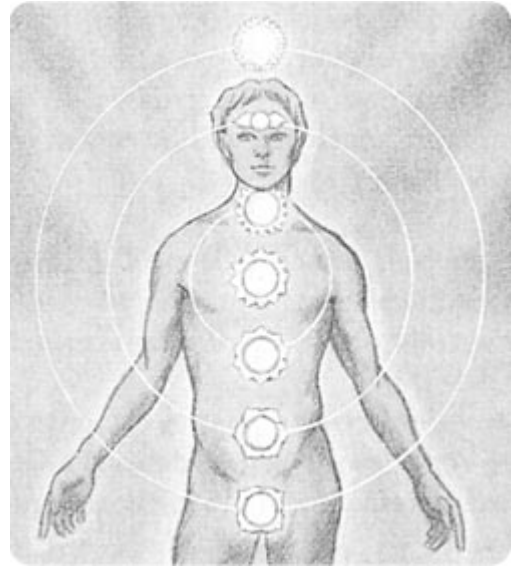


Yoga Psychology

The great Yogi and Guru, P.R. Sarkar (aka Shrii Shrii Anandamurti), incorporated **asanas** into his revitalized Tantra-based system of practice also known as Raja'Dhi'Raja yoga. Sarkar clearly gave meditation, rather than physical posture, the priority in his system. Nevertheless, he considered **asanas** an essential complement to the meditation practice and explained the important role asanas have in helping to **balance the body-mind**. He called the practice "**bio-psychology**".



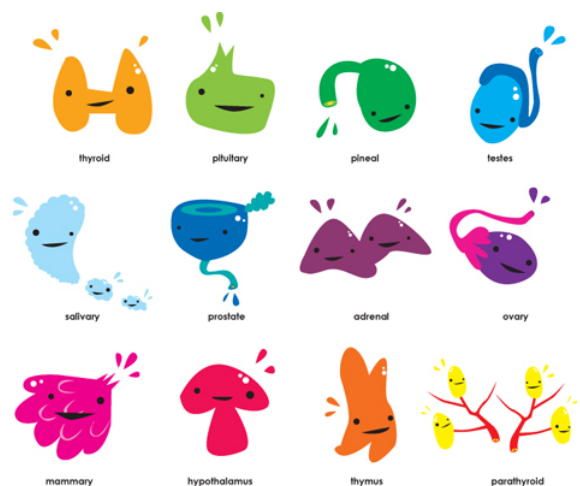
"By performing asanas regularly," said Sarkar, "human beings can **control the propensities** attached to each cakra, and hence the thoughts which arise in their minds and their behaviors."

What is the basis of Sarkar's biopsychology? To begin this explanation, some Sanskrit words need to be explained. Let's start with one most people have heard: cakra (often spelled "chakra"). Cakra means "**wheel**" in Sanskrit. There are **seven main chakras** in the body.

Research has confirmed the existence of energy fields at the areas of the body the yogis have called chakras.

- Valerie Hunt, a researcher at UCLA, found that there are **high frequency vibrations** emanating from these seven areas.
- Another researcher, Hiroshi Motoyama in Japan, found that when people directed their mental focus to individual chakras, they could **increase the frequency** of that particular area.
- Candace Pert, a leader in the field of psycho-neuro-immunology, discovered a high concentration of a specific **neuropeptide** at the location of the chakras. This neuropeptide, called VIP (vasoactive intestinal peptide), is critical in **regulating the neural immune switches** between the brain and the immune system.

Sarkar said that chakras are related to **nerve plexi** - networks in the autonomic nervous system that run near the spine. These are places where nerves converge and form a network, allowing for **complex communication** between nerve cells and the generation of more complex functional activity. These nerve plexi are the physiologic counterpart which help create the **subtle energy** of the chakras.



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The cakras are also associated with **endocrine glands**. The yogis called these glands "**nodal points**." Science has recently recognized the close functional relationships between the endocrine system and the nervous system - so much so that both systems together are now referred to as the **neuro-endocrine system**. The relationship between

mood and the nervous system has long been understood and has even entered the vernacular with expressions like, "It gets on my nerves" or "You have some nerve!" Hormones secreted by the endocrine glands also have a profound effect on our moods - as any woman who's experienced PMS or low thyroid function can attest. The yogis understood when the nerve plexi and endocrine glands functioned properly, the mind was balanced, the body felt better and meditation became easier - in other words, **balanced cakras equal a balanced mind**.

Balancing the cakras through yoga postures is the key to balancing mental/emotional states. Excessive or inadequate secretion from the endocrine glands results in triggering receptors in centers in the brain which **exaggerate emotional states**. Similarly, a weak nervous system can cause a variety of imbalanced mental/emotional state. By doing specific yoga postures regularly, we can regulate the function of the neuroendocrine system and thereby balance the cakras.

The tantric yogis taught that each cakra was like a lotus flower surrounded by a specific number of petals. They called these petals the **vrttis (also spelled "vritti")**. A vrtti is a **mental tendency or propensity - a potential state of mind**. You have probably seen drawings of yogis sitting in lotus position with their many-petaled cakras. This image gives us a symbolic idea of the energy patterns the cakras and vrttis create.

The six lower cakras have a total of 50 petals. These petals represent the **50 main vrttis or vortices of psychic energy**. Some of the 50 Sanskrit terms can be roughly translated as "fear", "irritability", "greed", "hypocrisy", "hope", "affection", "surrender."

The four petals of the **first cakra** represent all the **desires of human life**: physical, mental, psycho-spiritual and spiritual (kama, artha, dharma and moksa in Sanskrit).

The **second cakra's vrttis** express the **darker side of human nature** such as pitilessness, indifference, self-indulgence and cruelty.

The **third cakra's vrttis**, such as irritability, shame, lethargy and craving, are perhaps the **biggest challenge to our human potential**.

The **fourth cakra's vrttis** reflect our **higher capacities for both beauty and destruction** such as hope, love, and effort and conversely greed, arrogance and hypocrisy.

The **fifth cakra** contains vrttis which elevate us to the sublime, such as altruism, universality and surrender to a higher power.

The **sixth cakra's vrttis** speak to our capacity for **limitless knowledge**.

These cakras, with their distinct vrtti petals, create specific patterns of **psychic energy**. A person with a problem with depression, for example, would manifest a specific distorted pattern of energy within different cakras, depending on which vrttis contribute to their specific state of depression. Since different people manifest depression in different ways,



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each person would have a distortion in their energy pattern based on his/her own specific way of manifesting that imbalance.

So now we've looked at cakras and vrttis, let's look at the word samskara. **Samskara** is a Sanskrit term which means "reactive-momentum." Why do two people who face the exact same challenge respond differently? Why does losing a child cause one person to create a support group, develop a scholarship fund, volunteer at a local school, and find a deep inner peace while it causes another person to sink into deep despair, become bitter and withdrawal from his or her relationships? Why, when these two people have experienced the same event, are the patterns of psychic energy they express so different?



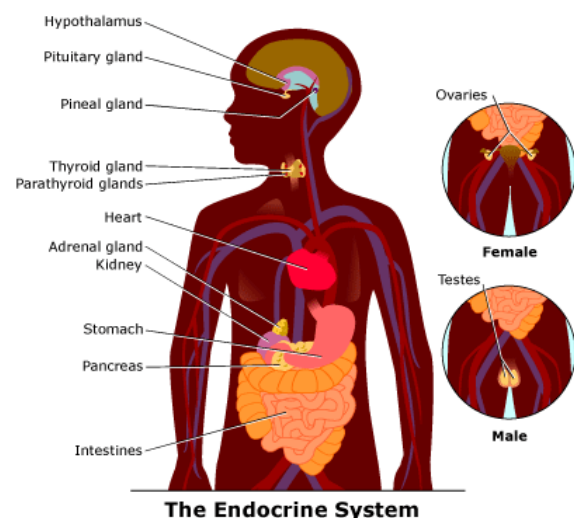
According to yoga philosophy, we bring certain samskaras into the world with us when we are born. People often call this concept **karma**, and it is much the same idea. We all come into this world with **different sets of challenges, or different samskaras**. These samskaras help dictate which vrttis will be activated in us and cause mental imbalance. The two people who lost a child have come into this world with very different samskaras that have caused them to react differently to the same event.

So what is happening when you find yourself continually having challenges around a particular emotion? Say for example, you find you are getting irritated at all sorts of little things that normally wouldn't bother you. Or perhaps you have suddenly developed a tremendous fear of public speaking. Both of these scenarios are symptoms of **imbalance**. The psychic patterns of cakra energy, distorted by samskara and activated vrttis as well have created the imbalance in the emotional state.

Western science has given us the ability to look at how these energies relate to our physiology. Candace Pert's research on psycho-neuro-immunology has been groundbreaking in showing how **mental/emotional states are produced all over the body and are not confined to the brain**. Pert explains that nerve cells have long finger-like endings which reach out and send neuropeptides to other cells. When we are sad, the nerves produces neuropeptides that promote sadness and send that chemical to all the cells in the body, so that every cell in the body becomes sad--your skin is sad, your bones are sad, your toes are sad; literally, the whole body is sad.

An imbalance in the cakra/vritti creates an energy field that is picked up by very subtle nerve currents (nadiis in Sanskrit). The mind field becomes perturbed, which in turn stimulates or inhibits the secretion of the endocrine gland associated with that particular cakra causing an over- or under-secretion of **hormone** which then activates a certain **physical/emotional response**.

Specific yoga postures can help strengthen the endocrine glands and nerves associated with the particular imbalanced cakras.



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If you have an imbalance of the fear vritti, you can use postures which primarily balance the third cakra (see sidebar). Specific **asanas** held for specific periods of time put sustained, alternating pressure on the **endocrine glands** and help them to function better through facilitating **blood circulation**. The better functioning glands begin to shift the energy field of the cakra, helping to bring the disturbed vrittis (hormone secretion) into **balance**.



There is a tremendous need individually and collectively to achieve balance in our body-minds. So much of what is happening in the world at present tells us that yoga's timeless gifts are invaluable to us in the here and now. Biopsychology gives us the tools to begin to change the things that dissatisfy us about the world within ourselves first. All of us are seeking to unblock the energy of our fourth chakra, our **heart chakra**, and allow **compassion, magnanimity, and love to flow freely**. There is a deep, collective force within us that **wants to surmount our lower vrittis and merge with**

others and with all of life. This is both the greatest desire of the human heart and its greatest challenge.

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Special Thanks to the following website for their photography:

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- iheartguts.wordpress.com
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- kidshealth.org