

Chakra Practices

A few examples of how to strengthen and restore the *Chakras*

I. Introduction:

Working with the *Chakras* can be very useful for creating a life of well-being.

For example, consider the first *Chakra*, *Muladhara*. This is our foundational *Chakra*, the place we build a basic confidence necessary to thrive. To maximize our life experience we need self-confidence. Self-confidence frees us to view the world with clarity, unhampered by negative thoughts and emotions, whether about others or ourselves, that prevent connection.

Viewing the world with this kind of clarity involves building emotional resilience. By way of review, this means we do the work necessary to: 1) overcome childhood obstacles, such as abuse or poverty; 2) deal with everyday stresses such as arguments with friends, problems at work, and financial pressures; 3) work through life-altering events such as death of a loved one, loss of a job, or a divorce; and 4) learn to apply resilience to “reach out so that you can achieve all you are capable of.”¹

When we are able to engage the world without the dead weight of bias, judgments, prejudices, fears, and anger, we are much better able to fully experience each moment. We are better able to recognize and experience positive emotions.

This foundational work helps us find the courage to do the self-study necessary to discover our particular strengths. Once we discover and develop our strengths, we are far more likely to find engaging and meaningful activities. We cultivate the skills necessary to develop and maintain nurturing relationships. We develop empathy and see how we are all connected to each other. This makes it easier to identify opportunities to serve others and, by doing so, live a life of purpose.

How do we work with the *Chakras*? Fortunately, there are some tremendous resources to assist us, including two books by Dr. Anodea Judith: *Wheels of Life*² and *Eastern Body, Western Mind*.³ In both books Dr. Judith offers valuable information about the energies of each *Chakra* and suggests ways to help us strengthen and, as required, restore the energies of each *Chakra*.

¹Reivich, Dr. Karen and Dr. Andrew Shatte (2002). *The Resilience Factor, 7 Keys To Finding Your Inner Strengths and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, at 15.

² Judith, Anodea (2004 ed.). *Wheels of Life*. St.Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications.

³ Judith, Anodea (2004 ed.). *Eastern Body, Western Mind*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

Today we take a brief look at some examples, including practices offered by Dr. Judith. These practices are a way to help us connect to the power of the *Chakras*. If this subject is of interest to you, strongly consider getting these or other books for yourself.

II. First *Chakra*: *Muladhara*, the “root” *Chakra*.

The function of *Muladhara Chakra*, located at the base of the spine, is survival and grounding.⁴ Its purpose is to create the foundation we need as a human being in order to thrive in the world.⁵

- A. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith suggests a grounding meditation in which she asks the reader to sit in a chair and then guides the reader into proper alignment. From this position, she then provides cues to help the reader ground into the earth, the element associated with this *Chakra*, establishing a sense of strong foundation.⁶
- B. From my experience, the seemingly simple practice of grounding helps me when I find myself in a stressful situation. By rooting down into the floor (this is, after all, the “root” *Chakra*) I’ve learned to associate that action with my own personal power.
 - 1. The power comes from the lessons learned from the people who raised me, taught me, coached me, or otherwise interacted with me in ways that helped me grow into an independent person.
 - 2. The power also comes from the love and support of many people and each time I root into the ground, or floor, I am reminded of that love and support.
 - 3. The power also comes from my own hard-earned work, academically, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. It comes from the knowledge that I’ve had the courage to examine my own behavior and take responsibility for it, even as I worked to modify patterns of thought and behavior so as to live more gracefully.
- C. The next time you find yourself about to get into an argument or say something that might be hurtful, press your feet into the ground and take a few breaths. As you root yourself firmly into the solid floor, summon memories of all the support of others that you know have been there for you. Allow yourself the space of just a few seconds to absorb those memories, restoring your sense of confidence to the point that you don’t need to say something out of fear, insecurity, or other

⁴ *Wheels of Life*, at 58.

⁵ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 52; see also, Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 209–210.

⁶ *Wheels of Life*, at 86–87.

unhelpful emotion. Let this action of returning to your foundation help you avoid saying something that moves you away from positive emotion, away from the cultivation of a meaningful relationship.

- D. A Midline Practice: Bring to mind something you've done by way of study, work experience, or some other effort, to create the foundation in your life. Spend two minutes recalling that work⁷ (to deepen memories of the powerful foundation you have created for yourself; enhancing your self-confidence).

To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith offers several recommendations, including simply standing in proper alignment. She says that standing this way is an assertion of our personal power, teaching us to stand up for ourselves.⁸ Again, as I mentioned, this simple act helps us remember our own power and capabilities.

III. **Second Chakra: *Swadhisthana*, the “sweetness” *Chakra*.**

The function of this *Chakra*, located at the sacrum, is desire, pleasure, sexuality, and procreation.⁹ Its purpose is movement and connection, critical components for finding our purpose in the world, as well as developing and maintaining healthy relationships.¹⁰

- A. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith suggests a water meditation. Water is the element associated with this *Chakra* in part because water represents movement. She offers a water meditation involving drinking a glass of water as she cues the reader to certain feelings created with that action.¹¹
- B. Another practice that I've used is to visualize a stream, something every yoga student has been asked to do numerous times! I visualize a powerful current in a narrow mountain stream, maybe three to five feet wide. I watch the water forcefully flowing, unimpeded, until it faces a large rock sitting on the shallow riverbed. The water doesn't stop its flow when confronted by the rock. At the same time, the rock certainly doesn't get up and leave so the water can have its way. Rather, the rock sits, because it is a strong, heavy rock. As a result, the water parts its way and flows around the rock, continuing to move downstream, even more powerful for having to focus and coalesce its energy.

⁷ Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC, at 210.

⁸ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 96–97.

⁹ *Wheels of Life*, at 106.

¹⁰ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 104.

¹¹ *Wheels of Life*, at 135.

1. This is how we develop nurturing relationships. People in nurturing relationships don't impede each other's flow. Instead, they cause each other to accommodate.
 2. In nurturing relationships we honor each other, serving as mirrors for each other's potential.
- C. A Midline Practice: Recall a situation in which you reevaluated your viewpoint in some way in order to allow a relationship with somebody to flourish.¹² (To strengthen your recollection of the value of reaching accommodation where possible to favorably resolve disputes)

To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith writes that healing this *Chakra* involves finding balance in the movement of our emotions, encouraging our excesses or deficiencies to move toward the center. We identify restricted patterns of emotional movement as well as patterns where such movement is excessive.¹³

IV. Third *Chakra*: *Manipura*, the “lustrous gem.”

The function of this *Chakra*, located in the area of the solar plexus, is development of self-esteem and personality, as well as willpower and assertiveness.¹⁴ Its purpose is transformation.¹⁵

- A. To bring more positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships into our lives, we necessarily have to study ourselves to identify what holds us back. Then we need the courage to take the steps necessary to transform our patterns of thought and behavior, making changes in them as needed. We have to overcome whatever is causing us to hold on to ill-serving patterns of thought, including our biases, prejudices, and fears.
- B. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith suggests a breathing exercise called “Breath of Fire.” To do this, a person sits in an upright position and engages in a form of breath work cued by Dr. Judith. This connects the person doing the exercise to the Fire element, representative of the heat and light of transformation.¹⁶
- C. Another practice involves standing in a solid foundation, feet hips width apart and pointed straight ahead. Hug the shins towards each other and, keeping that, take

¹² *Finding the Midline*, at 212.

¹³ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 150–151.

¹⁴ *Wheels of Life*, at 150.

¹⁵ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 166.

¹⁶ *Wheels of Life*, at 176.

the upper inner thighs back toward the wall behind you. With the thighbones back, extend your buttocks flesh down towards the floor and use that energy to lift and extend the arms overhead. As you push from the hips down, extend the arms up. At the same time, recite the seed sound Ram. Repeat several times.

- D. A Midline Practice: Think of an example where somebody pushed or prodded you to do something you felt resistance to doing, and now in hindsight you can see that your choice to do what they urged you to do has benefited you.¹⁷ (To reinforce your appreciation of the need to engage in self study so as to recognize patterns of resistance to potentially beneficial opportunities)

To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith recommends, among other suggestions, that her clients give up being attached to feeling safe.¹⁸

V. **Fourth Chakra: Anahata, the “unstruck” Chakra.**

The function of this *Chakra*, located at the heart, is love.¹⁹ Its purpose is love and balance.²⁰

- A. As I write in my book, *Finding the Midline*, to live a life of well-being we ultimately have to decide if we are going to the view everybody as separate from us—not our problem—or, instead, as individual, unique expressions of Spirit living in the world in many diverse forms.
1. If we choose the latter viewpoint, we stop drawing lines as to which people we care about and which ones we allow to be thrown to the wolves.
 2. We stop drawing those lines because making such distinctions ultimately diminishes our capacity for love. We either are love or we are not.²¹
- B. Once we make a choice to be love, our choices automatically move us into a life of well-being. When our mind is, by default, operating out of inclusion instead of separation, we aren’t hampered by rote responses of fear, anger, envy, and jealousy. We don’t view everybody with an attitude of scarcity. Freed of these powerfully inhibiting feelings we are open to experiencing more positive emotion. We recognize the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities. We become somebody whom others wish to befriend. Life becomes full.

¹⁷ *Finding the Midline*, at 215.

¹⁸ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 216.

¹⁹ *Wheels of Life*, at 190.

²⁰ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 222.

²¹ Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 216–217.

- C. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith suggests a deep breathing exercise in which we make our inhalations and exhalations full and watch the breath.²² This helps connect us to the Air element, associated with this *Chakra* and representative of knowledge, openness, and spaciousness.²³ These qualities are essential to creating increased sense of awareness of life's Midlines, those opportunities to bring into our life a rich experience.²⁴
- D. Another practice is performing *Ustrasana*, Camel's Pose, while reciting this *Chakra*'s seed sound, Yam. To do this pose, knee on the floor on a carpet, mat, or blanket, with the knees inner-hips width apart, toes pointed backward on the floor. Place the palms on the hips. Keeping the thighbones moving backward, extend the buttocks flesh down towards the floor as you lift the chest.

Alternatively, while doing that pose, or while seated, envision persons to whom you are grateful, place that vision in front of you and, on each exhale send your breath in their direction.
- E. A Midline Practice: Think back to a time when you saw a stranger in trouble and you helped or, conversely, when a stranger lent you a hand when you needed help.²⁵ (To build compassion, a key attribute of a fully developed *Anahata Chakra*)
- F. To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith suggests a number of exercises, including an interesting visualization practice in which the reader imagines somebody, a "fantasy" person, such as an ideal parent or lover. She then guides the reader through an exercise in which the reader infuses their cells with the feelings associated with this fantasy, using these feelings to help recharge this *Chakra*.²⁶

²² *Wheels of Life*, at 216.

²³ *Wheels of Life*, at 196.

²⁴ See, generally, *Finding the Midline*.

²⁵ *Finding the Midline*, at 217.

²⁶ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 281.

VI.

Fifth Chakra: Visuddha, the “purification” Chakra.

The function and purpose of this *Chakra*, located in the throat, is communication and creativity.²⁷ This *Chakra* is associated with the Space element because sound represents the energetic field of vibrations that make up our universe.²⁸

- A. We use sound and words to experience and create our world. This *Chakra* is critical to creating a life of well-being because it is involved with issues of communication, creativity, listening and finding our own voice in the world.²⁹
- B. Part of “finding our own voice” is identifying and then embracing our particular signature skills and then using them in a way that serves others. We become more valued as a friend because of our ability to effectively communicate with others.
- C. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith suggests playing charades because of its ability to build communication skills. She also suggests taking vows of silence, even if just for a short while, so as to open up other senses, allowing us to tune in to what is going on around us.³⁰
- D. Another practice to help build communication skill is to monitor the next ten emails you compose before you send them. Look for ways that your choice of words or even sequencing of words or sentences could possibly be received in a way you don’t intend.
- E. A Midline Practice: Think of a time when somebody touched your heart by what they said or perhaps even how they said it. Why do you think this person was able to touch you this way?³¹ (To help build a deeper understanding of the power of communication)
- F. To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith recommends, among other suggestions, a deep listening exercise in which the reader sits in a quiet place and identifies as many sounds as he or she can.³²

²⁷ *Wheels of Life*, at 234; *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 286.

²⁸ *Wheels of Life*, at 241–243.

²⁹ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 286.

³⁰ *Wheels of Life*, at 266.

³¹ *Finding the Midline*, at 219.

³² *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 325.

VII. Sixth Chakra: Ajna, the “command” Chakra.

The function of this *Chakra*, located in the center of the head slightly above eye level, is seeing and intuition.³³ Its purpose is pattern recognition.³⁴

A. This *Chakra* is associated with light because we learn about the world through the way we perceive, visually and psychically.³⁵

1. When we see patterns, we are able to see how things interconnect.
2. This ability allows us to “see” how a particular situation would benefit from our particular gifts, giving us the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution.
3. By seeing connections we become more sensitive to the ramifications of cause and effect. We think before we speak. If we take action, we have a better sense of possible unintended consequences.
 - a. When people live in awareness, they can sometimes seem psychic. For example, some attorneys are trained to consider potential adverse outcomes and take safeguards to protect clients from them. When they do this they are sharpening their psychic skills.
 - b. Similarly, life experiences increase our wellspring of knowledge. This, in turn, gives us more information to assist us in seeing potential outcomes of what we say and do. For example, if, every New Year’s Eve, we drink to excess, we can pretty well predict into the future that we will have a hangover on New Year’s day.
 - c. That said, verified examples of psychic ability abound. Our failure to have experienced one for ourselves may be attributable to blockage at this *Chakra*. How would we know if we are, in fact, blocked?

B. To strengthen this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith recommends several mediation exercises, as well as a photo blink exercise to help us improve our visual observation skills.³⁶ This involves looking at a person, then opening and closing the eyes, then observing what arises in our mind.

³³ *Wheels of Life*, at 279.

³⁴ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 338.

³⁵ *Wheels of Life*, at 282.

³⁶ *Wheels of Life*, at 308.

- C. I find that it helps me to spend some time reading or watching movies about our various mythological heroes. These characters became mythological heroes because of something inspiring about them. Not only do they inspire us but they also help us learn how to think in metaphor. Thinking in metaphor assists us in learning how to see one thing and, from one thing, draw a connection to something else.
1. Yoga lore provides great examples, such as Hanuman, the Monkey God of the *Ramayana*. It is difficult to read about Hanuman without being inspired to be a more loyal person to those worthy of such loyalty.
 2. After watching a movie about Robin Hood, I was moved to think about the value of such a courageous person standing up for the masses in the face of abuse by those in power. Thinking about this character inspires me to be more courageous about these issues as they exist today.
- D. A Midline Practice: Think of something you do each day on a regular basis, a hobby, your job, a sport activity, or something else, where the initial inspiration to try that activity came from watching somebody else.³⁷ (To build our capacity to see connections through tracing our experiences to the initial inspiration)
- E. To restore this *Chakra*, Dr. Judith recommends, among other suggestions, dream work, the study of mythology, and visualization exercises.³⁸

VIII. Seventh Chakra: Sahasrara, the “thousand fold” Chakra.

The function and purpose of this *Chakra*, located at the top of the head, is to fully understand; to see the Divine imprint in everything.³⁹ “Understanding” in this context means a divine intelligence by which we see the underlying purpose and connection of everything.⁴⁰

- A. *Sahasrara Chakra* is associated with the bliss of pure consciousness and spiritual connection.
1. The higher mental functions of Buddhi occur here and the full potential of this *Chakra* is mystical experience and illumination.⁴¹

³⁷ *Finding the Midline*, at 221.

³⁸ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 375-387.

³⁹ *Wheels of Life*, at 317; *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 390.

⁴⁰ *Wheels of Life*, at 319.

⁴¹ Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1998). *Tantra, The Path of Ecstasy*. Boston, MA: Shamghala Publications, Inc., at 151–152.

2. When this *Chakra* is open, we no longer view the world through separation. .
 3. The opening of this *Chakra* allows us to see the underlying order of everything.⁴²
- B. To strengthen this *Chakra* Dr. Judith suggests an exercise in which a person follows a thought back to its origin.⁴³
- C. I practice looking for the manifestation of Supreme Consciousness in the innumerable expressions of ingenuity all around us. Consider modern surgical devices that allow medical personnel to look inside our colon and other places and actually perform healing. Look at the incredible creativity in some architecture, poetry, or in how a mystery writer weaves a spellbinder. Listen to the magic of certain music.
- D. A Midline Practice: Spend two minutes contemplating how many amazing things any modern invention of your choice does for you. Consider the thought and creativity that resulted in its existence.⁴⁴ (To illustrate for us the divine beauty of each of us as manifested through ingenuity)
- E. To restore this *Chakra* Dr. Judith writes that this *Chakra* involves recognizing the reality of our spiritual nature.⁴⁵ She recommends a number of exercises, including sitting quietly and relaxing, being open to whatever thoughts arise.⁴⁶

⁴² *Wheels of Life*, at 319.

⁴³ *Wheels of Life*, at 340–341.

⁴⁴ *Finding the Midline*, at 223.

⁴⁵ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 421.

⁴⁶ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 423.

IX. Conclusion.

Studying the *Chakras* is a great way to recognize where we hold patterns of thought and behavior that get in the way of creating a life of well-being. This is also a valuable way of enhancing our ability to connect to our own inner strengths as well as with each other.

At the end of *Eastern Body, Western Mind* Dr. Judith includes a section entitled “Putting It All Together” in which she outlines a chart method for the reader to use for assessing which *Chakras* are excessive or deficient. This can be an important tool for the reader to use in order to delve into *Chakra* work.⁴⁷

We now turn to the “bible” of yoga, Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras.

⁴⁷ *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, at 443–450.