

Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

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Kundalini has been the theme of the last five chapters. In Chapter Three, we saw that eros is able to mobilize emotion and imagination alongside physiology to overcome the stimulus-response loop of the orgasmic spasm reflex. In Chapter Four, we expanded on the significance of eros, finding its fullest development in kundalini, for which we have physiological and historical evidence suggesting that kundalini (by whatever name) has been known and cultivated as a natural human capacity since at least the last Ice Age. In Chapter Five, we saw how the mad saints use eros/kundalini unconsciously to overwhelm their ego and mobilize an unconscious process whereby the psyche as a whole is re-organized. Ego returns as an observer of processes that are understood to be of divine origin and that establish a larger center in the psyche which India has called atman or self. In Chapters Six and Seven, we considered the antinomian saints who strive to make the psychic re-organization conscious by deliberately entering the realm of the shadow -- culturally defined areas of impurity and evil. The left-hand path of Tantra is a dangerous undertaking in which the antinomian saints court the dangers of powerful disturbance (sexual arousal, disgust, terror) in order to stimulate the integrating dragon of kundalini as a force which can meet those challenges by surging up from within. The heroic saints confront those terrible forces with kundalini, rendering them "non-terrible" worthy opponents.

For the antinomian saints, kundalini is merely the dragon of the soul's life energy: known only as a formidable and dangerous power which rises up from within, like a seed outgrowing its pod. It is enough for them to know that such a power exists. They familiarize themselves with it merely as an autonomous and potentially "friendly" force and never come to understand it in detail. In order to rise beyond the heroic rung of the diamond ladder to the next, it is necessary to learn the nature of kundalini in much finer detail. This task, as we have said, requires that the mystic redirect attention from the outside to the inside. As long as

the disturbing force of disgust, compulsive sexuality, or terror is seen as coming from without, it is enough to know that kundalini is an inner dragon capable of neutralizing the exterior challenger. If we are to go beyond meeting exterior challenges, however, we have to familiarize ourselves with the details of what occurs within us as this inner dragon is mobilized.

Those who have turned their gaze inward and contemplated kundalini herself have found her to resemble a serpent that moves with the suddenness, brilliance, and zigzag course of a bolt of lightning and the indestructibility of a diamond. Traditionally, therefore, they have referred to kundalini with the term *vajra*, meaning thunderbolt, diamond, and adamantite. However, it is only the awakened kundalini that moves like this. For most individuals, she sleeps coiled up at the bottom of the body cavity or at the base of the spine, encircling an internal *linga* or phallus, drinking the vital energy [1] that is wasted by those men and women who have not learned the secret of her nature. Once aroused, she rises up through the body to the cranial vault; and along her serpentine path she draws attention to a subtle body comprised of several "centers," "chakras," or "wheels" that remained closed or "knotted" in those who have not familiarized themselves with kundalini.

In this chapter we shall begin discussion of the achievement required at the subtle-body rung of the diamond ladder by turning our attention inward to describe the nature of those chakras that comprise the subtle body. Afterwards, in Chapter Nine, we shall see how familiarity with the subtle body enables the mystic to gain a certain mastery over the diamond body and convert it into an internal ladder of ascent.

The Subtle Body

To begin with it must be noted that the subtle body is an imaginal fact. It surely manifests itself with physiological and emotional accompaniments, but what we shall be describing in this chapter are not structures that can be laid bare through a careful dissection of the fleshly body. The chakras and the pathways that connect them -- i.e., the subtle body itself -- are perceptible only on the subtle plane. Discussion of the subtle body, therefore, implies familiarity with erotic trance. Indeed, anyone who recognizes some of the sensations and impression described below has to have entered an altered state of consciousness -- whether acknowledged as such at the time or not. Although there are several traditional descriptions of the subtle body which disagree among themselves as to whether it is comprised of only four centers or more than twelve, and although we shall follow the most common tradition which identifies seven of them, we may say that at a minimum there is a center in the lower abdomen whose opening makes us aware of a monumental power at once frightening and promising, portending an uncommon adventure of some sort; another in the chest associated with transcendent feelings of love and connectedness; a third in the brow whose opening reveals the subtle plane of the imaginal world; and one in the crown of the head which gives us access to the Absolute, God, or ultimate manifestation of the cosmos. In examining these centers and the ones in between, we shall be following Eliade, who says, "Careful reading of the texts suffices to show that the experiences in question are transphysiological and that all these 'centers' represent yogic states" (Eliade, 1969: 234). When Eliade calls the experiences "transphysiological," he seems to mean that although they are rooted in physiological changes and are described in physiological language, they transcend physiology in the sense

that they are also changes in consciousness, manifestations of erotic trance.

At all four of the centers just mentioned, we encounter something that transcends the profane world of the ego and the persona field. In the lower abdomen a power is felt surging forth that manifests as incomparably greater than the ego and alerts us to the fact that the *I* we have believed ourselves to be is something like a pod about to be outgrown by its seed. At the heart center we become aware of a connectedness inconceivable to the subject/object dichotomy of everyday thinking and which dissolves the illusory barrier between ourselves and our partner and between ourselves and the world at large. In seeing the imaginal world through the "third eye" of the brow chakra, we become aware of essential realities hidden from our fleshly eyes which convince us of their greater, "cosmic" truth. At the crown chakra we become aware of the fullness of that larger reality and know our place in it -- at once infinitesimal and unlimited.

All these experiences reveal to our esoteric eyes the central fact of Tantrism, the fact that the subtle body itself is a sort of cosmos in miniature, filled with the power, connectedness, and vision -- that is to say consciousness -- that comprises the cosmos at large. "The essence of Tantric thought is that man is a microcosm. . . . In man is truth and through man it must be known (Dimock, 1989: 137). Evola says nearly the same thing, "The body in Tantrism is 'made cosmic' and is conceived of in terms of principles and powers that also act in the world" (Evola, 1983: 221). Because the same fundamental layers can be discovered in both the microcosm and the macrocosm, the various systems of yoga "map" the cosmos onto the body and the body onto the cosmos. They are, in the expression of Feuerstein (1989: 176), "psychocosmograms," that is, guides both to the microcosm of the psyche and the macrocosm of the universe.

All things are unified through the microcosmic self. There are seeming dualities in the world, such as men and women, human and divine, self and not-self. But such dualities are only seeming, and the first step toward restoring the normal state of unity is the realization of this (Dimock, 1989: 138).

In the "transphysiological" language of Tantra, cosmic energy is said to flow into the microcosm through the chakras and thence to cycle through the subtle body and out again into the macrocosm. It is said that this happens in all of us, whether we know it or not and whether or not we cooperate in the process. Our degree of openness at the various chakras corresponds to our degree of consciousness; and our conscious participation in the macrocosm increases proportionately (Karagulla & Kunz, 1989: 36). More specifically, however, it can be said that each chakra, beginning at the base of the spine and proceeding upwards to the head, opens for us a separate and progressively higher "level of consciousness" (Sivananda Radha, 1990: 49). This means, for instance, that those who have awakened kundalini to the point of becoming aware of the center in the lower abdomen experience the world differently than those in whom kundalini is still asleep. Those who have opened their heart center have still another field of consciousness opened to them. Jung (1996: 13) summarizes this universal doctrine by pointing out that "each chakra is a whole world." He means that those in whom kundalini sleeps at the base of the spine live entirely in the empirical world and have no access to erotic trance. Those whose consciousness is centered in the lower abdomen have entered erotic trance, but the world they live in is impoverished compared to that available to those in whom the heart chakra has opened.

Prefacing his remarks by warning that the following is a very limited perspective on kundalini and the subtle body, Jung says we can get some idea of the "worlds" that are opened to us through the several chakras if we begin in the head and work downward. In this passage he avoids all reference to what we have called "erotic trance," and speaks only of how the various psychological possibilities symbolized by the chakras may be grasped in a preliminary manner by one who remains in ordinary consciousness:

We begin in the head; we identify with our eyes and our consciousness: quite detached and objective, we survey the world. That is *ajna* [the brow chakra]. But we cannot linger forever in the pure spheres of detached observation, we must bring our thoughts into reality. We voice them and so trust them to the air. We clothe our knowledge in words, we are in the region of *vishuddha*, or the throat center. But as soon as we say something that is especially difficult, or that causes us positive or negative feelings, we have a throbbing of the heart, and then the *anahata* [heart] center begins to be activated. And still another step further, when for example a dispute with someone starts up, when we have become irritable and angry and get beside ourselves, then we are in *manipura* [the center located at the diaphragm or solar plexus].

If we go lower still, the situation becomes impossible, because then the *body* begins to speak. For this reason, in England, everything below the diaphragm is taboo. Germans always go a little below it and hence easily become emotional. Russians live altogether below the diaphragm -- they consist of emotions. French and Italians *behave* as though they were below it but they know perfectly well, and so does everyone else that they are not.

. . . *Svadhithana* [the chakra in the lower abdomen] represents the level where psychic life may be said to begin. Only when this level became activated did mankind awaken from the sleep of the *muladhara* [at the base of the spine] and learn the first rules of bodily decency (Jung, 1996: 63).

Singling out sexuality as the central issue in kundalini, Ken Wilbur has taken a similar head-downward approach as Jung. Noting that Freud had it backwards, that "God-consciousness is not sublimated sexuality; sexuality is repressed God-consciousness" (Wilbur, 1990: 130), Wilbur says that we "tie knots" in our consciousness, beginning with how we see things, then how we conceptualize them, feel about them, and so on. At each chakra we "tie a knot" until what might have been God-consciousness is reduced to genital sexuality. What Freud sees as our maturation from the "polymorphous perversity" of the infant into adult genital sexuality, Wilbur sees as constriction:

The infant takes equal erotic and blissful delight in all the organs, surfaces, and activities of the body, and thus his entire cosmos is one of bliss, while the normal adult finds exuberance and bliss, if at all, in only one specific and narrow region of the body -- the genitals. Genital bliss can thus be viewed in comparison with the body's natural possibilities, as a constriction, a restriction, a cramp, a knot. Note it is *not* so much genital sexuality that comprises the knot, but rather the *restriction of bliss to only one specific region* of the body, excluding all others (*Ibid.*, 122)

Kundalini yoga, therefore, wisely proceeds to reverse this tyranny of awareness and bliss step by careful step, untying the knots in what it sees as roughly the reverse of the order in which they were tied (*Ibid.*, 125).

Jung and Wilbur have taken a very Western and psychological approach to the subtle body of Tantrism. The reader who is familiar with traditional descriptions of the chakras as resembling open lotus flowers, each with a distinctive number of petals, each petal bearing a different letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, and so on, may be both relieved and puzzled. We are relieved to know that some sense can be made of the Hindu subtle body without entering the impenetrable world of Hindu iconography. On the other hand, we may wonder if something

has been lost "in translation." No doubt something has been lost, but if we can begin to connect traditional descriptions of the subtle body with bodily and imaginal experiences we ourselves have actually had, we will have gained a great deal.

My intention is to sketch a phenomenology of sexual/mystical experiences with the metaphor of the diamond ladder serving as an organizing image. Now as we approach the subtle-body rung and our attention is directed within, it will be useful to begin with common physio-imaginal and emotional experiences that are readily available to anyone who has noticed bodily reactions and imagery in ordinary life. For the mystics differ from the rest of us primarily in the fact that they have taken their erotic trances seriously, investigated them, and learned to obtain some mastery of them -- at least in the sense that their imaginal life has attained some stability. Imaginal experiences are so much denigrated by our persona field that most of us in the West discard our experiences as merely *imaginary* -- therefore private, idiosyncratic, and undependable. In doing so, we fail to notice that we may already be familiar with experiences that the mystics have taken so much for granted and so ubiquitous as not to merit comment.

In discussing the interior diamond ladder that is comprised of the chakras, therefore, I shall emphasize bodily/imaginal experiences that are readily available to all of us and employ as much as possible of Jung's 1932 lectures on kundalini yoga (Jung, 1996). Jung's account is not only psychologically sound and easy to understand but also validated by several writers far more immersed in Indian thought than was Jung (e.g., Mookerjee, 1989; Svoboda, 1994; van Lysebeth, 1995; Sinha, 1993; Dimock, 1989; McDaniel, 1989; and the close approximation of Eliade's thought to Jung's). Evola (1992, 1995) attacks Jung's writings on yoga and alchemy for having missed the point of mysticism through his therapeutic interests, and Wilbur (1982) seems to agree. But this, in fact, is the advantage of Jung's writings. He roots his observations in experiences that are available to us all -- precisely the thing we need to bring mystical claims down out of the stratosphere to a grounded place where we can connect them with our own experience and begin to appreciate that the mystics are people very much like ourselves -- people who differ from us primarily in the fact that they have attended to experiences that we habitually discard.

Proceeding upwards from the base of the spine to the head, as is traditional, I shall try to draw out the psychological and mystical significance of the seven chakras by describing how I have experienced them, filled out sometimes with reports I have gathered from others. I do not mean to suggest that everyone has to experience what I have, only that the concreteness of one individual's experience may give the reader a handle by which to grasp what the mystics have claimed. Such quasi-bodily experiences by no means exhaust the significance of the various chakras but are intended only as a starting point. What I hope to provide is surely a "low level" appreciation of the subtle body. But if successful this account should help readers to identify similar experiences in their own lives and provide a concrete foundation for the chapters that follow. My fundamental assumption, here, is that we all have a far wider acquaintance with erotic trance than we are inclined to believe. I find this verified again and again as I listen to the experiences of my patients, who often describe with some embarrassment sensations and images that seem irrational and crazy to them only because they are unfamiliar with the literature of mystical states.

First Chakra, Muladhara, At The Base Of The Spine

The muladhara is the place where kundalini sleeps. Apparently for this reason it is ignored in some systems. Because kundalini is asleep, the experience of the world from this "root chakra" is familiar to us all. It is the ordinary world devoid of erotic trance. Jung observes: "We are in our roots right here in this world -- when you buy your ticket from the streetcar conductor, for instance, or for the theater, or pay the waiter -- that is reality as you touch it. And then the self is asleep, which means that all things concerning the gods are asleep" (Jung, 1996: 14). Mookerjee calls it "the root center of physical experience" (Mookerjee, 1989: 39); and Evola says it is characterized by ordinary sexual desire (Evola, 1992: 173).

Ordinary individuals live their entire lives in the root chakra. Therefore it is not characterized merely by physicality but above all by our unconscious participation in the persona field, the social consensus that discards all imaginal experiences as invalid and that might well be called "group-think" or "mass-mindedness." Evola enumerates qualities typical of the root chakra: "greed, false knowledge, credulity, delusions, indulgence in coarse pleasures, and the force that induces sleep" (Evola, 1992: 151). Following Jung, Arnold Mindell associates the muladhara with toilet training and says that all of our "cramping" comes from our inability to let go in public life because the knot we have tied in the root chakra restricts "the inner animal or child who defecates and urinates at will" (Mindell, 1982: 40). Such "cramping" results from our determination not to embarrass ourselves by falling afoul of the expectations of the persona field.

Vimalananda refers to the traditional Hindu association of the muladhara with the primal element of earth. For the Greeks there were four elements: earth, water, air, and fire, in ascending order of subtlety. The Hindus have five, adding ether as the element more subtle than fire. In both systems, earth is the principle of inertia, weight, and dullness. Vimalananda says, "Once the Kundalini Shakti enters the Muladhara Chakra the entire Earth Element must be transformed before She can move to the Svadhithana Chakra" (Svoboda, 1994: 77). He seems to imply that the muladhara is not merely the center of ignorance, where the subtle plane never appears. Indeed, to experience it *as a chakra* requires that our esoteric eyes be opened -- even while we remain within its sphere of influence.

Svoboda's guru suggests that there is a moment when kundalini is awake in the root chakra, and then the boring constancy of the empirical world will be seen as changing, in the process of transformation. I take this to mean that the first beginnings of erotic trance must be found in the root chakra, in the interval between kundalini's awakening and her ascent. Logically, this makes sense. But he gives us little to go on in identifying this moment. I am inclined to think that it corresponds to what we will consider in Chapter Eleven. There is a moment between every pair of identifiable experiences when our mind is empty. The yogin learns to recognize these moments and expands upon them. They constitute our opportunity to enter a very high state of yogic trance. Normally the first moment of kundalini's awakening escapes our notice because we fail to catch sight of that empty moment that occurs between our blindness to anything but the empirical world, and that fall into confusion that characterizes the opening of the second chakra.

Theoretically, all of the chakras lie outside of our awareness as long as they are "closed" or "knotted." But when they "open" they are experienced as whirling vortices. When I learned

this detail, it opened my eyes to sensations I had long had regarding the second chakra, the svadhithana, and helped me to become aware of less obvious impressions in other parts of my body. Despite that, it was some time before I recognized the experience of the muladhara opening. Indeed, to this day I have rarely noticed the muladhara as the first chakra to open. It is usually only while practicing carezza that I experience a great whirling aperture in the space between my anus and scrotum (the perineum), pointing downward toward my feet. We might guess that no chakra's opening can be recognized before we enter erotic trance and that it is therefore easy to miss the opening of the root chakra which above all characterizes our state of ignorance regarding the subtle plane.

Second Chakra, Svadhithana, In The Lower Abdomen

Long before I had heard of the chakras or kundalini, I was very much aware -- indeed uncomfortably conscious -- of the sensation that must be the most elementary experience of the opening of the second chakra. From my teens until well into my twenties, I found that whenever I met a girl or a woman who appeared to me as a potential "earthly Venus," a yawning hole seemed to open in my lower abdomen. I described it to myself as "opening like the eye of a camera." The sensation was so vivid that I thought I could almost "see" in my mind's eye the "iris" of a camera's aperture spinning open below my navel. Unlike a camera's eye, however, it never reached a pre-determined diameter where it could mercifully stop but kept on whirling, almost painfully, opening wider and wider, causing unbearable tension. This was accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of vulnerability. I felt I had lost all protection, the barrier that gives us anonymity and comfortable mystery in the eyes of others. My "boundaries" were dissolving. I thought it must surely be apparent to everyone in my vicinity, especially to the young woman who had occasioned it. It never dawned on me that she might be having somewhat the same sensation. For that I seemed to need conversation, which of course was difficult to conduct under the circumstances.

The primal element that the Hindus associate with svadhithana is water. Evola has tied that together with my familiar experience quite economically, in saying the emotions generated by the chakra in the lower abdomen are: "terrifying unleashed power, sexual drive, aversion, shame, and languor, the force that causes thirst" (Evola, 1992: 151-2). Jung likens the water of svadhithana to what he calls the Night Sea Journey. This is the central image in his *Symbols of Transformation* (CW 5), based on the ancient mythological theme whereby the sun sinks into the Western Sea at night, whence it passes underneath us all night long, fighting the forces of darkness to arise renewed out of the Eastern Sea at dawn. All psychological transformation, Jung tells us, happens in exactly this way. An old ego-attitude requires renewal, and this can only take place through a terrifying confrontation with the forces of the unconscious. To be swallowed up by the unconscious means madness, but to struggle consciously with the demons of the unconscious leads to a transformation of the ego-attitude whence we arise renewed. He observes that the elephant traditionally painted in the center of the Hindu icon for the muladhara becomes in the svadhithana the leviathan, the undersea monster.

Now, the second center has all the attributes that characterize the unconscious. Therefore we may assume that the way out of our *muladhara* existence leads into the water. A man I know who is not in analysis has had interesting dreams representing this quite frequently, and they were all identical. He found himself moving along a certain road . . . the dream always began with such a

movement -- and then, to his great amazement, all these roads inevitably led into water, the second cakra.

Therefore, the first demand of a mystery cult always has been to go into water, into the baptismal fount. The way into any higher development leads through water, with the danger of being swallowed by the monster. . . . Baptism is a symbolical drowning. . . . It is a symbolic death out of which new life comes, a newborn babe (1996: 16).

The second chakra, as it opens in the lower abdomen, brings to our awareness all the promise and terror of eros. We are in an erotic trance. Eros appeared between me and those women before whom I felt closeness, sexual desire, shame, terror, and the loss of all protection. I knew -- although I lacked the words to express it -- that a harrowing adventure lay before me. I was in danger of losing everything I had known about myself. Perhaps I would violate all the rules I took for immutable. I no longer stood with the elephant, stolid as the earth and possessing an impeccable memory -- recalling all the experiences that made me "me." Now I was looking into the watery abyss of my destruction, highly unlikely to survive any so-called transformative process. When the svadhithana inspires such fright, it is because we cling to our ego, *ahamkara*, the memory of me and mine. After experiences like this, I know Vimalananda is not exaggerating when he says, "Whenever trouble increases during your *sadhana*, you can be sure that you are getting closer to your deity" (Svoboda, 1994: 126). I was resisting my deity. I had no idea what she wanted of me, but I was sure I was unprepared and inadequate to the challenge. Implicitly, I had already learned some of Vimalananda's wisdom: "Those who ride Kundalini without knowing their destination risk losing their way" (Svoboda, 1994: 20). Jung is more specific:

The gods . . . are germs in us, germs in the *muladhara*, and when they begin to move they have the effect of an earthquake which naturally shakes us, and even shakes our houses down. . . . To fly is one's own activity, and one can safely come down again, but when one is carried upward [by a great wind or by kundalini], it is not under one's control, and one will be put down after a while in a most disagreeable way -- then it means catastrophe. So you see, it is wise not to identify with these experiences, but to handle them as if they were outside the human realm. That is the safest thing to do -- and really absolutely necessary. Otherwise you get an inflation, and inflation is just a minor form of lunacy, a mitigated term for it. And if you get so absolutely inflated that you burst, it is schizophrenia (Jung, 1996: 27).

If the yawning of the abdominal chakra causes us this much discomfort, we are surely not ready for our Night Sea Journey. But if we should ever have the strength to enter some distance into the fray -- like a vira, not a mad saint -- and come out of it in one piece, the opening of the svadhithana can become a source of information. We risk the life of our sanity, but it is not we ourselves, our limited egos, that face down the enemy. It is the dragon of our soul's energy that takes on the leviathan. We come out of the experience knowing something of the nature of kundalini. She has opened our eyes for the first time to the subtle plane; and although it scared the life out of us when it first occupied the field of our vision, we have now claimed a parcel -- marked some boundaries and familiarized ourselves with the flora. It is therefore with delight that I have found the svadhithana opening sometimes when I am in session with a patient. It gives evidence of a powerful bond between us, at a nearly instinctual level; and while open, it gives our communication added significance. There is nothing shameful, sexual, or greedy about the experience. It is informative. Its disturbing power has been neutralized, turned from a worthy opponent into an ally.

An additional detail may be worth mentioning. Sometimes when my svadhithana has

opened with a patient, I have also "seen" a tube connecting our bodies at the level of the abdomen. I have never seen this reported in the literature, but find it a useful experience insofar as the tube is distinctly different with each individual. Sometimes it seems made of flesh of different colors and textures, once it appeared to be made of glass, and on another occasion it was comprised of countless threadlike tubes, braided, in white and red. Each time it has given me a useful impression regarding the sort of relationship shared with the patient. I had believed this experience was unique to me, and therefore hardly worth mentioning, until I heard an interview with the world religions expert, Huston Smith, on National Public Radio's program, "Fresh Air." [2] Terri Gross asked Smith if he had ever experienced "satori." [3] In reply he told a story about his seemingly fruitless struggles with the koan [4] assigned to him ("Does a dog have Buddha nature?"). He had many frustrating meetings with his Zen master (Roshi), until one day something inexplicable but momentous occurred and Smith saw that his Roshi and he were connected to one another, abdomen-to-abdomen, by a tube. This "tubed" experience was his "satori."

Third Chakra, Manipura, At The Solar Plexus

Would-be heroes who enter the abysmal waters of the svadhithana, aware of their fright but moved by the greater force of kundalini, emerge renewed like the rising sun in manipura, whose element is fire and location the solar plexus. The one who trembled before an adventure that clearly appeared too formidable steps out of the abyss with new self-knowledge. In retrospect it is clear to us that before our plunge -- when we still lived in the ordinary world of the root chakra -- we had little idea what we stood for, we were unaware of the essential and nearly impersonal principles on which our life is founded. But having been put to the test, we find our existence has simplified itself. We have jettisoned the illusory ideals of our "false self," that persona we subliminally formed so that we could hold our head up in the hectic and ephemeral world of social consensus. In the process we have been whittled down to our essentials -- the real principles that ought to have been guiding our life but which we had hidden from ourselves in shame, false modesty, and cowardice. In manipura we find our essential being.

Such at any rate is the promise and potential of manipura, the solar plexus of our being. Jung's description of this chakra, whose Sanskrit name means "fullness of jewels," is somewhat more ambivalent. He articulates two aspects of manipura.

[*Manipura*] is the fire center, really the place where the sun rises. The sun now appears; the first light comes after baptism. This is like the initiation rites in the Isis mysteries, according to Apuleius, where the initiate at the end of the ceremony was put upon a pedestal and worshipped as the [sun-]god Helios, the deification that always follows the baptismal rite. You are born into a new existence; you are a very different being and have a different name (Jung, 1996: 30-1).

As long as you are in the *manipura* you are in the terrible heat of the center of the earth, as it were. There is only the fire of passions, of wishes, of illusions. It is the fire of which the Buddha speaks in his sermon in Benares where he says, The whole world is in flames, your ears, your eyes, everywhere you pour out the fire of desire, and that is the fire of illusion because you desire things which are futile. Yet there is the great treasure of the released emotional energy.

So when people become acquainted with the unconscious they often get into an extraordinary state -- they flare up, they explode, old buried emotions come up, they begin to weep about things which happened forty years ago. That simply means that they were prematurely detached from

that state of life; they have forgotten that there are buried fires still burning. Then they were unconscious, but when they touch the lower centers [i.e., the first three chakras], they get back into that world and become aware that it is still hot, like a fire that has been left forgotten under the ashes. But take away the ashes and there are still the glowing embers underneath, as it is said of pilgrims going to Mecca: they leave their fires buried under the ashes, and when they return the following year the embers are still glowing (*Ibid.*, 35-6).

Jung reveals that the manipura is as much a dual experience as are the first two chakras we have considered. In the first kundalini sleeps, but she may also be awakened. In the second we are confronted with destruction; but if we allow kundalini under the aspect of virya to confront those dangers, we can be transformed. In the third we have access to our essential being, but the smallness of our remembered ego-identity may seize upon resentments and unresolved issues from the distant past. The passion that might proceed directly from our essential being may be distorted by our neurotic defenses. Still the passion is an important achievement; for, "A man who is not on fire is nothing: he is ridiculous, he is two-dimensional" (Jung, 1996: 34).

The person who trembled before the abyss of svadhisthana had no real passion -- at least nothing that burned from within. That former being of ours was unacquainted with the inner fire and too apt to become a shuttle-cock between fear and pretension. In manipura we are introduced to our essential being, but an important task remains for us. We have to learn to face up to its truth and stop protecting ourselves with illusions about who we wish we were, who we are afraid we might be, and our resentments concerning the obstacles that prevented us from realizing these things years ago.

In its best sense -- that is to say, when it is "open" -- manipura presents us with a sobering realization of the identity that lurks beneath all the lies we have constructed about ourselves; and this is the source of the real fire of our being. It is the "center of the life force" (Mookerjee, 1986: 40). At its worst, when the manipura is still knotted and closed, we immerse ourselves in illusory fantasies about our essential identity and manifest a passion that betrays its neurotic nature by consistently missing the mark. Evola says that the combustion of the manipura is desire in the form of "a burning, shining substance," characterized by emotions such as: "anger, fear, astonishment, violence, pride, and hunger" (Evola, 1992: 152). Mindell describes it in terms of: "gut knowledge . . . where many assertive reactions are repressed and turned into aggressions and anger. Stomach cramps, ulcers, 'heart burn,' diabetes, and cancer . . ." (Mindell, 1982: 41). But when stripped of its neurotic illusions, this third chakra "confers knowledge of character and the dispositions of human beings" (Evola, 1992: 158).

This means that when it is "open" the manipura dissolves the barriers between us and opens our eyes to imaginal realities. In the erotic trance of the solar-plexus chakra, we apprehend the subtle reality of our own essential being and that of our partner. The amazing thing about all the chakras, when they open, is that the rigid boundary of the rational and empirical world that divides the subject resolutely off from the object is dissolved in an imaginal trance. The "object," especially our partner, is no longer a mysterious "other," closed off from us, living a private existence that we can apprehend only from the outside. The erotic trance made possible by the rise of kundalini and her opening of the chakras reveals greater realities that are available only on the subtle plane. When the manipura chakra opens, we have an immediate intuition, self-evidently true, of our own essential being and that of our partner.

By my mid-twenties I had already begun to appreciate this aspect of erotic encounters. The thorough confusion brought on by the opening of the abdominal chakra which had characterized my adolescence had cleared somewhat, and I could see that, however intimidating the challenge might be, it also revealed something essential about both me and the individual I had newly met. It appears that greater familiarity with erotic openings had tempered my panic. The watery abyss of the svadhisthana no longer blurred my vision so completely. I pursued some of those visions made possible by the opening of the solar-plexus chakra -- the glimpses of what seemed to be the other person's "essential being," the personality that underlay all the confusing details of everyday life. I felt I had become acquainted with a reliable core of information. I found that retaining this vision in my memory and comparing it with the details I learned later only confirmed the truth of realities seen on the subtle plane.

We may surely be mistaken about such things. For when the manipura is activated but still knotted, our vision of our own being as well as that of our partner will be distorted with our own defensive illusions. We may be led into an erotic involvement filled with delusions, misunderstandings, and emotional disasters. Patients have told me, for example, that they were so convinced by an initial erotic trance that they and their future partner were "made for one another" that they naturally assumed all the everyday details of living together would be worked out miraculously. When things became more complicated and intractable, they were inclined to believe that they could never again trust such visions. They want to retreat from all experiences of the subtle plane out of fear of being misled again. But they are missing a crucial distinction. The vision of their partner's essential being may well have been accurate enough. What failed was their assessment of the defenses which distort the way we live that essential being. Information about subtle realities such as the essential being of ourselves and our partner does not absolve us from the necessity of struggling with our illusions and defenses in everyday life. It is the potential for an "inflation" ("I know everything I need to know") and self-delusion ("therefore everything will take care of itself") that has prompted Jung to insist that the "gods" activated in the various chakras must be viewed as impersonal third parties. The vision of my essential being is not "me," it is the greater personality I might become; and the same is true of my partner.

I have never felt the manipura opening like a whirling lotus flower or camera eye. Its most powerful quasi-bodily manifestation, however, did reflect its theoretical nature as the locus of my essential being. Some years ago, when my son had just earned his driver's license, he had an accident while driving to high school. I hurried to the hospital; and as I passed through the inner doorway of the emergency room to the cubicles where patients were awaiting examination, my straight-ahead gaze locked onto the eyes of my son, his upper body elevated on an examination table. The moment our eyes met, I felt a powerful blow to the solar plexus. The depth of our connectedness was immediately apparent, almost as though our joint life of sixteen years passed before my eyes. The essential nature of our bond was unmistakable. He had suffered no injuries. The ambulance ride to the hospital had merely been a precaution. But the immanent possibility of disaster had stripped away all illusion, and we met one another in the essential being of manipura.

We allude to this reality of holding our essential being in the region of our solar plexus when we speak of being punched or kicked "in the gut" by events that seem to challenge the ground of our conscious existence. The metaphors of everyday life often reveal their origins

in the ancient and timeless discoveries of the kundalini tradition. An analogous experience was reported to me by a female colleague who had undergone treatment by an urban shaman. I asked her what she had experienced, and she jabbed me as hard as she could with the extended fingers of her right hand in my solar plexus. "It was like this," she said, and jabbed me repeatedly. "I felt my solar plexus being pushed inward by a force I could not control." Months later, when I met her at another conference, the experience was still with her, and she jabbed me again.

A more vivid description of the power and fire of kundalini as she manifests in the manipura chakra can be found in Jung's autobiography (Jung, 1961), when he describes his meeting with Freud, in 1909, in the elder man's study in Vienna. [5] Jung had come prepared with a series of questions on parapsychology, which Freud rejected as utter nonsense:

in terms of so shallow a positivism that I had difficulty in checking the sharp retort on the tip of my tongue. . . .

While Freud was going on this way, I had a curious sensation. It was as if my diaphragm were made of iron and were becoming red-hot -- a glowing vault. And at that moment there was such a loud report in the bookcase, which stood right next to us, that we both started up in alarm, fearing the thing was going to topple over on us. I said to Freud: "There, that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorization phenomenon."

"Oh come," he exclaimed. "That is sheer bosh."

"It is not," I replied. "You are mistaken, Herr Professor. And to prove my point I now predict that in a moment there will be another such loud report!" Sure enough, no sooner had I said the words than the same detonation went off in the bookcase.

To this day I do not know what gave me this certainty. But I knew beyond all doubt that the report would come again. Freud only stared at me. I do not know what was in his mind, or what his look meant. In any case, this incident aroused his mistrust of me, and I had the feeling that I done something against him. I never afterward discussed the incident with him (Jung, 1961: 155-6).

Clearly Jung sees this meeting as having marked the beginning of the end of his relationship with Freud. Both men felt the essential ground of their existence challenged in this encounter. Freud had placed his reputation and all his efforts into constructing a rational and "scientific" psychology that would stand up to the empirical criticisms of the nineteenth century, while Jung had been vitally concerned with parapsychology from childhood, had delivered papers on the subject before his college debating society, had written his doctoral dissertation on mediumship, and eventually coined the term "synchronicity" to describe the "non-causal but meaningful connections" with which parapsychology concerns itself. Parapsychology's reality was as essential for Jung as its rejection was for Freud. Both men were involved at the level of the manipura chakra.

When Jung bit his tongue and suppressed a spontaneous "retort," he immediately became aware of an impersonal force -- a blazing fire at the solar plexus that heated his diaphragm until it was a glowing vault. A "knot" in his manipura flamed up in suppressed rage -- a powerful defense against Freud's withering remarks. When the bookcase popped, he knew in the erotic trance of his aroused state that the sound was connected with the unbearable pressure and heat below his diaphragm. The energy of his kundalini was out of control, and it would happen again. Under the circumstances, we might wonder if Freud was less

frightened of parapsychology than of Jung's manipura demonstration. It must surely have sufficed to convince him Jung was determined to "kill the father." Indeed, at their next meeting the drama continued: Freud fainted as Jung went on and on about some peat-bog corpses that had been recently discovered. At a third meeting in 1912, Freud fainted as Jung became enthusiastic over the Egyptian monotheist, Amenophis IV (Ikhnaton) who had removed his father's name from the monuments he had built (Jung 1961: 156-7).

All three incidents suggest a conflict at the level of the solar plexus; but the one with the bookcase gives us the most information. It appears that the rage of a knotted manipura combined with the opening of the subtle plane whereby Jung had precognitive abilities. The bounds of ordinary reality were dissolved as an inner experience of fire was accompanied by an outer physical event. The "essential being" of the two men seemed to be at stake. Both of them had knots in their manipura. Even Freud's fright suggests that -- deny it as he might -- he was convinced of Jung's "killing the father" so thoroughly that he was unable to doubt it. He, too, was in a sort of trance, and in retrospect no one doubts that he was right.

Much later in his life, it appears that Jung had learned to use the opening of his manipura in his conduct of analysis. His patients report sessions in which the ordinary world dissolved into "whirling molecules" and they could no longer say what distinguished them from the furniture in the room. On such occasions Jung spoke to them of dreams they had had but not reported. He seemed to speak, as they said, to their "essential condition." Jung himself described this situation as "thinking unconsciously" and attending to a third party to whom he referred as "the Three-Million-Year-Old Man" (cf. Haule, 1999a). It appears Jung was employing a vision of the essential being of his patient as well as his own that became available through a mutual opening of the manipura chakra. To avoid becoming "inflated" with this knowledge, he ascribed it to the agency of a third party of superhuman intelligence and wisdom -- very much as an Indian would refer to Shiva or Shakti, even kundalini, as the divinity responsible for an erotic vision.

Fourth Chakra, Anahata, The Heart Center

A great transition occurs when we traverse the diaphragm from the solar plexus to the heart center. We leave "the lower chakras" with their close connection to the physical body and enter "the higher chakras." In the lower three we move between ego and its essential core, what Evola calls "the principle of individuality," [6] the me beneath my pretensions. My essential being and the fierce desires, defenses, and illusions that distort it have a personal quality. However, in the anahata:

One no longer identifies with one's desires. . . . It is hard to talk of these things because most people are still identified with *manipura*. . . . The diaphragm would correspond to the surface of the earth, and apparently in getting into the *anahata* we reach the condition where we are lifted up from the earth. . . . You rise above the horizon . . . if you're identical with the sun (Jung, 1996: 36-7).

Jung sticks close to the imagery of the Night Sea Journey in his articulation of the chakras. In the second, the sun sets in the Western Sea and begins its struggle with the darkness of the unconscious. In the third, light dawns in the East, but the sun has not yet detached itself from the earth, which Jung emphasizes by speaking of the blaze of manipura as the fire at the

center of the earth. Only in anahata does the sun of our being break free of the earth and rise into the air. Anahata is traditionally identified with the primal element of air: "because the heart is closely associated with the lungs. One must be naïve to understand these things. In primitive experience, it is the same thing. In fact it is a psychological truth" (Jung, 1996: 36). It is also a physiological truth, for our breathing and heart rate are very closely related. The heartbeat that speeds up in the face of sexual arousal, terror, and the like, can be controlled by the breathing exercises of yoga.

In the earth of muladhara where kundalini sleeps, we are stolid and unmoving in our identification with rationality, empirical facts, and the assumptions of our social consensus. In the water of svadhithana we plunge into the chaotic emotional turbulence of the unconscious. In the fire of manipura we can become caught in passions of a very personal nature. But when we rise into the air of anahata, we detach ourselves from our personal identity. In the solar center, for example, I am convinced that in seeing my essential being I am seeing "the real me"; and as I direct my manipura-inspired gaze upon you, I perceive "the real you." But in the heart center a real "detachment" takes place.

For example, when we experience one another sexually through any of the lower chakras, we cannot avoid the impression of viscosity. Negatively, we may feel "invaded" through the abdomen or "punched in the gut" of the solar plexus; positively, we may feel "entered" or "joined." The bodily foundation of these experiences and the sense that they are "mine" is never lost. But when my heart chakra has spun open, I have had the most airy feeling of transcendent bliss. "Bliss" is not an appropriate word to describe what happens in the lower chakras. We may talk of pleasure, pain, intimations of truth, and the like; but we are never moved to speak of bliss. We thus feel a crucial distinction between the lower and the upper chakras. Furthermore, we are moved to call it *transcendent* bliss. It is neither mine nor yours. It transcends us both and "comes to us," as though bestowed from on high. When our heart chakras spin open, there is no doubt in our minds that they are spinning in unison and that the oneness we experience is supremely light. In my experience, it can take place while we are fully clothed and without the physical activities of love-making. Toomer seems to have alluded to the heart chakra when he said that he had dropped the weight of "that me."

Although there is a sensation in our chest, it is as though our entire body has been "sublimed" [7] and turned into air, flowing through the vortex of my anahata into yours and back again. "I" and "you" persist, but a discarnate "we" predominates. Jung alludes to this experiential fact when he says that "individuation" begins in the heart chakra. In his language *individuation* does not mean "individuality," but rather one's connection with what is transpersonal, impersonal, or collective. Our personhood is rooted in what we share with all humankind, and indeed with the universe. The process of individuation for Jung establishes a living relationship with the impersonal ground of existence that he calls "the collective unconscious" or "the self." When we realize the centrality of the self, we discover that the ego we thought exhausted the reality of who we are has become merely an "appendix" of the larger reality the Hindus call atman.

In *anahata* individuation begins. . . . Individuation is becoming that thing which is not the ego, and that is very strange. . . . The ego discovers itself as being a mere appendix of the self in a sort of loose connection. For the ego is always far down in the *muladhara* and suddenly becomes aware of something up above on the fourth story, in *anahata*, and that is the self (Jung, 1996: 39-40).

In *anahata* . . . [one] gets the first inkling of the power and substantiality, or the real existence, of psychical things. . . . One cannot catch them with a butterfly net, nor can one find them under microscopes. They become visible only in the *anahata* (Jung, 1996: 45).

In the texts of Tantrism, the heart center is often described as a "void" that is "free of duality" and characterized by the state of bliss (Silburn, 1988: 7). "When Kundalini touches the heart center, [the yogin] breaks the attachment that ties him to the body" (Silburn, 1988: 73). Traditionally this condition of being beyond the body and the empirical world is symbolized by the "unstruck sound" which is the literal meaning of *anahata* (Evola, 1992: 153). Everything written about the *anahata* chakra emphasizes sublimity. It is not only we who are "sublimed," but the field of our consciousness as well. It is the immaterial world, the subtle plane as a realm in itself and not merely the esoteric significance of empirical realities. This is what Jung means when he says we get our "first inkling of the power and substantiality, or the real existence, of psychical things." Erotic trance becomes spiritual to a degree unknown at the lower chakras.

Whenever a chakra opens for us, the boundaries of everyday life are obliterated. When the *svadhisthana* opens in the lower abdomen, we have the sense that the two of us are dissolving into an erotic and dangerous *we*. At the *manipura* this dissolution manifests itself in our intuition of the essential being of the other. At the *anahata* it gives us the ability to "detect the *feelings* of other people" (Evola, 1992: 158; italics added). This is also why it is the primary center of love. But we can only read the feelings of others accurately when the *anahata* chakra is open. It may be activated but remain knotted. Then it can be characterized by a narcissistic self-love that includes, "hope, anxiety, apprehension, doubt, remorse, and hesitation" (Evola, 1992: 153). Mindell attributes to a knotted heart center, "hypochondria, skipping heart beats, cramping, stopping, over-excitement, and naïve sentimentality" (Mindell, 1982: 42). To be moved by the feelings that predominate in *anahata* without being detached from our ego-centered concerns distorts them as surely as our intuitions of essential being may be at the third chakra. If the open *anahata* is characterized above all by detachment from the body, from the personal realm, and from the outer world, a knotted *anahata* reveals persisting attachments, personal desires, and possessiveness.

When the *anahata* is knotted, its activation may be extremely painful. Typically this condition arises when we fall deeply in love with an individual who pretends not to reciprocate our feelings. Unable to conceal his feelings entirely, our would-be partner inadvertently gives us ample evidence that he loves us in return but cannot submit, perhaps, to the tumult of his own *svadhisthana*. Pulling back in fear, he frustrates our hopes and maintains distance. When our *anahata* chakra is knotted, we can feel this ambivalent rejection as a tearing or cutting right down the center of our chest. Such a torment results from our own knotted heart center. We have not yet risen above the surface of the inner earth of our diaphragm, and are still filled with personal attachments. We want to possess this beloved who rejects us. Unable to love in the pure, airy letting-be of an open *anahata*, our chest is clenched shut; and every attempt by the heart center to open seems to tear our flesh. Our pain is evidence that our "deity" is approaching and demanding that we let go of our attachments.

Intermediate between the bliss of a whirling *anahata* and the torment of a torn *anahata* lies the nearly sublime sensation that our heart center opens ecstatically like a groove in our chest that may sometimes expand to involve the lower chakras in an openness extending from

pubis to clavicle. We may feel that our partner nestles in that tender and sensitive trough or that we nestle inside our partner. Often it is difficult to determine which of us contains the other. The knottedness of the anahata is no longer experienced as painful. It is, indeed, delightful; but its rootedness in the physical body, now transformed through our erotic trance, reveals that we are perhaps lying on the surface of the inner earth and have not yet risen into the air. The subtle plane predominates over sensual realities. In *Divine Madness* (Haule, 1990: 154-6) I recounted an example of a couple who had reached a state like this and then were astonished to see that their coupling was but a footnote to the "real event": gigantic spirit beings were uniting in the air surrounding them. Although innocent of the whirling sensation so frequently described, their eyes were opened to "the real existence of psychical things": the full spirituality and independence of a divine subtle plane. Consistent with Jung's expression of the ego finding itself an "appendix" to a self which manifests "up above on the fourth story," those lovers felt personally "left out" of the main event, a pair of egos who were only permitted to observe.

Ioan Couliano says that this experience is cross-cultural and invariably associated with the space of the heart as it exists in the subtle body:

. . . "cleansing one's pneuma" or hegemonikon, or "cleansing one's heart." These are the theoretical givens that make it possible to understand a number of mystico-magic Oriental techniques that place much importance on the transparency, purity, and brilliance of the "seat of the heart," such as Taoism, Yoga, Sufism, and Hesychasm. [8] Whether or not it is designated by the vocables *hsin*, *akasa*, *hrdaya*, *qalb*, or *kardia*, this "cardiac space" always represents the phantasmic synthesizer whose cleanliness is the condition essential to all manifestation of divinity (1986: 114).

A "clean" heart-space is uncontaminated with personal attachments, assumptions, and desires. In the literature of Sufism and Buddhism, this heart-center requirement is often expressed as "polishing the mirror of the heart"; for only a mirror devoid of all dust fragments and fingerprints can reflect the realities of the subtle plane without distortion. What Couliano calls "phantasmic synthesizer" is precisely the imagination, what Corbin calls, employing the capital letter *I*, "active Imagination." This is our imaginal capacity, our faculty for transcending the merely personal and gaining access to the *mundus imaginalis*, the imaginal world -- an objective and impersonal reality which is substantially the same for all who enter. Whatever differences may be found from one individual to another are attributed solely to personal predispositions, to smudges on the mirror of the heart.

The examples of mysticism described in the seven chapters preceding this one have had relatively little to do with the heart chakra. The mad saints enter into the turbulence of svadhithana's watery abyss and lose their ego-orientation. Kundalini obliterates the world of their ego; and if they survive the ordeal psychologically, kundalini has brought them through the abyss to their essential being in manipura. The antinomian saints struggle with the same transit, but do so in a far more conscious manner. If any of them rose to the level of the anahata, we have paid little attention to this development. In the chapters that follow, however, the vast majority of the examples will be centered in the heart chakra. Despite the doctrine that kundalini sleeps and wakes in the root chakra, it is commonly said that "Kundalini usually chooses to stir from the heart" (Silburn, 1988: 28), or that the heart chakra is "where we always are" -- a reference to the self or atman rather than the ego.

The great Bengali poet, Ramprasad Sen, says that he wants to dwell only in the heart chakra

because (a) one cannot remain long in the crown chakra where complete union is attained, (b) in the lower levels one cannot "enjoy" the experience, and (c) in the heart center one is intoxicated but remains aware of one's surroundings (McLean, 1998: 75-6). In the verse that follows, the "cage of green bamboo" refers to the rib cage. "Lalan" is one of Ramprasad's names.

Mind, your only hope is to stay in the cage,
The cage you have made of green bamboo.
One day the cage will fall down,
Lalan says, When the cage is opened
That bird will fly away somewhere.
(McLean, 1998: 82).

Fifth Chakra, Vishuddha, The Throat Center

The primal element of vishuddha, the throat chakra, is ether, which is itself a highly abstract notion. In the West *ether* has come to mean a certain sort of aromatic compound. This is not at all the primal element ether. Indeed, ether no longer plays a role in modern physics and chemistry. [9] In late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and even to the nineteenth century, ether still had a role to play as the rarefied medium through which the stars and planets move. India's ether plays a role something like that of our own discarded notion, but it also and more importantly refers to a level of psychological and mystical experience. In Sanskrit, ether is *akasha*:

[*Akasha*] means literally "radiance." Early on, it acquired the meaning of "space" or "ether," and served as a frequent comparison for the transcendent Self, which is described as being brighter than a myriad of suns. . . . In later times, *akasha* came to be regarded as the finest of the five material elements (*bhuta*) of the manifest cosmos. In this sense, the concept is similar to Aristotle's "quintessence" and the "luminiferous ether" of nineteenth century physics -- a notion that was abandoned at the beginning of our century (Feuerstein, 1990).

In Jung's words, ether is: "Matter that is not matter, and such a thing must necessarily be a concept. . . . One reaches a sphere of abstraction. There one steps beyond the empirical world, as it were, and lands in a world of concepts" (Jung, 1996: 42). In being "beyond the empirical world," vishuddha has much in common with the heart chakra as well as the upper two centers. But the heart chakra is characterized primarily by feeling, while the throat chakra brings conceptual realities to our awareness. In an open anahata we can feel the feelings of others; in an open vishuddha we can detect their *thoughts* (Evola, 1992: 158). If in anahata we rise into the air, in vishuddha we rise into a much more abstract space comprised of ether:

[In *vishuddha*] one should admit that all one's psychical facts have nothing to do with material facts. For instance, the anger which you feel for somebody or something, no matter how justified it is, is not caused by those external things. It is a phenomenon all by itself. . . . In other words, our worst enemy is perhaps within ourselves.

If you reach that stage, you begin to leave the *anahata* (Jung, 1996: 49).

The clarity with which Jung spoke of the first four chakras appears to desert him as he gets to the fifth. Appearing to recognize this, he throws up his hands before the task of describing the chakras remaining, "It doesn't help to speculate about the *ajna* and *sahasrara* and God

knows what" (*Ibid.*, 47). It is not only Jung, however, who begins to speak obscurely when he reaches the fifth chakra. I have found no accounts of what it feels like to have the throat center open like a whirling lotus, and have not experienced it myself. Possibly my throat chakra is particularly knotted. I am well known, in fact, as one who has frequently to clear my throat -- a factor that is certainly related to my constant post-nasal drip, but may well have psychological and spiritual dimensions as well. Evola says that an open throat center makes it possible for, "Atma [to] see itself in everything and dominate past present and future." Meanwhile a knotted vishuddha is characterized by emotions of "affection, sadness, respect, devotion, happiness, regret, and relationship" (Evola, 1992: 154).

Clear distinctions between anahata, vishuddha, and ajna (the brow chakra), are hard to find. But if vishuddha is associated, as tradition holds, with a facility in the use of words and concepts, it would seem that my writing employs the throat chakra. The reader will perhaps be the best judge as to whether this book testifies to an open or a closed vishuddha, but I think my experience in writing is not unique to me. I find that some other power, entirely impersonal and "not me," proposes images and words which in the first instance I simply observe. Often a whole scene unfolds for me, and I simply write down the words that come by way of articulating it. Sometimes words and phrases come of their own and the images follow.

If this is a description of kundalini proposing and my ego disposing, then perhaps Muhammad is the best historical example of a man who worked entirely from the vishuddha. For by his own account he merely repeated word-for-word what the Angel Gabriel spoke to his inner ear when he was reciting the texts that eventually were assembled as the Qu'ran. So respectful was he of the divine origin of those words, that he eschewed all ego participation in the process. Every one of his inspired pronouncements began with the word, "Recite." Kundalini, in the person of Gabriel, began every entry into the oral record that became the Qu'ran with the command to Muhammad that he was to "recite" what followed, and Muhammad was so worshipful in his regard for the impersonal source of what he was to say that he did not omit even the initial word of command.

In my case, ego plays a much larger role. I argue with kundalini, telling her that this is not yet the time for this particular idea, image, or set of words. I wait for her to speak to the issue at hand, reminding her that she got me into this or that difficulty and that it is her responsibility to get me out of it. I also do not hesitate to shape her material with an eye to my imagined reader. Sometimes I become depressed at the way things are going and block my access to the impersonal source of inspiration. I also have to submit myself to a great deal of ego-centered research, studying what others have said and accumulating a supply of material which kundalini shapes by turning up my interest. But it is generally she who finds the conceptual connections between the various ideas I have found in my academic sources. While the dialogue is going on between me and kundalini, I often lose track of time and my commitments in the empirical world. In a few instances this has led to embarrassment, but I find that generally kundalini or some other watchman keeps track of these things -- not unlike the internal clock-keeper who wakes me in the morning or at the end of an occasional afternoon nap at precisely the right moment, eliminating the need for an alarm clock.

According to the Hindus, ether is the element that transmits vibrations -- particularly those of sound. Thus the pronouncing of mantras is said to be associated with the vishuddha, not only

because mantras are phrases, words, or isolated syllables, but also because mantras are said to change our consciousness through the etheric vibrations produced when we speak them aloud. Music -- especially the music of the spheres -- belongs to the vishuddha. A musician once told me that the throat chakra is his most dependable access to the subtle body and the subtle plane. He can open it at will by pronouncing the mantra given him by a guru. But it also opens of its own and enables him to perceive that the *world* is ethereal and comprised of vibrations.

Sixth Chakra, Ajna, Centered Above The Eyebrows

A great deal of nonsense has been written about the brow chakra, often called the "third eye," especially in Western literature. New-age accounts credit the third eye with every sort of imagery, making little or no attempt to distinguish the imaginal from the imaginary. Ajna is different from the other "higher chakras" in that it has more to do with imagery than the others. The heart chakra is responsible primarily for feelings, the throat center for concepts and words, and the crown chakra for cosmic vision. What distinguishes the brow chakra is imagery of a mythological and impersonal character. It is our eye into "Indra's Heaven," to use the metaphor from our earlier story about Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother.

The myth that we live without knowing it *as* a myth -- and perhaps without knowing that we are living a myth at all -- represents the unacknowledged ground of our personal existence. When our ajna is open, this impersonal ground expresses itself in imagery and narrative. It has a thoroughly impersonal character. The extent to which we live our life centered in the ego's concerns obscures the mythological foundation and enables us to depart from our psychological roots in various neurotic ways. When the mythological foundation of our life is acknowledged, however, it does indeed form the basis of our existence; and ajna, as our imaginal access to our foundation, envisions the ruling myth of our life. In this sense it is the "command center." Beyond that: "It is the receiver for the guru's telepathic communications to the student. Hence it is also called the *guru-chakra*. . . . Its activation is said to lead to all kinds of psychic powers (*siddhi*), notably clairvoyance and the ability to communicate telepathically" (Feuerstein, 1990).

Mookerjee says the ajna "controls" the various states of consciousness that one gains through meditation (Mookerjee, 1986: 42). It gives us "simultaneous knowledge of things as they really are"; and is the perceiver of cosmic consciousness (*Ibid.*, 12). Silburn says that these visions occur while the body, will, and intellect are "benumbed," although the "heart keeps watch" (Silburn, 1988: 74). This seems to mean that genuine ajna experience requires a real detachment from the body, as is true of all the higher chakras. Karagulla, a medical doctor who reports her educated observations, notes that while a clairvoyant is "seeing" invisible or imaginal realities, the eyes appear "slightly dilated and fixed," and the pupils do not react in the normal way to light (Karagulla & Kunz, 1989: 84).

A dramatic story about the opening of the ajna chakra constitutes a turning point in the biography of Ramakrishna. A naked, wandering guru named Tota attempted to initiate Ramakrishna into his own fairly orthodox practice of Vedanta. Meanwhile, Ramakrishna reports being delighted with Tota's nakedness and used the opportunity to play with the elder man's "little penis," apparently as though it were the member of a boy -- thus expressing

Ramakrishna's unconscious identification with homosexuality and Tantra. [10] Tota became frustrated by this sexual play and by Ramakrishna's devotion to the goddess, believing that it kept Ramakrishna's eyes closed to Vedanta's formless vision of brahman:

The graceful form of his Mother kept appearing to him, floating in his psychic sky to challenge the command of the monk who had smirked at Ramakrishna's devotion. Finally, Tota took a piece of sharp glass and embedded it in Ramakrishna's forehead: "Concentrate here," he said. Once again the goddess appeared, but this time the saint imagined that his new-found knowledge was a sword and cut the goddess in two. At once his mind ascended past name and form and merged into the formless *brahman*. Within a mere three days, he had attained what it took Tota forty years to accomplish (Kripal, 1995: 152).

The ultimate victor in this story was Ramakrishna, who brought Tota to such despair that he wandered into the river to commit suicide, where he had a vision of the goddess, the Mother of the Universe, and realized that, "*Brahman* and the *sakti* of *brahman* are nondifferent!" (Kripal, 1995: 153). But the detail about embedding the piece of sharp glass in Ramakrishna's forehead appears to be an authentic reference to what it feels like to have the brow chakra open. Bhattacharya's introduction to the ajna chakra was very similar. His "instructor," a little Vaishnavite yogin named Narada, removed a brown bead from his hair and pressed it into Bhattacharya's forehead. Bhattacharya gives a lengthy series of incidents in which reality and illusion are so interwoven with one another that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. The ajna brings us visions, but no little discernment is required before we can utilize them. Bhattacharya says, "To this day I feel much embarrassed for this brow-reaction [the seeing of visions]; and I always stand in fear of it" (Bhattacharya, 1988: 287). His confusion and embarrassment betray a certain "knottedness" in his ajna.

I have never felt my own brow chakra open, but several people have reported to me that they have experienced it as a vertical split in the forehead, suggestive of the Indian icons in which a third eye is positioned vertically between the two horizontal fleshly eyes. [11] One woman told me she experienced it as an unusually sharp and persisting headache in the center of her forehead that was "so immobilizing that I couldn't get out of bed to get an aspirin" and that when she closed her eyes she had an image of a "gridlocked woven pattern in multiple colors." Apparently her knotted ajna was trying to open. Further evidence of the knottedness of her ajna is suggested by the fact that she was assailed by visions she found extremely disturbing. For example, a vision or dream of a car crash convinced her that one of her grown children was in danger of dying in an automobile accident. She entered a psychotic-like state that lasted a couple of weeks, and restored her sanity by returning to the yogic practices she had been neglecting. On her return to sanity, she said that the lesson she had learned from all that had happened was that such visions were "true but not literal." In short, she had learned that the visions belong to the subtle plane and not to the empirical world.

Muktananda's experience confirms that the sensation accompanying an opening ajna chakra may be a powerful pain in the forehead:

I started to feel a pain between the eyebrows, which was so strong I could not sleep at night. Then a light came in meditation, like a candle flame without a wick, and stood motionless in the *ajna chakra*, the two-petaled lotus between the eyebrows (Muktananda, 1978: 128).

Seventh Chakra, Sahasrara, At The Crown Of The Head

Sahasrara, meaning "thousand," refers to the "thousand-petaled lotus" or "thousand-spoked wheel" that represents the crown chakra, sometimes located at the crown of the skull, where the energy of kundalini may be felt to exit, and sometimes located some four inches above the crown of the head. "The Sahasrara is the centre of quintessential consciousness, where integration of all polarities is experienced, and the paradoxical act of transcendence is accomplished in passing beyond ever-changing *samsara* [12] and 'emerging from time and space'" (Mookerjee, 1986: 44). It is the point at which semen rising through the central channel (sushumna) is said to be transformed into nectar and the point where Sadashiva, as the union of Shiva and Shakti, occurs. Silburn says that to pass beyond the brow chakra, it is necessary to have mastered meditation's goal of samadhi, the state of non-dual consciousness (Silburn, 1988: 29). What is attained in the sahasrara is the "splendor of consciousness"; and it does not come about through self-effort. In Christian terms, it is a matter of "grace," i.e., supernatural agency, a gift of God. What is seen in the high attainment of samadhi in the crown chakra is a vision of "the very nature of things" (Silburn, 1988: 31).

"The very nature of things" may be called Sadashiva, Shakti, consciousness, brahman, or given a large number of names; but the essence of the vision involves seeing the underlying nature of reality. The empirical world is revealed as a limited and illusory vision of ultimate reality, which may be described as the energy that lies behind what we see with our fleshly eyes. [13] It is the fundamental experience of "Thou art That." Gopi Krishna's meditation on the thousand-petaled lotus of his sahasrara gives us a distorted hint of what the experience may be. To approach the experience more clearly, we will have to consider the nature of samadhi and the Buddhist doctrine of nothingness (*shunyata*) or "co-dependent origination" in Chapters Eleven and Twelve. For now it will be enough to know that it transcends all earlier experiences and is the goal of mysticism. "Indra's Heaven" and its analogues that become available to our imaginal vision in the brow chakra are also revealed to be a limited and illusory perspective on the ultimate when the yogin's sahasrara opens.

* * *

This survey of the seven centers that comprise the subtle body represents a very limited account. We have striven to remain close to everyday consciousness so as to reveal aspects of the subtle-body experience that many readers may have had and in the hope that experiences that have not been had can at least be vividly imagined. Surely more complete and officially "correct" versions are available. I have tried to keep this account simple by not going beyond my own experience. The point is that we encounter a whole world of experience at each chakra, for each one bring a unique perspective to bear, with its own physiology, emotion, and imaginal structure. The chakras are the gateways to the several dimensions of the subtle plane, where what is "out there" and what is "in here" are not different. We all experience the subtle body in fragmentary ways. Most of us discard these glimpses because we have no way of naming and categorizing them. They have no place within our Western consensus. I am convinced that the best way to proceed is to begin taking note of the experiences we are already having, and not to try to force ourselves to have the

experiences we find described in books. Thus the descriptions above are not meant to be taken as a blueprint so much as a set of clues. subtle-body.

1. Although the texts generally describe this energy as "sperm" or one of its mythological equivalents, the fact that it is common to both men and women prompts my employment of this more general expression, "vital energy."
2. First aired in 1966. I heard it repeated on April 2, 1999, while revising this manuscript.
3. Satori: the experience of "awakening" or "enlightenment" in Zen.
4. Koan: A saying, phrase, or story given to a student of Zen to be meditated upon with the idea of finding an "answer." Koans always take the form of conundrums designed to frustrate the student's reasoning and everyday thinking powers so as to bring about a break-through, i.e., satori.
5. Of course Jung never connects this incident with the language of kundalini yoga.
6. He uses the Latin expression, *principium individuationis*.
7. In chemistry, to "sublime" is to pass directly from the solid state to the gaseous state without becoming a liquid in between. You can see this on a warm, humid day in winter when the snow turns directly into steam and may even produce a fog.
8. Hesychasm: the mystical practice of the Orthodox Church, discovered by the monks of the monastery at Mt. Athos in the fourteenth century. By repeating the mantra, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," they sought a vision of "the Divine Light, the Energy, not the essence of the godhead," through yoga-like practices (Ferguson, 1977).
9. Unless one sees it smuggled back in the form of the "fields" through which the energy-packets of quantum theory propagate themselves; or in the "no-place" where Bohm's "implicate order" lies "folded up." As we shall see in Chapter Eleven, there is ample reason for considering this mythological interpretation of certain obscure notions in modern physics.
10. Not only does this playful sexuality suggest that Ramakrishna was infantilizing the elder guru, it also implies that Ramakrishna was initiating Tota into his own unconscious Tantric practice at the same time that Tota was endeavoring to initiate Ramakrishna into Vedanta.
11. This vertical placement of the "third eye" seems to represent a minority position among Indian iconographers, as the eye in the center of the brow is more frequently represented in the horizontal position. It is tempting to think that those who place it vertically may be more fully initiated.
12. Samsara: the eternal round of death and rebirth, also the empirical or profane world, the source of all illusion. We are fated to be reborn into the empirical world after every death until we attain the transcending consciousness which sees through it. Once this is achieved, our death ends the struggle and we enter forever into the full reality of what is.
13. This doctrine that the empirical world is a limited aspect of ultimate reality is common to the various schools of Tantra. It contrasts with the Vedanta doctrine of Shankara, whereby the empirical world has no reality at all, is merely an illusion. For Tantra, the empirical world is a real but limited perspective on "the very nature of things." It is illusory insofar as it poses as the way things really are; but it is real insofar as it constitutes a limited aspect of ultimate reality.