



## Healing the Whole Self

by Karen Corcoran

**Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self** by Anodea Judith is one of those rare books that changed my life, changed my view of what is therapeutic and what helps one heal.

Judith started as a massage therapist then became a psychotherapist. She wrote her first book at the age of 25, **Wheels of Life**, outlining the chakra system and its relevance to healing.

In the former book, the author integrates techniques from bioenergetics, psychology and spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation into a system for healing and transformation. She postulates that body, mind and spirit are equal partners, that we cannot heal one part of the Self without addressing every part.

Western psychology and many of its psychotherapies, though a helpful system, (one that I fully embraced, considered a lifeline, and trained in to become a mental health counselor), has glaringly left out the body! How did this happen?

The "sacred temple" must sit there motionless (or in Freud's day, lay on the couch) for the requisite 50 minutes so we can talk and talk about what's bothering us. Then we rise, stretch our stiff self, get into our car and drive home to our computer or television. Our culture's norm of treating separate parts is no more evident than in our healthcare system: from psychiatry to gynecology, endocrinology to neurology, there is a physician for every body part!

How do we unite psyche and soma in such a cultural milieu? How do we nurture spirit? The explosion of yoga classes in all its variety of styles and increasing numbers of yoga practitioners in America highlights our desire to integrate.

I remember well my first yoga class at the age of 18. I had never felt that level of relaxation of my body and my mind ever as I lay in Savasana, corpse pose. It would be many years, though, before I embraced the unifying practices of yoga.

First I came to Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhaajan as a way to lessen my chronic anxiety as the mother of two young children. It was effective at stress reduction. I immediately wanted to become a teacher and taught friends in my basement (and still do) sticking to the kriyas (a scripted series of breath patterns, poses and gestures and meditations) outlined by a master.

Kundalini is a fast-paced, powerful type of Raj yoga, that emphasizes the movement of energy up the spine from base to crown, from Muladhara Chakra to Sahashrara, resulting in feeling highly energized but also relaxed, calm and focused.

It is here that I first learned about the chakras from my beloved teacher, Michelle Damelio.

Yoga class is where most westerners come to hear of the chakras. What exactly are the chakras? I quote Judith here: "The Chakra System is a seven-leveled philosophical model of the universe... Yoga is a discipline designed to yoke together the individual with the divine, using mental and physical practices that join our mundane and spiritual lives. This goal is achieved by passing through ever-expanding states of consciousness. The chakras represent these steps.... A chakra is a center of organization that receives, assimilates, and expresses life force energy." (1)

Chakra translates literally as "wheel." Described as spinning vortices of energy that emanate from the spine and the major nerve ganglia that branch out from the spine, the seven major chakras are depicted in a vertical column, not real in the physical sense but energetic structures that correspond to states of consciousness. I wanted to understand more, gain a deeper awareness of how this applied to my own life.

In 2005 and 2006, I took two workshops with Anodea Judith, "The Psychology of the Chakras" and "Mind-Body Integration." In the first, we took a whole day to cover each of the major centers.

Through a multi-modal approach including trance, dance, yoga, bioenergetics, breath work, artwork, partner work, journaling, meditation and deep relaxation, I glimpsed that inner reality. I even experienced what she calls a "charge" in front of my throat -- a buzzing, vibrational feeling as I had a discussion with other workshop participants. I had never felt this before, and haven't since.

Judith explained that there is a manifesting current and a liberating current, energy running up and down the system, through the body-mind.

Manifesting is when we move from crown to base, from idea or thought to action to fruition. We make our dreams and goals a reality. Most spiritual traditions have emphasized the liberating current, moving from the mundane to the divine, connecting

to Universal consciousness as a path to freedom. Freedom from the body, even denial of the body's basic needs is well known in the ascetics.

Yet here was Judith bringing the body back to its place as the "sacred temple" that it is, the place where all parts of our "Self" can be experienced: physical, emotional/sensual, energetic, relational, mental, visual, and spiritual. Staying in the body, noticing and accepting all is key to health and healing.

It is when we deny parts of the self, when we have that "gut" reaction we dismiss, when we bite our tongue and don't speak, that we suffer and "the body holds the score." (2) The body will inevitably develop a way of telling us something is not right!

We all hold blockages in the body in the form of aches, pains, constriction, congestion, muscle tension etc. When it moves to extreme or we experience trauma that is never allowed to discharge, we can develop disease or chronic illnesses. Most of these "blocks" begin in early development, the core issues and patterns that create suffering for which many of us seek relief in psychotherapy or bodywork.

Using the Chakra system as a template for understanding my "Self," taking a multi-modal approach to well being has opened me up to new levels of healing. I have enthusiastically begun to share these tools in my yoga classes on Cape Cod. I invite all who are interested to join me and delve into this inner realm.

It is a journey well worth taking.

Footnotes:

1. Judith, Anodea, **Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self**, Berkeley/Toronto, 1996.
2. Van de Kolk, Bessel, MD, **The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Post Traumatic Stress**, study in Post Traumatic Stress. Article published in Harvard Review of Psychiatry.1994.

**Karen is writing articles about the Chakras for future issues of this magazine**



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"Men of great knowledge actually found out about the chakras—their workings, their petals, their sounds, their infinity, their co-relationship, their powers. They found that the life of a human is totally based on these chakras." -Yogi Bhajan

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Karen Corcoran has been a yoga teacher on Cape Cod since 1998 using the chakra system as a template to develop classes that inspire students to delve into the body/mind and healing. She is a licensed mental health counselor, holding a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Lesley University since 1986.

Her classes combine a variety of techniques and styles from the heart-opening of Anusara, grounding of Bioenergetics, to Kripalu, Kundalini and vinyasa flow. She lives in Brewster with her husband, two teenage children and three pets.

For more information on her classes visit her website at <http://seachangeyogacapecod.com>

She can be reached at 508 280-6265.