

The Chakras in Shiatsu

By Carola Beresford –Cooke

There are many traditions that describe the human energy field, using a wide variety of different terms and points of reference. We come across them in our reading as we attempt to discover more about this mysterious phenomenon which is the basis of human life. In our turn we, the explorers, are often aware of nothing more than an intuitive sense or feeling in our own contact with human energy, and this feeling may or may not correspond to what we read about. Given the non-intellectual nature of our own contact with the human energy field and the diversity and intricacy of the systems which describe it, it is often hard to fit our experience into even one system (in other words to fit our experience in the treatment room into the theoretical system we learn during our training) let alone more than one.

So if we encounter areas in our receivers which seem to be related to the chakras and then we try to find out more about the chakras, which are a feature of the Vedic system, we find nothing familiar which we can link with the theoretical structure of Shiatsu or indeed with our own experience. The Element system might be a point of contact, but the Vedic Elements are four, not five, and correspond more to the Western than the Chinese system. I will leave aside the complications caused by the different models which are found within the field of Shiatsu!

But it is my belief that there is one underlying truth which links all the myriad manifestations and experiences of the physical and energetic realms. Differences disappear when we adjust our focal length, change a lens or a filter; the truth comes into view.

Intrigued by experiences which have occurred both in my own development and that of my receivers, I have long been interested in the chakras. They appear to me as centres for the perception and processing of experience, among other things. If they exist, then they have a relationship with the world of Ki, and thus can be interpreted in terms which we as Shiatsu practitioners can understand. In order to begin this process, first of all we have to strip down the models we are using to their bare essentials to find out what they have in common.

The models we are examining are the Vedic model and the TCM model of the human energy field, and the feature they have in common is the core.

The Core

Most models of the “human energy body” are depicted with a core or central channel of energy running vertically through the torso. This is also a feature of our physical selves. A central structure appears in the embryo very soon after conception (it is known as the “primitive streak”) and forms the basis for the “neural tube” common to all embryos, a longitudinal central structure alongside which the alimentary canal subsequently develops.

Later, the central channel is associated with other longitudinal physical structures such as the central nervous system, the spine and the arrangement of the glands in the endocrine system.

The Core in the Vedic Model

In the Vedic system the central channel is called the sushumna, and has the “positive” and “negative”, upward-downward flows of the ida and pingala spiralling around it. According to some sources, the upward flow is the path of transformation, along which the vibrations become increasingly finer and less material, and the downward flow is the path of manifestation, along which the vibrations become increasingly physical.

The chakras (chakra means “wheel”) are found along the central channel. In the Vedic model there are seven, but in other systems such as the Tibetan or Nepali there may be five. Their locations are often given in an apparently precise way, but in fact there is a huge variation between the different versions. Sometimes a chakra is said to be located on the back, sometimes on the front of the body. Some versions state that the chakras are on both front and back. There is also widespread variation in the longitudinal placement of the chakras, particularly the second and third. Some sources mention a chakra at the sacrum, some place it in the lower belly, some at the navel, some at the solar plexus, and there may be different combinations of these locations. The location of the throat chakra, too, is often only vaguely described.

The Core in the Chinese/Japanese Model

In the Far East Asian model of the human energy structure, as embodied in TCM, there is also a core, though it is differently interpreted. The Governing and Conception Vessels (said to be the circuit that develops at conception when the egg which forms us first splits in two) and the internal connection between them, the Penetrating Vessel or Chong Mai, represent the Central Channel, our connection between Heaven and Earth. The classical Kidney on the front of the body and the Bladder on the back extend its influence outwards, suggesting that the central channel has depth and breadth. We can imagine it as a radiant core of energy deep within the body, aligned with the spine, the central nervous system and the endocrine system. Like the magnet at the centre of an electro-magnetic field, it generates the whole energetic field of the body, and thus also the meridians. (The Chong Mai is called among other things the “sea of the twelve meridians”.)

The Conception and Governing Vessels and Chong Mai are among the Extraordinary Vessels, formed at or soon after conception and which govern the development of the embryo in the womb, in other words organise the Essence and Source Ki during the Pre-Heaven (before birth) period. They are flanked by the Kidney meridian on the front of the body and its auxiliary and executor, the Bladder, on the back. These meridians between them mediate with our reserves of Essence and Source Ki respectively and access our primary Yin and Yang, the source of our existence.

Where Essence is, there also Shen or Spirit must be. In everyday Chinese speech the words

Jing (Essence) or Shen (consciousness) are never used alone; rather the word jingshen is used to express the inseparability of consciousness from its physical embodiment. So the Shen, too, is a part of the central core of the being, the Fire within Water, Heaven contacting the earthly realm.

The chakras as such do not exist in the TCM model. Certain points or groups of points, however, indicate via both their location and function the importance of various regions along the central channel. So, for example, we have GV20 on the Crown Chakra, Yin Tang on the third eye, CV17 on the Heart Chakra, and CV 1 on the Root Chakra.

The Meridians in the Vedic Model

A short note to point out that there are indeed meridians and points in the Vedic system, or at least in the medicine of South India and Nepal, to my knowledge. There is a tradition, supported by the Indians, contested by the Chinese, that both martial arts and the meridian system arrived in China from India with the monk Bodhidharma. I have no working knowledge of the Vedic meridian system, however.

The Meridians in the Chinese/Japanese Model

What is a meridian? Probably a simple way of describing it is “a place where one can gain access through touch to the dynamic interplay within the human energy system”. This is an important point to grasp when we are working with the chakras through the meridians. We are using the meridians to gain access to the core of the body’s energy.

While we have no difficulty identifying some of the chakras with points on the CV and GV, fitting the other meridians into the picture is more of a puzzle, especially if we are still working from the principle that the meridians are lines or channels on the surface of the body. Clifford Andrews and Pauline Sasaki’s pioneering work has demonstrated that the meridian system is a phenomenon which permeates the field, not just a collection of lines on the surface, and we must use this perspective when considering the chakras.

Towards a Unified Theory of the Chakras

We are still no nearer a connection between the meridians and the chakras until we find a unified theory which connects the meridians and the central core. This unified theory can be summed up as a single image – let us think of the orange.

The outside of a peeled orange shows the lines which we can imagine as meridians, each connecting with the core. Here the orange represents the human energy field at rest and perfectly balanced. The meridians extend into the field around the body and deep within it, they are not just on the body surface.

If we bisect the orange, we can see the core, the Central Channel. This connects with all the meridians, as the central fibrous part of an orange is connected by the membrane between the



segments to all the lines on the outside of the orange.

Now we can imagine the radiant core of the human energetic field. We could visualise all the chakras lying along it, along the Central Channel. As the Central Channel contains the energy of all the meridians, then each chakra also contains the energy of all the meridians. Each meridian will manifest at a different vibrational level in each chakra. Thus the Stomach Meridian will manifest as hunger and need very differently in the root Chakra from the way it manifests at the Crown chakra. I don't want to be too specific here, it's best to use our own inner vision and imagination to intuit the different quality of resonance. In the words of Timothy Leary, "Please Do Not Clutch at the Gossamer Web".

We can thus imagine the chakras, not as specific structures but as variations in frequency along the Central Channel which generates the field. They have no absolutely precise location, and the influence of each chakra merges into that of the next, as the colours of the rainbow merge into each other. The frequencies change from those more related to Earth, the lower chakras, to those more related to Heaven, the upper chakras. This is akin to the different qualities of Qi in the different areas of the Triple Heater that we read about in the texts – the Upper Burner is like a mist, the Middle Burner like a bubbling cauldron and the Lower Burner like a drainage ditch. By the same token the lower chakras are more linked with our physical body and instincts, the upper ones with our more subtle perceptions. But we do not have to adopt the orthodox Hindu viewpoint that the lower chakras are to be left behind, the upper ones are to be cultivated and developed; we are working with a system in which Yin and Yang are equally important, and in which there can be no Heaven without Earth. The Crown and the Root chakras, as the two ends of the Central Channel, are as inseparable and interdependent as Yang and Yin. It would be impossible to leave the Root behind and realise the Crown.

The word chakra means "wheel" in Sanskrit. This is traditionally taken to mean a wheel-shaped structure on the surface of the body. But suppose that we slice our orange crossways.

Is it not likely that the "wheel" is the influence of the chakras in the Central Channel moving out to the surface of the field, through all the meridians? (Obviously, this influence is not limited only to the meridian locations, but radiates throughout – it's just that the meridian model is the particular way in which we shiatsu practitioners access the field).

So we can perhaps take as a working hypothesis:

- The Central Core generates the whole field and the meridians before the physical body develops – (the Chong Mai is said to be the "sea of the twelve meridians")
- The meridians mediate between the Core and the boundaries of the human field
- The chakras represent different vibrational frequencies along the length of the Core
- The qualities of all the meridians are present in all the chakras, manifesting differently according to the frequency of the chakra

But these are really not the most important things we need to know about the chakras. This is

just a way of rearranging information so that conflicts between the theoretical models do not distract us.

The truth is that our experience of the chakras is a deep, rich and vibrant encounter with our core energy. Recently I was approached by email by an acupuncture student who was writing about “chakra acupuncture” for his final thesis. I was happy to communicate some of my ideas until I realised that he wanted somehow to reach the reality of the chakras through theory, and it cannot be done. These centres within us are our link with the Source; they are different for every one of us, they are fountains of feeling, colour, imagery and contact with our own being. They change constantly.

The importance of the chakras for us as shiatsu practitioners, I feel, lies not in how we contact them in our receivers but in how we contact them in ourselves. Awareness of these vital centres in a real sense expands our experience of what it is to be alive and helps us to a greater understanding of the incredibly diverse manifestations of human energy. We can resonate more completely with our receivers when we have practised resonating with ourselves in all our various aspects. To this end, when my co-teacher Annie Cryar and I teach workshops on the Chakras, we spend as much time on the music, the movement, the experience of each chakra within ourselves as on ways of contacting the chakras in our Shiatsu practice. Fitting the Chakras into Shiatsu theory is an extra, like the icing on the cake!



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Sen Lines and Myofasciaⁱ

By Julian Cosmo Kemp

The traditional model of Thai Yoga Massage works on the notion of energy flow, which until now has made it a deeply intuitive and feeling based art form built up over thousands of years. This had caused problems for some westerners used to working on the physical, on symptoms and with sound empirical evidence, but learning to feel and not think too much was good for them. It's about that letting go thing again and learning how to feel and flow with natural forces; learning to tap into the deep unconscious and instinctive aspect of nature and ourselves. It was this intuitive ability that could feel and work with the subtle energy body and map it. The physical body is only a part of who we are, but its also the tangible basis upon which we can work and influence the deeper and more subtle aspects of our being.

Until very recently nothing was really known about Sen lines, but there has now been some important research, which shows that the 10 Sen lines manipulated in Thai Yoga Massage are in essence the same as Nadis and Meridians, in being subtle energy pathways and part of a huge inter-connected network running throughout the entire body. On surface appearance Sen lines seem to follow different pathways to meridians, because Sen lines follow muscular contours, the myo-fascial pathways between muscles and between muscles and bones. So the myofascial Sen lines are what we can get our hands on, whereas the meridians of TCM also follow the internal cyclic flow of energy between vital organs. Research though carried out at the University of Vermont and college of medicine used high frequency ultrasound scanning acoustic microscopy to study acupuncture channels and the effects of needling, and found that most meridians are located between muscles and between muscles and a tendon or bone also. So it could be that meridians, nadis and sen lines are part of the same subtle connective tissue network of fascia and that the merdians which follow the cyclic flow of energy between organs are in fact part of the deep fascia, subserous facia and membrane linings.

Although the 10 Sen lines are a complete system and very effective model to follow, there are some contradictions on the precise location of these lines between some schools. Most professionals though and myself seem to agree that Sen Lines are energy lines of connective tissue, known as the myo-fascial pathways between muscles throughout the entire body. This network of fascia is so vitally important because it provides stability and structure to the body, enables movement of muscles, metabolism to take place, protects the vital organs and nervous system,

allows for communication between cells and boosts our immunity to fight infection to name a few functions.

One common point of view now is that Thai massage can be explained in the same way that Structural Integration therapy or Rolfing can, because each of them apply a deep and sustained pressure into the body's fascial binding in order to release deeper tensions and blockages fixed into the fascia elsewhere in the body. It can do this because fascia forms an intricate web co-extensive throughout the body, central to its performance and well-being, and so releasing these trapped tensions in one area of the body can correct postural imbalances, chronic conditions and unexplained pain symptoms elsewhere in the body, because they are often caused by tensions locked into the binding tissue of the fascia. These blockages are often quite subtle and may be due to injury, or emotional trauma, so when therapist and client both focus into the same area being worked, then its far more than the physical body being manipulated, and even childhood issues and holding patterns can be unearthed from the depths of sub-conscious being and let go of.

Fascia is so important. The myo-fascia extends from the deep fascia in the body, which is central to the flexibility and function of vital organs, and it covers, supports and separates skeletal muscle. Myo-fascia helps attach muscles to other muscles, and runs between and separates them, thereby improving movement function and acting as a protective sheath. It also provides a protective route and sheath for blood vessels, nerves and lymph to flow through. The fascia also acts as a very important circulatory and communication system and recent evidence now suggests that within the collagen cells of myofascia is cerebrospinal fluid and thus creating a very complex communication system, stemming from the ventricles of the middle brain and reaching out to the heart of every living cell.

The effects then of manipulating fascia during thai massage are endless and perhaps timeless as we tap into a karmic web of the bodies history and capacity. It is obvious that the early Buddhist monks and teachers of Thai Yoga Massage understood this and therefore laid great emphasis on becoming and giving Metta in Thai Massage, which is Indian Sanskrit for loving Kindness. So meditation is practiced at all the main teaching schools in Thailand before the beginning of each class to bring one into the right frame of mind and focussed intention. We influence the people we touch with our state of mind and so its important to achieve that feeling of benevolence and loving kindness within ourselves because this quality and healing vibration is transmitted to every cell in the body through the huge and living conscious inter-connected web we call the fascia

Despite common agreements, there still exist conflicting ideas around whether Sen Lines can actually be used as a diagnostic tool, as in TCM. But we might say 'can the body or meridians really be used as a diagnostic tool anyway? Meridians can be used to diagnose a problem in the body and with a particular function, but this does not reveal an underlying cause. The body just reveals symptoms of underlying causes, and all treatments using their particular model try to work on the energetic basis of them. We can work on the symptom, but we can't always get to the causes which are more often than not based in the mind, past experiences, present stressful conditions and specific attitudes that are preventing the free flow of vital energy in the mind body network. In my experience of giving Thai Yoga Massage, I think we can treat Sen lines revealing a blockage and at the same time help to unlock the flow of energy and stimulate a vital psycho/physical healing process for a client.

The healer and writer Carolyn Myss, has produced some important work explaining the symptoms, healing processes and relationships of mind body connections. She offers a very interesting diagnostic system using Yoga philosophy of the Chakra system. Carolyn uses the true Yogic philosophy in that we are all seen as spiritual beings having a human experience and that the physical body reflects inner stages of growth and that illness can be cured and self realisation attained through our journey into the chakras and the seven stages of healing. Treating the body two dimensionally and mechanically is not very effective at all.

Although Thai Yoga works on the physical body, its whole approach is about balancing the energetic system upon which it believes the bodies function is based. Many people have struggled with the idea of finding the right model and the right way, thinking that if one is right then the others must be wrong. However although Oriental models differ, they can and do exist in a perfect relationship with one another. Using the metaphor of a map, we can imagine that we have 4 different people wanting to reach Bangkok city centre, travelling in by road from the North, South, East & Westerly directions. They all have to use different roads (vital energy pathways) from each other and yet they all manage to reach the same city centre! According to Yoga, TCM and Thai Yoga Massage, there are 72,000 roads, subtle energy pathways running throughout the entire human energy being network. Yoga focuses on 3, Thai Massage on 10 (inc sushumna, ida & pingala) Chinese medicine on 14. All of them are effective in facilitating a healing process, curing illness and maintaining optimum health.

ⁱ <http://cosmothaiyoga.com/thai-massage-courses/the-medical-model/>, 7/20/14, 2:08pm, Julian Cosmo Kemp