

Aligning Your Chakras

By JJ Gormley-Etchells

My teaching fuses the chakras—comprising the seven main energetic centers of the body—with traditional yoga postures or asanas to bring a greater awareness and mindfulness in your practice. When working with the chakras in your asana practice, you can also bring in elements from the chakras to look at your body/mind/soul in a more holistic manner.

Through a lot of experimentation on my own body, then in working with other students of mine, I've found how much the energetic body (chakras) are integrated and can be integrated in to your yoga practice which includes not only the asanas, but more importantly, your breath practice in asana and separately (pranayama) and to use the information your are learning in this process (svadhyaya) to begin or develop further your meditation practice.

Many years ago, I became familiar with the chakras from a kundalini yoga teacher. Informed by my left-brain training in mathematics, I was dubious about the whole notion. Chakras simply could not be proven.

Somewhere along the way, I opened my narrow thinking to allow that perhaps there may be some energy vortices (acupuncture points) somewhere on or in the body that are accessible. Somewhere else along the way (in physics class) I learned of vortex energy and that it

occurs from things flowing along curved lines. Take, for example, whirlpools or eddies created as a river bends and twists on its way to the ocean and the spine with its cerebral-spinal fluid (CSF). Then it becomes much clearer that such energy paths are more than just fanciful new-age notions. In fact, they were talked about thousands of years ago and so are a very old age notion. Coupled with the knowledge that as medicine and science continue to develop new technologies, those very technologies have always proven what the ancient yogis knew. I'm waiting for the technology to develop to the point of being able to see or prove the existence of these energy centers along the spine called chakras. (By the way, the word is correctly pronounced with the ch as in chair, not champagne, in fact all c's in Sanskrit are pronounced that way, otherwise it would be spelled with an s of which there are 3 different ones.)

As the chakra system became more sensible to me in the mid-1980s, I started patterning alignment cues that I learned from all my teachers into the various chakra areas of the body. Much of my initial work on the chakras and alignment was unconscious and decidedly undocumented, but as it began to take on a more conscious manifestation, particularly over the last several years, I began to think more systematically about the chakra-alignment relationship.

Today, the alignment that I teach in my classes and workshops essentially consists of two movements at each of the main chakra centers on the body. Broadly, these movements oppose each other and require first that we discover the movement that we have been

habitually doing over the years. Then we work to correct that movement to bring balance to that particular chakra. Therefore, the alignment instruction is appropriate for every body, some bodies needing more of one movement, while others need more of the opposite movement. And, as our body changes (through our yoga practice), we must watch to see if we are still in need of the same movement or if we have perhaps crossed over the balance point and may now need more of the opposite movement.

I haven't enough space here to talk about each of the seven chakras and their related movements. I've created a DVD explaining the alignment of the chakras. For now, I'd simply like to talk about the relationship between our body patterns and stuck energy. Keep in mind that doing yoga will help to release these old patterns and unblock stuck energy.

The way we've habitually patterned our bodies to move over the years has created the energy blockages or openness at particular chakra areas. For example, someone who habitually moves with a tucked pelvis has created a blocked first chakra, and will often manifest issues associated with the first chakra: fears, phobias, excessive concerns about security and stability. Until we are able to balance our body and release the old patterns and stuck energy, we may chronically continue facing the same concerns. Of course, we can also make changes in the emotional body through essential work with a therapist or just a sensitive shoulder to cry on. These efforts, in turn, may cause our body to shift.

Simply by looking at your posture when you are upset, depressed, tired, or fatigued, you can observe how the body and emotions are related. The body doesn't lie; it invariably expresses what the emotional body is feeling. A slumped spine and rounded shoulders may indicate fatigue or depression. This is a sign that the body is trying to protect the heart. The raised chin held sufficiently high to hold the head upright so as not to stare at the floor is really the body trying to open the throat to unleash stuck energy.

The whole idea of moving from the periphery of the body toward the core really can be seen at the solar plexus. Blocked energy here affects our ability to draw toward the core at this chakra without impeding our breath. Once we are able to find this, the asana seems to come out of nowhere. This underscores the idea in the sutras that the pose be steady and comfortable. For example, open your back ribs and invite the breath there while at the same time, opening the front ribs with a toned belly. That is the alignment of the 3rd chakra: circumferential expansion of the ribcage. The energies of third chakra represent our self-image, self-empowerment, determination, and will power.

If you are interested in this kind of depth in your practice, please come to a class, workshop, or retreat with me. You can view my schedule on my website: www.SuryaChandraHealingYoga.com

Namaste,

