

The Poetic Symbolism of the Chakras

The chakra system has a poetic symbolism that we can draw upon to inspire our yoga practice and our creativity. The chakras map out a poetic, symbolic map of our inner solar system, helping us locate the constellations of our own subtle energy system. No one can define exactly what the chakras are or where they are located, so each time you work with the chakras, you are an explorer of inner space.

Each time we meditate upon the chakras and visualise them manifesting within our body, we are creating an interface between the seen material world and the unseen world of subtle energy and spirit. Each time that we tune into and imagine a chakra as a coloured light, a lotus flower, a sacred sound, or an archetype, we are balancing our Sun and Moon energies, bringing heaven down to earth and raising earth up to heaven, and so uniting the visible world of matter with the invisible world of spirit.

There are seven main chakras along the midline of the body. The chakras were envisioned by the Tantric yogis as spinning vortices of psychospiritual energy that formed part of a network of subtle energy found within the human body. The yogis conceived of the chakras as wheels that connected the world of spirit and matter and provided an interface between the heavenly and earthly realms. The Tantric yogis intuited the location of the chakras in the body and through the power of their imagination created an anatomical map of the body's subtle energy system and uncovered its relationship to both the spiritual and material domains. This anatomical description of the subtle energy system is symbolic and poetic and serves to help the yogi to climb the steps to enlightenment, by increasing awareness, and bringing about a transformation that leads to a state of unsurpassed bliss (*ananda*).

This poetic model of the chakras, as opposed to a literal one, gives us the freedom to intuit where the chakras are in the body and to allow our imagination to roam free. We find

that in the silent stillness of meditation, a door opens, leading into the subconscious and universal conscious. In this deeply relaxed, awakened yogic state we gain access to the body's subtle energy centres (chakras) which in turn are a doorway to the soul.

The chakras are wheels or vortices energy that store the universal life force (prana). The actual spelling of chakra is *cakra*, but this spelling is not commonly used. Cakra ('wheel') is derived from the verbal root *car* ('to move'). There are seven main chakras located along the midline of the body between the base of the spinal column and the crown of the head. Some sources wrongly interpret the chakras as nerve plexuses; however, the scriptural testimony of Tantric yogic authorities contradicts this literal interpretation.¹ The chakras are centres of psychospiritual energy that don't precisely correspond to any tangible physical structure.² The chakras are imagined into being by the Tantric yogi as an aid to meditation. The beauty of this interpretation means that each one of us can visualise and create a chakra system that is guided by yogic principles but ultimately uniquely our own, which is in itself a profoundly creative act.

The above excerpt is adapted from the *Chakras for Creativity* book, by Jilly Shipway

¹ Feuerstein, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*, 72-73.

² Budilovsky, Joan, Adamson, Eve, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga*, (Alpha Books, Indianapolis, 2001), 231.