

How to Master Kundalini Meditation

(includes related article) *John Selby*

I was lucky enough to have a grandfather who was himself a deep spiritual master, even though, as an oldtime cattle rancher, he certainly never took on that role in any formal fashion. What he taught, or more precisely what he showed through his own life's example, was that to live life fully, we must learn to let go of all our chronic thought flows, all our convoluted religious concepts, all our superstitious fantasies and theological belief systems--and encounter the depths and heights of spiritual life directly, through immediate experience.

Even while I was getting my doctorate in comparative religions and training in formal therapy traditions, I was still regularly returning to Grandad's ranch to sit quietly with the old man, listen intently when he spoke, and nurture the qualities of contemplation he radiated. In reflection, I can see that his spiritual example was what enabled me to sense immediately, when I first encountered kundalini meditation, that here was a process that offered essential keys for advancing rapidly in spiritual directions.

His example also made me react and pull back from much of the esoteric baggage kundalini authors and teachers often present. If you've heard of kundalini meditation before now, you've almost certainly heard of it as being extremely difficult to master, even downright dangerous to explore.

The truth is that you don't have to adopt any new religious orientation in order to embrace these meditative programs in your own life. Kundalini, which in Sanskrit is traced to the word kundala (which means "coiled"), over generations came to refer to the latent power of spiritual realization buried deep down in the human body, perpetually under pressure to rise up and manifest its ultimate truths, power, and bliss. We need no religious symbology dragging us down in our exploration of our deeper spiritual nature. All we need are core meditative techniques that enable us to quiet our thinking minds so we become still, and know through immediate personal contact our oneness with God--with whatever name we might give to the infinite and yet intimate spiritual presence that lives deep within us.

In the kundalini tradition, there are seven distinct energy centers known to exist in the human body, located up and down the spine and also in the brain itself. In Sanskrit terminology, the energy centers have traditionally been called chakras. These internal energy vortexes are not only grand symbolic notions. They are in fact definite energetic happenings inside each of our bodies--whether we're aware of them or not.

In the ancient Hindu spiritual understanding, these chakras were said to be empowered by a mysterious force called prana, which the human body takes in regularly through breathing. In a more contemporary scientific understanding, the inner energy vortexes empowering the human organism are understood in terms of the electromagnetic dynamics of subatomic physics. The chakras are in fact a primal expression of the cosmic dance described by subatomic physicists as a spontaneous shifting of matter into energy, energy into matter, and matter back to energy again.

As Einstein clearly posited--and ancient yogic masters knew many thousands of years before--our bodies are not just material in nature. They are also quite definitely energetic in nature. Science has amassed considerable knowledge concerning this electromagnetic, bioenergetic functioning of the human body. But scientists are first to admit that they don't really comprehend the underlying forces that generate life.

Scientific instruments can look only so far into the matter-energy continuum before reaching their perceptual limits.

However, as "spiritual experimenters" have known for thousands of years, the human mind itself is in fact capable of focusing directly upon the creative source of life. Consciousness has proven itself to be the ultimate tool for encountering and participating in the underlying forces that empower our lives as we commune directly with the basic scientific realities of life.

Kundalini meditation is a specific, quite precise technique for awakening the conscious mind to the presence of the seven energetic centers--or chakras--in the body. Through focusing regularly on these energy centers, we learn to balance our energetic system for optimum functioning, while also increasing the overall flow of energy through all seven chakras, so that our entire being becomes illumined. There are four primary ways to direct our power of attention toward illuminatory experience. First of all, we can turn our attention inward to our own moment-to-moment sensory experience of being alive in the present moment. We do this by focusing on our breathing, our heartbeat and pulse, the pull of gravity on our bodies, and our spontaneous whole-body awareness in the present moment.

The second technique, or "vehicle," for carrying us deeper into contact with our spiritual selves is to focus our power of attention directly on each of the seven chakras in our bodies so as to stimulate these energy centers into higher, more balanced levels of participation in the infinite dance of life.

The third primary tool is the power of sound vibration--specifically, the power of our own voices to awaken each of the chakras up and down our spines. There are particular sounds, or chants, called mantras in traditional Sanskrit terminology, that are associated with the awakening of each of the energy centers. When we chant these sounds either silently or aloud, we stimulate our deeper spiritual nature into higher levels of consciousness.

The fourth vehicle for kundalini awakening is the use of visual images for activating and balancing each of the chakras. These images, known as mandalas (or yantras) in traditional Hindu practice, provide the essential impetus for chakra activation.

THE SEVEN CHAKRAS

Let's look now more closely at each of the seven chakras.

Often called the "Earth" or "Root Chakra," the first chakra lies at the base of your spine and is the energetic gateway between the organic world of Mother Earth beneath you and the mental and spiritual worlds that can be awakened step-by-step up your spine. Through meditating on this chakra, you help yourself become more grounded, more solid and powerful at physical levels of survival.

The second, or "Sexual Chakra," located in the sexual organs, becomes activated once the work of the first chakra is completed at puberty. Through the awakening of this chakra you move from being a creation of your parents to becoming a creative being who in turn creates the new generation. By doing second-chakra meditations, you will increase your sexual charge and bring a spiritual vitality to your erotic feelings and interactions.

Called the "Power Chakra," the third chakra is associated with fire, with combustion, with anger, joy, and laughter. It is located between the navel and the solar plexus in the body and is said to generate a mythical fire in the belly. It is the energy of the solar system radiating in our personal lives, and like the sun, creates energy for us to burn. This chakra strongly influences the adrenal glands.* By learning to balance

the energy in this chakra you will bring your physical and emotional condition to a point of moderation. Your heartbeat will become even and calm. Your raw willpower will become especially transformed into a higher quality of spiritual presence in the world.

The fourth chakra, the "Heart Chakra," located in the center of the chest, is the guiding light that shows the third chakra how to burn its raw energy in loving ways, shows the second chakra how to manifest its sexual energy through the transmutation of love, and shows the first chakra how to merge the physical with the divine. The Heart Chakra is equidistant between the first and the seventh chakra, between earth and heaven. It is the centerpoint of the primary emotional energy of the universe, which we call love. It balances the chakras above with the chakras below, all of equal importance. The fourth chakra strongly influences the functioning of the thymus gland, located in the center of the chest just behind the upper breastbone. Because this gland directly influences the functioning of our immune system, fourth-chakra balancing and energization can also have a profound effect on our overall health and resistance to disease. The fifth chakra, often called the "Communication Chakra," is located in our throat region--in our larynx and thyroid gland from a physical point of view. This is the center of communication, of talking, of expressing our inner depths of feeling in words that the people around us can understand. Vocalization is one of the main vehicles for kundalini awakening. When I speak of chanting, I speak of activating this fifth chakra and using it to empower the other chakras. In our everyday lives, this chakra is our vehicle for spreading our spiritual realizations to the world around us. This is where we begin to listen to ourselves and realize what we are saying.

The "intuitive Chakra" is the sixth chakra that you find right between and above your eyes. It is traditionally referred to as "The Third Eye." This is the seat of true wisdom, where your thinking mind comes into contact with your intuitive mind. This is where, if you are listening during meditation, God speaks to you directly. The sixth chakra influences the pituitary gland in the brain, and thus determines the entire functioning of the body and mind at high levels. By bringing energy up and down into this center, you can alleviate many depressive patterns and balance the nervous system to help overcome paranoia and distorted perceptions of reality. At lesser levels, headaches can be left behind through energetic balancing of this chakra, as well as nightmares and many visual problems. This chakra is where spiritual balancing heals emotional distortions.

Also called the "Crown Chakra," the seventh chakra, which is located at the top of the head, is light years beyond the lower chakras. The true nature of the seventh chakra is beyond human comprehension. The advice of all my teachers on the kundalini path, and mine to you as well, is not to ever try to push yourself into seventh-chakra consciousness. This experience will come to you when your nervous system is fully prepared for such infinite realization and union with the creative force of the universe. However, in regular meditation, it is important to focus your attention for at least short periods directly on this center so that your energetic system can balance itself and you can open yourself to the inflow of energy from above.

It will, of course, take time for you to learn how to make deep experiential contact with these chakra centers. The purpose here is to help you learn to direct your attention so that you discover for yourself the presence of these energetic centers in your body. The spiritual challenge is to go beyond mental concepts of chakras and energy centers and kundalini upflows and all the rest, and to encounter these realities directly.

CHANTING

I'd like now to look particularly at one of the four vehicles for kundalini meditation: chanting. In his remarkable book, *The Serpent Power*, published in India at the turn of the century, Sir John Woodroffe says that "Japa, the Sanskrit word meaning repetition of a Mantra, can be compared to the action of a man shaking a sleeper to wake him up."

Mantras are verbalizations that we repeat over and over, which have specific effects on our nervous system due to their particular vibratory power and the overall power of the chanting experience itself. If we surrender to the experience of chanting these mantra words, we directly stimulate an awakening of kundalini power in the chakra upon which we are focusing.

Psychologically, the direct effect of chanting is to occupy the verbal part of the brain-body complex so that the usual flow of thoughts is brought to a halt. As Fritjof Capra, in *The Tao of Physics*, puts it, "The basic aim of these techniques (chanting and mandala-contemplation) is to silence the thinking mind and to shift the awareness from the rational to the intuitive mode of consciousness."

To experience a first taste of this quieting of your thinking mind, let's begin to explore the primal yogic chant of OM. Let this sound flow through your mind, and perhaps awaken your vocal cords as well. OM actually becomes four sounds in most traditional meditative practices. Simply let the three vowels, then the consonant, come alive in your body as your lips and tongue move to the various positions to make the sounds: "Aaaaa, Ooooh, Uuuuu,

Notice that as soon as you begin to chant, even silently, your breathing begins to enter the picture as the primary force that empowers your sounds, that manifests your inner intent into actual physiological sound generation. Chanting is in fact a breath meditation.

Obviously, vocalizing is done only on the exhale; on the inhale, you are silent. Therefore, part of your chanting experience is active (on the exhale) and part is passive (on the silent inhale).

This basic pulsation from the extreme of full (inhale) to the extreme of empty (exhale) and back to full again--breath after breath for the entire duration of our lives reflects the universal pulsation found throughout the universe. This pulsation principle is the ultimate principle of the universe. Energy, for instance, is constantly shifting into its equal and opposite, which is matter; matter, certainly at the subatomic level, is constantly shifting into its energetic form. Our breath experience is simply another primal manifestation of this pulsation principle.

It is said in the Sanskrit scriptures that "he who mentally and vocally utters with creative force the natural name of anything, brings into being the thing that bears that name." This belief is also found in the ancient Hebrew tradition of the Old Testament, and in most primitive tribal cultures as well. Words do have power, if invoked with intent.

When, through silent or manifest chanting, you call out the name of the Root Chakra, for example, you are in effect bringing this chakra into existence in your consciousness--you are merging the actual energetic presence of the chakra at the base of your spine with your mind's awareness of this energy center. This is powerful meditation.

The natural name of the Root Chakra, according to the ancient yogis who learned to listen directly to the sound emanating from their awakened chakra, is LAM in the Hindu tradition, and a slightly altered and often more powerful LANG in the Tantric Buddhist tradition of Tibet and Nepal.

With LAM, your lips touch at the end of the chant, bringing the male and female energies into union, thus activating the creative power of the word.

With LANG, something slightly different happens, a creative act between open lips, with a stronger resonance in the body. My teachers have generally counseled me to use the more inner, softer, feminine LAM when I am in a gentle mood, and LANG when I want a stronger energy experience for that meditation.

Hold in mind when you chant a mantra such as LAM or LANG (there are different sounds for each chakra as told below) that you are generating vibrations both within and around you, and that this vibration does not necessarily stop when you stop chanting. In fact, one of the aims of chanting is to stimulate an increased vibratory activity in your chakras for quite some time after the chanting stops. Chanting a particular mantra is a direct way of tuning your entire nervous system to the particular vibrational qualities of each chakra. Again, you are acting through conscious intent to point your mind in directions that have traditionally proven effective for awakening kundalini energy.

THE SEVEN-BREATH MEDITATION

In my book, Kundalini Awakening, I describe in detail a series of basic kundalini meditations as a general spiritual discipline. I also describe in my book a short "seven-breath" chakra-integration meditation that can be done in just a minute or two. With this meditation in hand, there is actually always time to do your kundalini meditations! And often, five such short meditations in the midst of everyday life can be just as significant as a single half-hour or hour meditation done once a day in retreat. The need for regular discipline continues to exist in contemporary society, for finding time to be alone to meditate for at least half an hour a day. But there are many shorter times in each day for doing a brief kundalini meditation, and we should regularly take advantage of such times.

Once this Seven-Breath meditation becomes ingrained into your everyday routines as a spiritual habit, you will find that you can go deeply into kundalini awakening in a very short period of time. In this hectic world, such an approach to meditation is vital, even though traditional meditation teachers would frown at the brevity of the session. I believe, however, that one breath during which you are conscious of your breathing is worth a thousand breaths without such consciousness.

The Seven-Breath meditation is simple---a synthesis of the entire chakra program included in my book. You can do the meditation either standing, sitting, or lying down, working at your desk, digging a ditch, eating a meal, lying in bed, waiting for a dental appointment, or sitting at a board meeting. Pause for one to two minutes ... tune into your breathing experience for a few breaths ... expand to include your heartbeat and whole body here in the present moment... see what energy flows are happening spontaneously in your nervous system

1) On your next breath (the first breath of the formal meditation) chant LAM or LANG as you exhale, either silently or out loud depending on your situation... constrict the sphincter muscle and abdominal muscles to move your attention instantly to the first chakra... as you inhale, allow a beautiful upflow of kundalini energy to begin to rise up through your body... and if your visualization ability is sharp, let the first-chakra mandala come into your mind as well.

2) As you begin your second exhale, shift your attention to your genitals... set your chakras vibrating beautifully with the sexual-chakra chant of VAM or VANG until you are completely empty of air... remain empty a moment as you open yourself to an inflow of kundalini energy higher into your energy system... feel the energy flowing down into you from above at the same time... and as you inhale, let the

energy flows increase... and perhaps visualize the Sexual-Chakra mandala as well while you slowly inhale.

3) Hold your breath at the top of your inhale a moment, so that you again experience your entire energy system as a whole... now let your third exhale begin, moving your attention up into your Power Chakra... chant silently or aloud the third-chakra mantra of RAM or RANG... constrict sphincter muscle and abdominal muscles again as you exhale completely... hold on empty while you feel the vibrations continuing in your system... inhale and let the power mandala come into your mind... be open to the inflow of light and energy from above and below.

4) Hold on full-breath a moment... and now exhale slowly while chanting the fourth-chakra YAM or YANG, focus on the Heart Chakra... you may try raising your arms out to the sides... hold on empty while energy flows through your entire chakra system... and visualize the fourth-chakra mandala as you inhale slowly.

5) Hold at the top of your inhale... let your awareness rise up into your throat... slowly exhale while you chant the fifth-chakra HAM or HANG ... hold on empty and feel your chakras from top to bottom ... visualize the fifth-chakra mandala while you slowly inhale... bring energy up higher and higher.

6) Now hold again at the top, and let your awareness shift up to the third eye between your brows ... exhale while the chant OM vibrates through your entire spiritual being... hold on empty to bring the higher energies and light down deep into your lower chakras ... and as you inhale, visualize the sixthchakra mandala as you let kundalini energy come rushing through your energy system.

7) Hold a long time at the top of your inhale, as you shift your consciousness up to the top of your head, to the Crown Chakra, the union of your personal presence with the infinite presence... be filled with light from above ... and now exhale slowly, allowing a beautiful flood of light and love to come into your body from top to bottom... become empty... let your spiritual consciensness expand infinitely at the same time. Following this seven-breath, seven-chakra meditation, breathe quietly in a spontaneous manner for as long as you like or have time for, so that you live consciously within the heightened energetic reality of your spiritual system.

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* Editors' Note: Author Selby's correspondence of the third chakra with the adrenal glands differs from Dr. Eric Leskowitz's correspondence of the adrenals with the first chakra (see "Modern Science Catches Up with the Yogis," next page). Among the various schools of thought regarding chakras, there remain certain differences of opinion such as this one. Sometimes they arise, Dr. Leskowitz says, because of different conceptions of physiology in the East and the West.

Modern Science Catches Up with the Yogis

The seven primary energy centers--the chakras--were all defined and located by yogis using introspective means; anatomical dissection was forbidden in the Hindu tradition. The yogis especially used meditations that refined awareness of subtle bodily sensations to develop their map of man's subtle anatomy. Although there are minor discordances between the chakra maps used in various derivative schools of thought, it is interesting to note that all seven major centers correspond in location rather precisely to the seven primary endocrine glands (see diagram below), which include two glands--the pineal and the thymus--whose functions were unknown until quite recently.

The correlations do not stop there. The chakra sites were each thought to govern the expression of one particular emotion. The emotions progressed from concrete survival-oriented functions in the lower centers to subtle spiritual functions in the higher centers. The emotions ranged hierarchically from sexuality in the gonads (or sacral center) to compassion in the sternum (or heart center) to insight in the brow (or third eye center). To use William Tiller's electronics metaphor, these energy centers function as stepdown transformers, and presumably transduce universal life energy into physiologically usable chemical messages through the mediation of the appropriate endocrine hormones. The table below identifies the psychological attribute and the endocrine correspondence of each energy site.

Several findings in modern psychoendocrinology suggest that these are not simply fanciful correlations, but deep and significant connections. For example, the survival (root) center in yoga relates to the adrenal gland, which mediates Hans Selye's "stress response" [also called the fight-or-flight response]. The brow center of inner mystic vision relates to the modern notion of hypnotic susceptibility, which is now measured clinically by an eye-roll test that closely resembles a yogic meditation to activate the third eye. The crown center, which linked each yoga practitioner to the cosmos, is now known to be the locus for the pineal gland's synchronization of circadian rhythms to the sun's 24-hour-day light cycle, literally connecting each individual to the universe by a concrete biochemical pathway.

Given such associations, several research questions arise regarding these centers. One general question is whether specific meditations or visualizations can, in fact activate specific endocrine glands, as is suggested by yoga guidelines. We already know that there are nonspecific endocrine effects from unfocused meditations like TM [Transcendental Meditation] or the relaxation response (particularly, acute increases in prolactin and longer-term decreases in growth hormone). Can psychoendocrine feedback interactions between mental image and endocrine gland be made specific enough to become clinically useful? For example, can an underactive thyroid gland be stimulated by throat chakra meditations, or can an overly responsive adrenal be calmed by appropriate root chakra imagery?

A second general question is whether this paradigm might shed any light on the burgeoning field of psychoneuroimmunology. For example, is there a relation between thymic (heart chakra) activation of T-lymphocytes and the psychological process of opening the heart against despair and loneliness? Could such an interaction help explain the widespread finding that social interconnectedness protects against all manner of illness, from infectious to neoplastic to cardiovascular? In other words, does love activate the thymus?

A third question might seek an endocrine-mediated explanation for the ancient mystic practice of hermitage in caves to achieve enlightenment. That is, what might be the effect of total darkness on pineal function in sleep?

A second key aspect of the yoga energy model is the concept of an energy field. It was held that an enlightened being had an extensive field of influence that affected all in his presence by virtue of his superabundant supply of prana (life energy), while unevolved people had a much more restricted energetic impact on their environment. Today, it is common to talk of someone "radiating" health or of protecting one's "personal space." Is there, in fact, a detectable electromagnetic field that explains these notions?

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Endocrine Energy Center Correspondences
ENDOCRINE ENERGY CENTER EMOTION

GLAND (CHAKRA)

(7) Pineal Crown Bliss

(6) Pituitary Brow Intuition

(5) Thyroid Throat Creativity

(4) Thymus Heart Love

(3) Pancreas Solar Plexus Power

(2) Gonads Sacral Sexuality

(1) Adrenal Root Fear