life feels good and you look forward to the future. Comfortable with your worldly reality, you hold on to outlooks and opinions that are truly valuable to you and let go of those that are not. Confident and self-determining, on the whole your life feels fairly uncomplicated except when inherently complex situations present themselves. When that occurs, you usually meet them head on.

Gurumayi provides a valuable insight about self-confidence.

> Confidence is a delicate term. It is one of those qualities that cannot be understood without humility. The right amount of the right kind of confidence strengthens you. You move forward in your endeavors; you are not afraid to develop your abilities. . . . But overconfidence weakens you; it makes you a laughingstock. In effective first chakra work, you become confident . . . but not overconfident.[3]

The Dark Side of the First Chakra

Issues and Challenges: You search for ways to feel safe, secure, worthy, and relaxed, and strive to follow your own preferences rather than others' designs.

First or Muladhara Chakra

Food, water, physical safety, clothing, shelter, work—when these essentials are lacking, most of us find life to be a challenge (or focusing on chakras to be a

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This is the end of the sample chapters.