

# The Chakra System as a Framework for Holistic Educational Development

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## Abstract

As my interests and job duties have shifted toward holistic educational development beyond teaching support, I have sought a conceptual framework to organize my efforts. Joining my identities of educational developer and yogi, I have adapted the chakra system from yoga philosophy. The One Thing in my personal life has become The One Thing in my professional life too, informing programming and pointing out voids to fill. This essay reviews the classic articulation of the chakra system in the seven major chakras and offers examples of how the chakras can illuminate our institutional work, both individually and as an integrated system.

**Keywords:** Development, Values, Chakras, Yoga

I honor the lotus feet of all the ancestral teachers.

Which awaken and manifest joy in oneself,

Beyond comparison, appearing as a snake charmer.

For pacifying the poisonous delusions of samsara.”

—From the Ashtanga Yoga opening invocation, as translated by Tias Little.

Yoga, which I was introduced to one day in 2003 on a Hawaiian terrace overlooking the ocean, changed my life. It became a tool for personal development in my life during my divorce in 2005, helping me find inner strength, a more solid sense of self, and a feeling of purpose throughout 2009, when I did my yoga teacher training. I have brought yoga to the POD Network conference, and I am proud that it is part of my legacy to the field. When I interviewed for my current position in 2010, I structured my job talk around yoga, making it my metaphor for teaching, learning, and educational development—to an overwhelming response from the faculty. Not only did I get the job, but they begged me to teach them yoga. I folded it in the mission of the center and created a yoga faculty learning community. Once or twice a week, we practiced on the mat, read readings on yoga philosophy, pedagogy, and their intersection, discussed our perspectives, and blogged on a wiki our reflections on how yoga changed our relationship with students and with teaching. With the emergence of the contemplative pedagogy movement (Barbezat & Bush, 2013), which considers yoga one of the contemplative pedagogies, we later embedded our yoga work in this larger framework. Energized by the Faculty Learning Community, several faculty members initiated collaborations, changed their teaching based on yoga, and produced scholarship documenting those changes. I knew the FLC was making a difference, so I initiated a research study to document its impact, the full results of which will be discussed elsewhere. However, to my astonishment, some participants credited it with their very survival in academe, allowing them to weather accruing performance expectations, a consolidation with another university and the resulting upheaval, momentous changes in the tenure and promotion process, turbulent leadership transitions, and unique personal struggles. My trusted tool for personal development had become these faculty’s anchor too.

What is so special about yoga? The promise of joy beyond comparison seems like hyperbole, but the promise of liberation from samsara is appealing. Samsara is the conditioned existence (Little, 2016), the reactive life we live on autopilot when distracted by our busy ness. Being free from those scripts that rule our life and able to be present in the moment, to live out our authentic selves, is a very appealing prospect, especially in academia, a place that traditionally segments us to our ideas and brains and tends to forget bodies and emotions. Yoga means union, or more precisely nonduality, rediscovering that the body and the mind were never separate in the first place (Stone, 2008), and working toward a full awareness of mindful body and embodied mind.

The importance of focusing on the body is underscored by Foucault's (1977) observation that the body is the locus of oppression, the principal target of disciplinary power. The most demoralized faculty and graduate students I consulted with over the years wore their failures on their skin—slumped bodies, curved in shoulders, floorbound gaze, lower back pain, posture problems from sitting at the computer, and unwanted weight gains from unhealthy eating habits in the pursuit of maximal productivity. None of them was living the life they wanted.

Listening to their stories, it became clear that helping them with their teaching could only go so far because of the complex root system underlying the presenting issues. Some were beaten down by the bullying they experienced on campus, whereas others were rendered helpless by an alienating consolidation process they described as a “grief to mourn.” Gradually, my focus expanded. I used to see my work with faculty as instrumental to student learning, the one thing I cared about. While that is still important to me, I now see faculty well being and empowerment as a goal unto itself. When faculty are fulfilled, lots of good things happen. Student learning improves, of course, as well as research productivity, faculty engagement, collegiality in the department, faculty retention, among other things.

Our unit's focus has recently been expanded to include integrated faculty development beyond teaching. We are a center of 10 full time staff, adequately resourced for our size, at a university with 35,000 students and 2,500 full and part time faculty, on two campuses 10 miles away from each other. We have been charged with offering programs to support career and leadership development, holistic development, and creating a positive institutional culture. Looking for a framework to organize our programming, yoga philosophy became a natural candidate. The yogic framework I use to determine our programs and the goals behind them is the *chakra* system.

## The Chakra System

The chakra system is one of the metaphors Eastern philosophy uses for the concept of alignment. The Upanishads (Easwaran, 2009) describe the self as being composed of five different layers, or *koshas* (physical, energetic, mental, wisdom, and bliss). The energetic body, also called the subtle body, contains the *prana*, or life force, flowing through the body along thousands of channels termed *nadis*. Along the nadis, we find energy centers, called *chakras* (meaning wheel, or vortex, in Sanskrit). The most important nadi is the *sushumna*, and it runs down the spine. Along it, we find the seven major chakras, each presiding to basic human functions, from the most material, at the base of the spine, to the most rarefied, at the crown of the head and beyond.

Most of us, unless we have reached enlightenment, live in a state where the chakras are not all well functioning. We might have blockages in some chakras, and be either deficient or excessive in expressing that function. Each of us has a unique chakra profile describing our human condition, but a common pattern in academia seems to have excessive imbalance in the head chakras, corresponding to the more intellectual functions, with blockages in the lower ones. To achieve liberation, each of us is tasked with the work of opening up the chakras in a healthy and balanced way so that they work in harmony with each other. Yoga describes this process through the metaphor of the Kundalini serpent, which rests coiled three and a half times at the base of the spine until its energy is awakened and it ascends, rising through the sushumna, and piercing every chakra open as it goes up, rendering a higher consciousness possible (Campbell, 2011). The physical practice of yoga is one tool for this awakening, but there are others. Jung (1999) built his theory of the unconscious on the chakras, and claimed that psychotherapy can also do

that. In this essay, I extend that metaphor and, echoing the opening quotation, I posit the educational developer as a “snake charmer.” In the following sections, I will explain each chakra, their functions, the rights and challenges (conceived in terms of “demons”) associated with them (summarized in Table 1), the consequences of imbalance, particularly in faculty’s professional life, and the ways in which I try to attend to each of them using the tools of our field. I rely heavily on the work of Judith (1999, 2004, 2006), who approaches the chakra framework through the lens of developmental psychology, a perspective I find to be simpatico with the aims of our field.

**Table 1. Summary of the Seven Major Chakras**

S. No.	Chakra	Location	Function	Right	Demon
1.	Muladhara	Coccyx	Grounding/Stability	To be	Fear
2.	Svadhithana	Sacral plexus	Movement/Desire	To feel	Guilt
3.	Manipura	Solar plexus	Power/Transformation	To act	Shame/Anger
4.	Anahata	Heart	Love/Balance	To love	Grief
5.	Vishuddha	Throat	Voice/Truth	To speak	Lies
6.	Ajna	Third eye	Vision	To see	Illusions
7.	Sahasrara	Crown	Transcendence/Legacy	To know	Attachment

### *The Root Chakra—Grounding*

We begin at the bottom of the spine. The lowest chakra (Muladhara, or “root support”) is the energy center that presides over our root, our grounding. It is our foundation, where our sense of self resides. It is associated with matter and solidity, governed by the earth element. We can also think of it as the background system that governs all the subroutines necessary in our life, the regularity that makes sure all the bills are paid, the laundry is done, the learning management system is set up, homework is graded and returned to students in a timely manner, and the travel requests are submitted, so we can actually get to the conference and engage in higher intellectual purposes. How does this relate to educational development? Well, as an example, we meet new faculty at a time in their life when their foundational subroutines are all disrupted. They have moved to a different city or state to take a job, their lives are still packed up in cardboard boxes, and they have to learn their way around an unfamiliar place. Meanwhile, classes start Monday, and a small voice inside is wondering if this will turn out to be a good move for them. Before even considering teaching philosophies or strategies, new faculty orientation is a colossal first chakra endeavor, aiming to quickly bring balance to a temporarily upended chakra.

Each chakra has a right associated with it, and the right of the root chakra is the right to be, to take up space. People with a balanced first chakra exhibit a sense of stability, and they feel safe and secure. People who are excessive in this chakra might exhibit an aggrandized sense of self, or workaholism. However, people who are deficient in this chakra might display fear, anxiety, and insecurity, or lots of ideas but difficulty concretizing them. This chakra is literally our seat, but people who are deficient in it live life as if sitting on the edge of the proverbial chair, never fully relaxing into themselves. Each chakra also has a “demon,” or a “trickster,” associated with it. The demon of the first chakra is fear. Fear is evolutionarily connected to the hips, where the root chakra resides, through the fight or flight response, which activates by contracting the hips and coiling the body in, ready to spring to attack or to flee the scene. Some have observed that modern academic life is in a constant state of fight or flight response. Schoen (2013) argues that modern life has turned our survival instinct indefinitely on. As more and more faculty and graduate students share with me episodes of stress leading to depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, I see the persuasive force of his argument. On July 1, 2017, the state of Georgia enacted its concealed carry law. Once again, anxiety has spiked up for the faculty as a group, who are now worried for their physical safety. When faculty identify survival as a top issue, as those in the yoga FLC did, the work must start at the root chakra level.

While chakra profiles vary across people, there are nevertheless patterns across groups. For instance, the pressures on part time faculty concur to block a healthy expression of this chakra. Economic anxiety due to insufficient wages, lack of faculty offices, being cut off from the regular flow of information for those not invited to department meetings, and other challenges, make difficult for this group to take up space. It is

no coincidence that many of our consultations with adjuncts revolve around issues other than pedagogy, because the necessary subroutines have not been established. They ask us for basic help on how to use the learning management system, how to enter their hours for their time cards, and they have questions about parking and campus policies. I decided to hire somebody completely dedicated to supporting their needs, and they advocated that this person come from their ranks. One of the first initiatives of this new educational fellow for part time faculty support was to found a national conference where part time faculty could present their research, where our faculty would be subsidized to attend. Fittingly with the themes of the first chakra, we titled the conference the Symposium for Part time, Adjunct, and Contingent Educators (SPACE).

#### *The Pelvic Chakra—Desire*

If the first chakra is the chakra of unity, where we go inward and reflect on our foundation, the second chakra is that of duality, where we open our eyes and see a world made of people and things different from ourselves. We notice polarities and we register where we are on those continua in relation to the rest of the world. We are attracted to some of those things and repelled by others; in other words, this chakra is about movement and choice. Located in the pelvic bowl, the second chakra (Svadhithana, or “sweetness”) is the energy center that presides over our desires. It is governed by the water element, which flows with the current until it fills the space. It is connected to the right to feel. This right is not traditionally acknowledged in academia, with consequences. Those with a balanced second chakra exhibit emotional intelligence, nurturance of self and others, healthy boundaries, and passion. When this chakra is excessive, we might see reactivity and impulsivity in following one’s professional desires, starting multiple projects but not following through, and a feeling of being overcommitted, as well as moodiness and poor professional boundaries. Deficient characteristics include lack of passion or excitement, disengagement or boredom, and poor social skills.

Our center acknowledges these potential deficiencies, and one of our goals is to keep our faculty excited about teaching. When we showcase new technologies and pedagogies in our workshops and webinars, part of the purpose is to pique participants’ interests and give them the tools to continue in their explorations. Similarly, we have initiated a funding program called Course Design Enhancement Fund, where faculty suggest a change they want to make to their course and draw a budget to realize their idea. Maybe they need funds to buy clickers, or to shoot videos in order to flip their course, or to attend a training to become certified in a certain skill they will then teach the students. The program is our intentional effort to remind educators of their professional desires and to fuel them.

The demon of this chakra is guilt. Guilt tells us that we are wrong to desire the things we desire, we are inconsiderate to wish to protect our time and say no to other requests, we are too rigid if we set boundaries with our students so that we can meet our research expectations. When guilt is in the driver’s seat, we repress our authentic desires and are at the mercy of those making demands on us. This issue is particularly topical for early career faculty if their chairs are not intentional in protecting their time, so we explicitly address politically savvy ways of saying no. For instance, we invite experienced mentors from each college to new faculty orientation and ask them to share their own strategies. Expressing appreciation for the proposed project before turning it down, listing all other ongoing commitments, enlisting the chair’s help in prioritizing, explicitly asking which assignments can fall off the plate, are recurring suggestions. However, using the chakra framework has helped us realize that we do not offer enough in this area, so we decided to plan a workshop on how to use the performance review and goal setting meeting with the chair as an authentic moment to align faculty professional desires with the needs of the department along a successful trajectory toward tenure and promotion.

#### *The Solar Plexus Chakra—Power/Transformation*

The third chakra (Manipura, or “lustrous gem”) is situated right below the navel. This chakra is the center of our personal power, and it presides over transformation. Ruled by fire, the solar plexus is the body’s sun, the furnace where we burn matter, metabolize it, and transform it into energy. This is where we draw the energy to act in the world, and indeed the right to act is connected to this chakra. We now start to see the benefits of this structure. When we build on a balanced first and second chakra, we combine matter (mass) from the first chakra and movement (speed) from the second, creating energy, in a metaphorical

reimagining of Einstein's Equation  $E = mc^2$ . While water (as of the second chakra) moves, it flows down following the path of least resistance. However, the energy of fire of the third chakra rises, ascending us toward a higher consciousness.

Those with an open, balanced third chakra are confident, warm, energetic, able to take risks when appropriate but still being responsible and reliable. Excessive competitiveness and ambition, arrogance, hyperactivity, driven, type A personality, being stubborn and reckless are indicators of an excessive third chakra. Whereas, lacking initiative and confidence, being risk averse and overdefensive in the face of failure are symptoms of deficiencies in this chakra. The demon of this chakra is shame, because shame prevents us from taking action. A common manifestation of this shame, and the resulting blockage in the power chakra is impostor syndrome. Again, while each individual will have a unique chakra profile, patterns emerge. For instance, the socialization experiences of many women have forced them to work harder at establishing their power in a system that was not build for them, with resulting blockages in the power chakra. We address this issue explicitly in our work, especially in our book clubs. Faculty in these clubs consider questions of the impostor, such as: Where does our power come from? Does it stem from our expert knowledge? From the funds we raise in our grants? From the power to decide student grades? Can we build it through relationships and empathy? Through building authenticity and vulnerability in our professional selves? It is not a coincidence that our most popular book club was *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*, by Valerie Young. In a similar vein, other popular book clubs have included Amy Cuddy's *Presence*, Brené Brown's *Rising Strong*, Angela Duckworth's *Grit* and Therese Huston's *How Women Decide*. Our faculty have a hunger for discussing these issues, and want read what the research says and connect with others who share similar experiences. The me too moments of recognition we witness in our book club discussions empower and validate their worth. The shared strategies build a personal repertoire. Gradually, the entitled student, the gaslighting colleague, and the inner critic are cut down to size.

#### *The Heart Chakra—Love/Balance*

The fourth chakra (Anahata, or “unstruck”) takes us to the heart. As the location suggests, this chakra is associated with the right to love and, in this context, it is about meaningful professional connections. It is ruled by air, the oxygen we breathe in through the lungs and release in the blood stream circulating through the heart. Again, we can see how the chakras build on each other, as the water of the second chakra metaphorically separates into the hydrogen in the sun furnace of the third chakra and the oxygen of the fourth. Qualities of a balanced, healthy, and open heart chakra include empathy, contentment, and a caring spirit. Historically, the academy has not been built with the heart in mind, leading to the disintegration of the nonduality of heart and mind rather than to connection, and to imbalances. Imbalances in this chakra are characterized on the one hand by excessive giving of oneself, to the point of becoming a martyr, or isolation and lack of empathy on the deficient side. When the institutional or departmental culture does not emphasize collegiality and interactions lack empathy, many faculty feel like the targets of incivility or bullying, reports of which are on the rise (Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

The demon of this chakra is grief, which makes the heart heavier and more difficult to open. The faculty who reported grieving the consolidation process at our institution exhibited common traits. Those who could left. Those who stayed either assumed an air of resignation or became resentful. Both categories disengaged. Because many perceive the center as an oasis, several faculty confided in us, including those who have been bullied. Bound by confidentiality, we could not address their situation other than with gentle nudges behind the scenes. However just being there and offering a place of empathy and support made a big difference. For instance, after the consolidation, I met with the faculty from the new campus to explain the purpose of the center and solicit their input for programs. They shared that it was the first time in the whole process they felt truly listened to. I was able to secure funds from the provost to hire an associate director dedicated to the faculty teaching on that campus. Hungry for support, faculty immediately connected with him, and some of these connections resulted in joint STEM grants to the National Science Foundation, with faculty members doing the basic research and our associate director supporting the educational aspect of the grant. The funded grants have brought financial benefit to the institution, a tangible reminder of the dividends we can reap when we lead with love.

Fortunately, we are now witnessing a movement to find the heart in higher education (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) and reclaim this chakra's central right to love. Educators are redesigning courses with the aim of engendering empathy. Barbezat and Bush (2013) discuss teaching economics with the goal of maximizing utility for everybody rather than the traditional goal of maximizing profits for few. It is worth noting that from a lifespan developmental perspective (Erikson, 1994) the main identity crisis affecting early career faculty is the struggle between intimacy and isolation, crystallized in the question "Can I love?" Any holistic development program that taps into this developmental question is likely to resonate with that group. Our faculty learning community program lets faculty propose some of the themes to address during the year, and several proposed topics revolve around the goal of generating empathy in the students. For instance, the Inside Out faculty learning community gathered educators who teach about prisons from different disciplinary perspectives and brought their students in a correctional facility where they study and learn together with incarcerated individuals.

The fourth chakra has an additional function. It is situated halfway between the lowest and the highest chakras, the most material and the most rarefied. As such it reminds us of balance. We are all familiar with the balancing acts academics have to perform: balance between teaching and research, between theoretical and applied, between work and life. In addition to those, I underscore the balance between giving and receiving. For some of us, the conditioning of samsara is to only perceive our worth when we are giving of ourselves. However if we only give and do not replenish ourselves, we will become depleted. Radical pedagogue Stephen Brookfield (2017) points out the insidious ways in which we talk about teaching that promote depletion, such as when we call it a vocation, suggesting that is its own reward. Berg and Seeber (2016) argue that academia is in a state of imbalance in all the traditional areas of the profession (teaching research, and administration) and encourages slowing down as a way to resist the capitalistic forces on higher education. We used their book *The Slow Professor* for a book club. It was well received and we repeated it the following semester, but it highlighted for us that this is a programming area we need to develop further. This realization came at a particular time when our university has been shocked by the death of a young faculty member, who kept her illness private while performing strength and health publicly. It highlighted an additional, and delicate, balancing act between productivity and self care that academics can be caught between. In response to this event, a group of faculty has asked us to host a retreat on faculty wellness at the end of the academic year. This is one of the advantages of using the chakra framework in a systematic way. It points out our own areas of programmatic imbalance and deficiency so that we can strengthen them.

#### *The Throat Chakra—Voice/Truth*

As we move further up the energetic body, we get to the literal nexus between the head and the rest of the body the throat, home of the fifth chakra (vishuddha, or "purifier"). This chakra presides over the function of voice, is associated with the right to speak, and is ruled by the element of sound. The metaphor of sound waves, a vibration in constant movement and oscillation around a stable center, again reinforces the idea of building on the work of the lower chakras to examine and improve the way in which we communicate the next step in our liberation and transcendence. After all, by communicating we can understand others and experience the world through their perspectives, thereby enriching ours.

The purifying aspect of this chakra is an alignment. Communication is pure when we are clear in our thoughts from the head, clear in our feelings from the heart, and the two are in alignment with each other. Therefore, a balanced throat chakra allows us to express a full, resonant voice and speak our truth while being a good listener to others. Excessive characteristics might include gossiping, being all talk and no action, poor listening skills, inability to keep confidences. Deficient characteristics, on the other hand, include a fear of speaking up or speaking with a small, timid voice, or an inability to articulate our thoughts clearly. The demon of this chakra is lies.

In my understanding of this chakra, I extend this balanced communication to both oral and written forms, and I am aware that faculty have a different level of comfort with certain genres of communication. In particular, I know that the most anxiety producing genre for them is the personal narrative for promotion and tenure reviews. It is a genre they do not practice regularly enough to become proficient and confident in it, and the stakes of this communication are high. Unless your record is sterling, it is embarrassing to

discuss negative student evaluations or the grant proposal that was not funded. Moreover, it is challenging to account for those shortcomings without sounding defensive. We run workshops where we offer faculty principles for how to structure the narrative and how to explain any negatives. In the semesters when we have offered them, these workshops have always sold out, and we had to repeat them, proof of the need for this kind of programs.

In addition, through my commitment to inclusions and social justice, I try to use my voice to advocate for the needs of the faculty whenever possible. Because I realize that not all of us have the same privileges, I am especially conscious of the need to amplify the voices of those who are not fully empowered to speak. I have already mentioned part time faculty who do not have the protections of tenure. Given the current social climate, I am also acutely aware of the many faculty around the nation who have experienced hardship for speaking out forcefully against racism, white supremacy, and misogyny, in society and in academia. I see it as my responsibility to make the center a safe place to have these delicate conversations, using book clubs as catalysts. One of the ways in which we have done that is through book clubs such as Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress*, Beverly Daniel Tatum's *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, and Claude Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi*. We also ran a panel on race in the classroom, which filled the room to capacity. A participant commented the following: "At all my previous institutions, the teaching center was the place to avoid, the place you got sent to when you messed up in your teaching, but here the center has been the place that consistently has nurtured productive dialogue about race." These events made us realize that a goal we have never articulated for our center or measured explicitly is to create community. As a result, we have revised our assessment plan accordingly, and will be collecting evidence about this goal moving forward.

*The Third Eye Chakra—Vision*

We are now fully in the head, the academic's common province. The sixth chakra (Ajna, "to perceive and command") is located between the eyebrows, in the third eye, ruled by the element of light, and it presides over vision, or the right to see. Vision here refers not just to seeing things, but seeing through things for what they really are. Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick (2003) notes in her essay "Pedagogy of Buddhism" that when she yells at her cat and points with a finger to the mess the cat made, the cat instead fixates on the finger. In this framework, the cat would be deficient in the third eye chakra, because it is unable to see that the finger has a meaning beyond the digit itself. A full vision allows us to follow the signifier all the way to the signified, to read the words on the page as well as read between the lines. A fully expressed and balanced third eye chakra displays strong intuition, insight, creative imagination, and good memory. Excessive characteristics might include difficulty concentrating, persistent daydreaming and fantasizing, as well as obsessions. Deficient characteristics, on the other hand, might include lack of imagination, difficulty visualizing, undue skepticism, and inability to imagine alternative options and solutions. The demon of this chakra is illusion.

Embedded in the work for this chakra is the task of developing a vision for ourselves and our life. For those on the tenure track, academia presents a tightly regulated path for the first few years. Behind a sufficient number of publications and high enough student evaluations lie several tasks pertaining to this chakra—developing academic independence from the dissertation advisor, establishing a research agenda, developing a teaching philosophy, finding ways to contribute to the institution. This might mean learning to navigate the politics of a balkanized department, or digesting tenure and promotion guidelines to understand what they reveal as well as what they conceal. By contrast, after tenure and full professorship lies a large unstructured void of up to 30 years, to be filled by the individual. The feeling of "I made it here, now what?" is prevalent, as well as the sensation of relief in being off the chair's radar (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, & Moretto, 2008). Faculty must now structure this empty space, at a time when the most pressing identity crisis is the struggle between generativity and stagnation, framed by the question "Can I make my life count?" (Erikson, 1994). The overarching developmental question details itself in several specific questions. Will the future simply be more of the same? Will it continue to be fulfilling? Are there additional opportunities for leadership? Will those be on campus or nationally in my disciplinary field? How could I position myself for those opportunities? Will I have to move to a different university to do so?

These are pressing questions for many faculty. I have not yet started offering workshops on career development and leadership development, but excitement about those is high among my faculty.  
*The Crown Chakra—Transcendence/Legacy*

If we follow the process of awakening the Kundalini energy all the way to the top, we arrive at the final chakra, Sahasrara, the “thousand petaled” lotus resting on the crown of the head. Technically, this chakra is outside our body, signifying that here we reach a level of consciousness that goes beyond ourselves: we become one with the universe. The ruling element is thought, and it corresponds to the right to know. This goes beyond mere factual knowledge. Instead, it is the level of knowledge that derives from the higher consciousness achieved. Eve Sedgwick reprises the example of the cat and the finger, pointing out that in the third eye chakra, we know the difference between the object and the finger pointing to it; but in the crown, we go an extra layer deeper to realize that those two are the same at the core, because they are both expressions of the creative power of the universe. This is where we get a glimpse of the spark of the divine within ourselves, and we realize the interconnectedness of reality: of ourselves and our students, both the intrinsically motivated ones as well as the procrastinators who vex us with emails the night before the assignment is due; of our colleagues, both our generous mentors and those who send those all caps, unforgiving communications. We would reply very differently to those emails if we had this higher consciousness all the time, and they would not be as exacting on us.

Indeed, someone with a balanced crown chakra would possess wisdom, presence, open mindedness, and the ability to question. Conversely, someone with blockages would exhibit over intellectualization and living “in their head” if excessive, and cynicism or apathy if deficient. The demon of this chakra is attachment. All our worldly attachments act like ballast and weigh us down, leaving us unable to transcend beyond our perspective. The work of this chakra is learning to jettison them. For instance, seven years ago our institution switched to an online system for end of semester evaluations. That generated a lot of anxiety, as people were quite attached to the old way of collecting them by paper and had reservations about data privacy in cyberspace. To this day, there are still some who wish we would go back to paper forms. While we will not do that, our center offers support for those who have questions. As part of that support and to connect their concern about the format to the larger picture and expand their knowledge, we take the opportunity to remind faculty that professors, administrators, and students are all on the side of teaching excellence and student learning, to let them know about best practices to boost response rate, and to plant the seeds for course revision using the feedback provided by the students.

Another aspect of this chakra is the idea of legacy. Once we transcend (and in the original framework of yoga, reincarnate) what remains of us, of our labor? Of course, late career faculty are most sensitive to that question, as their main identity crisis is the struggle between ego integrity and despair, guided by the question: Is it ok to have been me? (Erikson, 1994). However we take the approach that legacy takes years to develop and that one should start planning it in mid career. In order to support faculty in this planning process, we rely on the work of Susan Robinson (2013), the Professor Destressor. Guiding faculty with her exercises and worksheets, we encourage them to plan a productive and fulfilling life and pace themselves through it to meet their happiness goals.

## The Manifesting Current

What I just described, the awakening of the chakras from the lowest to the highest is termed the “liberating current,” and it is how we traditionally understand Hinduism and Buddhism in the East as detachment. We strive to let go of the more material aspects of existence, to purify the self, and to achieve a higher state of consciousness—until we are released by the conditioned existence of samsara. However academics are not renunciates—ascetic monks for whom fasting, celibacy, and a life of deprivation were originally designed. They live in the real world where their survival depends on very tangible metrics. The parallel set of practices designed for laypersons (“householders” in yoga terminology) goes by the name of Tantra. It captures the spirit of the liberating current in order to achieve a higher consciousness, but it is designed to continue the journey and traverse the chakras back down, in what is called the “manifesting current” (Judith & Goodman, 2012). Equipped with the higher consciousness once it has been reached, one can descend it to the third eye to formulate a better vision for their life. This new vision can cascade



into the throat and be verbalized and communicated to others. Descending further, it gets enlivened by love and passion in the heart. Energy is added in the solar plexus, and movement in the pelvis. Things start to gravitate together, and matter finally coalesces in the root chakra, manifesting a new and better reality on the strength of the new consciousness acquired. At this point, the Tantric wheel spins and the cycle begins anew, in an iterative fashion.

This cycle captures the progressive improvement philosophy of educational development, but unfortunately, the cycle does not come full circle for everybody. Many professors come to our events, learn new things and as a result gradually expand their consciousness to be more learning centered. At times, this does not translate into action or change to their courses because they are overwhelmed by their other responsibilities (a first chakra issue). Sometimes it does, even with great success, and, in another expansion of consciousness, professors start seeing themselves as members of the professional teaching community, broader than their disciplinary background. They realize they have a story to tell the world that could benefit others, but they do not have the extra time to convert their teaching success into a SoTL publication, or they do not know how to express themselves in this new genre (a throat chakra issue). For these reasons, our center has a strong emphasis on manifesting, in creating products. For example, we organize several intensive events a year where the focus is for faculty to create. Based on ideas we promoted in stand alone workshops, we run several Course (*Re*) Design Institutes a year, where faculty can harness the energy of new ideas such as hybrid formats, or High Impact Practices into their courses. We teach them the principles of learning and backward design, and we consult with them as they work individually to redesign courses. They feel supported in their endeavors, they develop community, and a little bit of financial incentive recognizes their effort and provides a modicum of extra stability. Similarly, we run a SoTL retreat where faculty work on their SoTL projects while we provide assistance in the genre of SoTL writing, offer conceptual frameworks to frame their work and results, help with data analysis, or even the mechanics of IRB for those new to it. Many of these projects culminate in papers or conference presentations. A few of the participants have realized that working with other faculty would be a fulfilling endeavor for them, a further expansion in consciousness, and have manifested that reality by becoming faculty fellows at our center.

## Conclusion

The chakra system is very flexible and powerful and has helped us take inventory of our programs and make decisions about future offerings. Through our process, we have discovered that every program we offer maps onto one of the chakras, but not all chakras are represented in programming to the same extent or even at all. In our case, this validated the broadening of our focus to career and leadership development. It also led to our decision to offer a workshop on performance reviews, a retreat on faculty wellness, and a revision of our assessment plan to incorporate the goal of creating community. On a more philosophical level, grounding our philosophy and programs into key human functions (grounding, desire, power, love/balance, voice/truth, vision, and interconnectedness/legacy) allows us to realize our goal of providing holistic educational development for our institution and to meet faculty where they are with their needs.

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