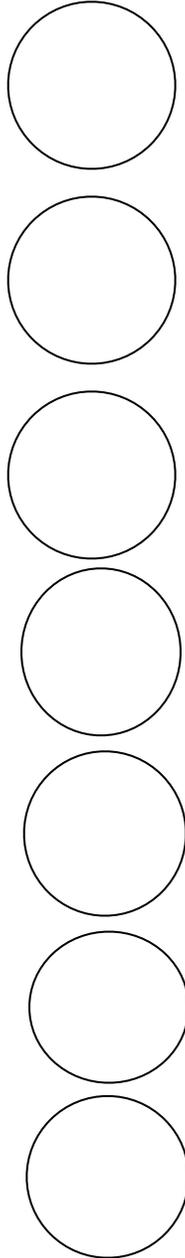


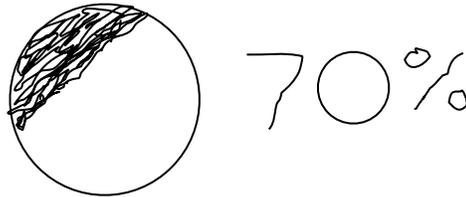
The Chakragram

On an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper, draw seven circles in a line, like this:



For each circle, I'll pose one or two questions about how open or closed you feel in a certain way. If you feel entirely open, leave the circle as it is. If you feel entirely closed, color in the circle completely.

Color in the circle to the extent you feel closed, and then write the percentage that remains open to the right of the circle. Remember, the percentage you're writing is the degree to which the circle remains uncolored and open. Here's an example:



For this circle, the person responding feels 70 percent open and 30 percent closed.

To the left of the bottom circle, write "one". Here are the questions for this circle: **How much do I feel secure, solid, and grounded in life? To what extent have I said yes to being alive?**

Without thinking too much about it, color in the circle to the degree that you feel closed – that is, not secure about being alive. Write the percentage that the circle is open to the right of the circle.

Got the idea? Now move up to the circle just above the bottom one and label it "two". Here is the question: **How much pleasure do I take in being alive?** Color in the circle and record the percentage uncolored to the right.

Questions for the third circle up, number "three": **To what extent am I able to get what I need? To what degree do I feel strong and capable?** Again, color in the circle and record the percentage uncolored.

“Four”, the fourth circle up: **How fully can I feel? How much do I touch others, and they me?**

“Five”, the fifth circle up: **To what extent can I express myself freely, communicate well, present my truth?**

“Six”, the sixth circle up: **How open and curious is my mind?**

“Seven”, the top circle: **How completely do I feel connected to something beyond myself, to a greater sense of being?**

That completes your Chakrogram. In order to help you understand it, I need to make a few introductory comments:

The Chakrogram is a clinical tool I’ve been using for quite a few years. It also makes a wonderful self-assessment. It’s based on the ancient Hindu chakra system, which is a very clear and comprehensive way of looking at human functioning and potential. The basic idea is that there are seven energy centers arranged along the spine. Each one governs an aspect of our mental and physical aliveness. The openness or closedness of a center (chakra) determines how well a person is living in that regard. The goal of human development is to have all the chakras entirely open so life energy can flow through unobstructed and with complete expression. To the extent that a chakra is closed, life energy cannot animate the area, and the result is less than optimal well-being. A major blockage, so that little life energy can get through, leads to real pathology of mind and body. The seven chakras, taken together, provide a comprehensive map of our mental and physical existence, complete with a vision of our possibilities and a portrait of our problems.

The document that follows shows the location of the seven chakras, along with what each pertains to. Also shown is what you answered above: a question or questions that, when answered spontaneously, without a lot of consideration, gives a fairly good indication of the state of affairs in each area. It should be noted that the chakras, while arranged from the base of the spine to the top of the head, are not, in Hindu thinking, actually located in the physical body, but are rather part of the "energy body" that patterns both the physical and mental activity of the individual. Depending on the energetic state in each area (open and freeflowing or closed and blocked), a characteristic pattern of physical health or disease, as well as an allied pattern of mental functioning or dysfunction, will be evident. Since there is a certain amount of imperfect agreement about the chakras in the literature, and since I am not an expert in Hindu psychophysiology, I have entitled the document "the seven centers of aliveness" to allow myself the latitude of my own interpretation. Whether or not what follows is an exact presentation of Hindu thinking, what it certainly represents is a wonderfully rich way to look at being alive. As you inspect it, you will discover an idea of yourself that is far more inclusive than what Western psychology has thus far provided. After you've looked it over, we'll discuss the chakras one by one, in order to guide you in interpreting your Chakrogram.

The seven centers of aliveness (chakras)

| | |
|--|--|
| crown of head and body core "I transcend and unify" | opening beyond self, joining with all How completely do I feel connected to a greater sense of being? |
| forehead and third eye "I understand" | intelligence, knowing How open and curious is my mind? |

throat and lungs
"I express"

self-expression, communication, creativity
To what extent can I express myself freely,
communicate well, present my truth?

heart and arms
"I feel"

emotion, embrace
How fully can I feel?
How much do I touch others and they me?

belly and solar plexus
"I grow"

energy, will, power to act
To what extent am I able to get what I need?
To what degree do I feel strong and capable?

genitals
"I like and dislike"

pleasure, passion
How much do I take pleasure in being alive?

base of spine and legs
"I live"

rootedness, security of stance in life
Do I feel secure, grounded, solid in life?
To what extent have I said yes to being alive?

Now let's examine your Chakrogram and try to figure out what it means. Start with the first (lowest) chakra. This is the area that governs the bare fact of your aliveness. If this chakra is mostly open, it means life energy is moving into and through you with enough force to both sustain your life and provide power for the other life functions that are built on the foundation of your vitality. You are strong enough to thrive, and you feel fundamentally secure. If the chakra is mostly closed, you lack basic oomph, and along with it trust and confidence. You therefore have limited energy to engage in life's various activities and possibilities. In other words, your growth is stunted from the beginning. People with major blockage in this area often have problems getting enough of life's

essentials. This may manifest as a perpetual lack of money and/or as a constant anxiety and worry about survival and well-being.

On a physical level, an open first chakra points to bedrock health and strength – the unshakable fact of the ability to be and do well. A closed first chakra means continual health concern. The good news is that, with enough understanding and motivation, even pervasive aliveness issues can be successfully addressed. The not so good news is that this often takes great dedication, patience, and perseverance. Think of a plant that is in poor soil and light and is barely living. It can be brought back to vibrant life, but minor interventions won't do the trick. The languishing plant needs more than a little water and some fertilizer. It needs major transplantation to richer soil and better light. Of course, there's no guarantee the transplanting will work, but plants (and people) are remarkably hardy and accepting of major change. So a mostly blocked first chakra can be unblocked. However, you'll need expert help and deep dedication to renewing your life. But what better enterprise can you think of, both for your own good and that of those who love you, now and in the future? Plus, having come through what amounts to a rebirth, you'll know something about life and the psyche that most people don't, and your understanding and example will be invaluable to others as they strive to accomplish the same extraordinary transformation.

I should mention two things here. First, your estimation of openness or closedness can vary at different times when you construct your Chakrogram. While there is often great consistency, this isn't always true. So if you indicated that your first chakra is mostly closed, you might want to consider whether this is really the case. And even if it is, the situation may not be anywhere near as serious as my previous discussion has made it out to be. You may be dealing with a far more superficial blockage, a lack of enthusiasm for life which, though

temporary, is robbing you of energy. If so, do what you need to in order to open up again. Short term blockage won't do you much harm. Just don't let the difficulty persist for too long.

Second, as we consider each chakra in turn, it might be useful to have an image to which we can refer. We'll use a growing fruit tree as a metaphor for our development as human beings. I haven't heard other people speak about plants from a chakra point of view, but it seems obvious to me that both plants and animals can be viewed as having chakras just as we do. Simple plants and animals have only the first three chakras, but more complex plants and animals reach higher. Trees, it seems to me, have all seven chakras (at least metaphorically, and probably in reality).

So, a fruit tree – or, rather, a newly germinated seed. What is that living thing's first job if it wants to remain alive? Find nourishment! Where? In the mother – the soil. So the seed puts down a root. We also need to be rooted, first in our mother's love and milk, and then in the caring presence of others and the food that the earth provides. If we get that sustenance from day one, we grow up strong and able. If we don't, we are weak in our foundation. We need to be anchored in life. Hence, the first chakra is called the "root chakra."

What is the seed's (and our) second job? To move toward what's life-enhancing and away from harm. The seed sends up a shoot toward the light and bends away from things like overcrowding. One celled animals swim toward food and away from noxious chemicals. Human infants seek what tastes good and recoil from what is disgusting. If your second chakra is reasonably open, you have learned to approach what is pleasant and withdraw from what is hurtful. In this way, you find the things that support and encourage your life.

The second chakra, located at genital level, is sometimes cast as entirely concerned with sexuality. I think this is a misunderstanding. True, sex is what creates life. But life is much more than sex, and our lot as living creatures is greater than our reproductive function. So the second chakra is best regarded as the site of our orientation to the complement of life's pleasures. If the second chakra is open, we are invigorated in many ways, all of them involving good feeling. If it is closed, our growth is compromised, both by harmful influences that are not avoided and by healthy ones that are not embraced. The prescription for less than optimal second chakra functioning is quite wonderful: find what makes you feel good and do more of it! Also, take responsibility for stopping the negativity that is directed at you.

On a physical level, the openness of the second chakra can be gauged by the degree of acceptance of one's animal nature and the pleasures that accompany that nature. Sex is certainly prominent among those pleasures, but so are many other sensual delights. The person who cannot relate to the joys of touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste is being deprived of much of what makes life worth living. And the person who partakes fully of the feast of existence brims with vitality and is powerfully enriched and enlarged.

Which brings us to the third chakra, located at the level of the belly and solar plexus. This is where food is converted to energy and flesh, and from whence willpower springs. After the seed has sent up a shoot, that shoot needs to broaden into a trunk, so that it can support the higher arboreal structures. Similarly, the child needs to grow physically and mentally, by finding what makes it thrive and how to get what it requires.

People with open third chakras know who they are, trust their perceptions and abilities, feel equal to the demands of life, and are able to meet their own

needs. People without this openness – and unfortunately there are many – are forever searching for an inner solidity from which to operate. They are in a perpetual identity crisis that should have been resolved in adolescence but instead makes them perpetual adolescents, ever seeking the approval of others and never trusting their inner promptings. If this sounds like much of today's society, you might ask yourself what societal prohibitions about pleasure and self-assertion have led so many of us into self-denial rather than self-development.

Physically, people with the perpetual anxiety that comes with not knowing who they are, what they need, or how to get it, often suffer from stomach or intestinal troubles. It's as though the food of life is not acceptable to them, and their insecurity creates an internal climate that cannot process what is offered. The prescription for opening this chakra is more nuanced than that of the second chakra, and may call for quite a bit of good, supportive relationship. Blocked third chakra people have to learn who they are, as opposed to who they have been told they should be. And they must master the art of nurturing themselves so that they grow ever stronger and more capable. This growing of the deficient self is best done, and perhaps must be done, in the company of supportive others who will provide accurate and helpful feedback. So a therapist and/or self-secure partner are essential in the attempt. The good news is that the learning process is very reinforcing, which encourages continued effort. It feels a heck of a lot better to know and trust yourself than it does to constantly fear and doubt. So, if you have third chakra work to do, find a guide or guides and get to it – full speed ahead with forging your identity and your will! Without a strong trunk, how do you expect to hold your limbs out and up, which is the next step in our growth?

The fourth chakra is in the center of the sequence and is located in the middle of the body, at the level of the heart and arms. It governs emotion and the embrace of others. In terms of the tree metaphor, it is the branching of the trunk, the development of boughs. In human terms, it is the point at which the person opens. The first three chakras have been about individual growth. The fourth chakra broadens us to include those around us.

If your heart chakra is mostly open, you are in touch with your feelings. Rather than residing entirely in your head and thinking so constantly that you have no awareness of your body, you are directly conscious of your body's reactions. Your heart is always speaking, and you listen as a matter of course. Since feelings are about relationship, ongoing awareness of how you feel enables you to relate well to others, to make contact with them emotionally and physically.

Unfortunately, many of us have learned to ignore or deny our feelings. We walk around lost in a cloud of thoughts about how we, others, and life should and shouldn't be, and this cloud blinds us to the reality of what's actually happening. People with a mostly blocked fourth chakra are unaware both of what their body is telling them, and of how others are reacting. They lack emotional intelligence. Since EQ is now acknowledged as more important for success in life than IQ, such emotionally closed-off people have a hard time of it.

The prescription for opening a blocked fourth chakra is simple but not easy: pay attention to what's going on in the body, especially in the heart and gut, and try to become aware of how those areas are influencing you. At first this is surprisingly difficult. The most that can be hoped for is consciousness of physical functioning – for example, the heart is beating fast and the gut feels tight or upset. But with practice the emotional tone starts to rise into

awareness, and you realize that the physical reactions are part of some identifiable feeling such as sadness, fear, or anger. Similarly, the positive feelings have a distinct physical “feel,” which, with practice, can be experienced as a lot richer and more satisfying than simply feeling “okay” or “good.” Progress may be slow, but eventually you can learn to perceive and trust the messages from your body. What is necessary is continued practice in paying attention to your internal state. The reward is twofold – first, a much fuller experience of being alive, and, second, greatly improved ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships. And since research is revealing that good relationships are a paramountly important factor in mental and physical health, opening the fourth chakra can make the difference between depression and joy, heart disease and hale-heartedness.

The fifth chakra, at the level of the lungs, throat, and mouth, governs the physical and mental exchange between the individual and his or her surroundings. Physically, we breathe in and out, and ingest food and water. Mentally, we either express ourselves freely, or we inhibit that expression. An open fifth chakra insures that we get enough sustenance, and that we are seen and heard. A closed fifth chakra means we are to some degree starved of nourishment, inspiration, and interaction with others. Physically, a closed throat or lungs may be accompanied by eating or breathing problems. Mentally, we may suffer from feelings of lack of self-worth and of isolation.

In the tree metaphor, the fifth chakra is the flowering. If this doesn't happen, insects won't be attracted and pollination won't occur. If it does, the tree can be appreciated for its greatest beauty and can produce life beyond itself. The same is true for us. If we let ourselves shine forth, if we don't inhibit the expression of who we are and what we have to offer, we will attract the notice and appreciation of others, including a mate. But if we hold ourselves in for fear of

being judged as not good enough, we'll wither from the lack of social connection, and won't discover and give our gifts. The prescription for opening the fifth chakra is, first, to risk saying how we really feel, second, to express our needs clearly without minimizing them, and, third, to find ways to nurture our unique creative vision. It is an absolute crime that most of us believe that we are not creative. Creativity – the natural, spontaneous, unattenuated expression of how we experience life – is part of everyone's makeup. Just look at primitives, who create as a matter of course, or kids and how imaginatively and freely they play. How is it that we have been socialized to believe that creativity is something reserved only for the specially gifted? A necessary component of an open fifth chakra is regular creative activity.

If the fifth chakra is the flowering of life, the sixth chakra is the fruition. For both tree and human, this is the highest of which we are capable as individuals. An open sixth chakra means all of life is considered and accepted, without denial or censure. A fully open mind understands and appreciates existence in all its forms, and is deeply grateful for the experience of being an individual in such an incredibly rich universe. Such a mind is alive with wonder, and passionately partakes of the diversity of experience as it is felt by each being. The apex of openness of the sixth chakra, and of appreciation for life, is an awareness that constantly enlarges itself by contact with everything and everyone that it meets. This is a mind without limits, ever widening.

Lest this sound a little unattainable, for most of us an open sixth chakra is demonstrated by a healthy curiosity and desire to know how other people see things, and what various life experiences feel like. Our mind does not close in automatic judgment, and is not daunted by having to stretch itself. In fact, it delights in the effort of learning, and welcomes novelty and challenge. I hope this describes you!

A mostly closed sixth chakra, however, robs an individual of the breadth and depth of life, and leads to a dulling of the intellect, rather than a honing. This is the difference between a smallminded person and a wise one. If the mind is constantly opened, life is a continual ascent rather than a gradual devolution. What is required is courage to venture into the unknown, to suspend certainty and not automatically seek the reassurance of fitting each new experience into the framework one has already constructed. Only in this way does the mental structure broaden and does real understanding develop. Einstein said, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the only source of true art and science."

Physically, a closed sixth chakra may lead to headaches. Mentally, there may be an inhibition or decaying of intellectual function. The prescription for opening a closed mind is not easy to formulate, but I believe it involves either being exposed to stimulation that is highly compelling and/or coming into contact with someone who models intellectual curiosity, openmindedness, and courage. This is especially where the media and mentors come in. Something has to call our curiosity forth, and someone must demonstrate that opening to the unknown is not intimidating, but inspiring.

The seventh, or "crown" chakra, connects the individual to something beyond her or himself. For a tree, this is the release of seeds to start life in a new location. For a human, it is the surrendering of separateness into the totality of existence. The person with an open seventh chakra feels her or his individual life played out against the backdrop of the unity of all creation. Oneness undergirds and supports individuality, and, at death, receives the individual into the collective of which it is already an integral part. People with open seventh chakras live life without fear, for they know that the only things that can be lost

are the mental and physical constructions that temporarily give the illusion of separateness. When all is said and done, entirety remains.

At the other extreme, a person with a closed seventh chakra and no sense of connection to anything larger is pessimistic and frightened at a basic level, because his or her separate life is continually threatened by the circumstances of living. The best one can hope for is a temporary avoidance of the inevitable, the point at which the struggle to maintain separate existence is destined for failure. So a person with a closed seventh chakra lives with constant underlying despair, while a person with an open crown chakra is in touch with unending feelings of affirmation and support.

I have added to the usual formulation of the seventh chakra by locating it not only at the top of the head but also in the core of the body. This is because some people feel the connection in an upward direction, to something that is above them. Others feel the connection at the center of their being. Many of us experience this larger livingness in both ways: spiritual unity seems to dwell both within and beyond us. The important thing is that we are aware of the presence of something beyond separateness.

How to access this broader sense of being? Delve into the world's spiritual wisdom! If you are willing to keep your mind and heart open, you may begin to think and feel things you would not have believed to be possible. If you do, your life will spread beyond yourself and your family to the whole human family, and further to all of creation. At this level, the tree is truly one with nature. As are we.

SO...this essay gives you a very brief introduction to the richness of the chakra system and what it has to offer. I encourage you to do two things. First, read

about the chakras. You will increasingly realize how profound and all-encompassing this way of looking at ourselves really is. As I said earlier, it dwarfs any modern psychological personality theory. Five thousand-plus years of disciplined introspection by a great many practitioners have produced some spectacularly sophisticated results. And second, take your Chakrogram seriously, as an indicator of how your growth is proceeding, and where it especially needs to be encouraged. From the Hindu (and Buddhist) point of view, there is no fundamental pathology of mind or body, only a lack of full development. Your difficulties are best perceived as indicators of where and how growth needs to take place. You have the map. Keep growing!

Spencer Sherman, Ph.D.

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