

Chakras Explained as Development: A Framework

Part One — The Lower Triangle

Why this document exists

What follows is not from the canon—not a traditional or authoritative chakra teaching. It isn't a recycled presentation of the chakra system, and it isn't meant to replace other models.

I get asked to explain what the chakras are and how they are influenced by exercises we do in Kundalini Yoga.

You know my allergies to Woo, and teaching things I don't have direct experience with. If I can't say it's the truth from a clear perspective, then I don't want to say it. It might be true for me, but my private truth is not automatically our shared reality.

So, I put this together to illustrate how I understand the chakras — through a developmental lens. The framework is shaped by a background in psychology, biology, lived experience, and years of observing how human beings actually grow, adapt, and sometimes get stuck.

I'm offering this in three parts.

First, the **lower triangle**: root, sacral, and solar plexus.

Second, the **heart**, which functions as a fulcrum rather than a rung on a ladder.

Third, the **upper triangle**, where expression, insight, and meaning come online.

This first piece is about how a self comes into being—and how it can function powerfully without yet being whole.

Root Chakra — Earth

Existence, Safety, Trust

In classical systems, the chakras are associated with elemental qualities—earth, water, fire, air, and space. I'll use these elements as metaphors rather than technical terms.

The primary lessons of the root chakra are learned *in relationship*. In the earliest stage of life, the caregiver and the infant are experienced as one field. There is no clear boundary yet between self and other. When I am hungry, I am fed. When I am cold, I am warmed. When I am uncomfortable, I am cleaned, held, soothed. My rhythms matter. Sleep comes when I am tired. Touch comes when I am distressed. The body learns something elemental: the world responds.

Needs do not have to be explained or justified. They only have to be expressed. Crying works. Reaching out works. Asking works. Relief arrives reliably enough that existence itself feels trustworthy. This is not a belief system. It is an embodied truth, and it leads to an assumption that trains us well. The nervous system comes to expect continuity—*this will continue; I will be met*. When this field is “good enough,” the body relaxes into allowing, into Being. Being alive does not feel like an emergency.

The core lessons here are simple and profound:

- Existence is permitted
- Needs are legitimate
- Dependency is safe
- The world is responsive

It's worth pausing to consider what happens when these early lessons lean in a different direction.

When existence feels conditional.

When needs are inconsistently met or ignored.

When dependency feels dangerous.

When the world is experienced as cold or unresponsive.

I'm not going to unpack this further here. Not because it isn't important, but because the point here is not to pathologize experiences. The point is to gain some perspective.

How a person moves through life is shaped by circumstances they *did not choose and could not control*.

This doesn't absolve us of responsibility for how we live or how we treat others. But it does ask something quieter and more demanding: that we release judgment. Judgment corrodes the field. It generates more fear, more loathing, more separation—precisely the conditions that created the problem in the first place.

What is required instead is understanding. And where possible, compassion.

Sacral Chakra — Water

Emerging Selfhood, Authenticity, Adaptation

If the root chakra is earth—solid, stabilizing, concerned with survival—then the sacral chakra is water.

Mix Earth with Water, get mud/clay. Something we can sculpt.

Water has no fixed shape. It adapts to conditions, boundaries, and limitations.

By choosing **water** to describe the emerging self, the ancients were doing something very precise: they were warning us *in advance* not to mistake adaptability and fluidity for weakness.

Water teaches three things at once:

First, **the self is real—but not rigid.**

There is undeniably a lived experience of being *someone*. Sensation, preference, pleasure, aversion, emotion. That's not illusion. But it isn't fixed architecture either. It's responsive. It moves. **It's clay, not stone.**

Second, **the self is shaped by conditions.**

Water takes the shape of its container. So does identity. Family, culture, attachment, approval, fear—all of these sculpt expression. The ancients didn't frame this as corruption; they framed it as *how it actually is*. It's biology, chemistry, physics. Of course the self adapts. That's what living systems do.

Third—and this is the part few like to point out—**suffering begins when we try to freeze water into stone.**

When we insist the self must be solid, consistent, defended, or proven, we start fighting its nature. We become brittle. We mistake flexibility for betrayal and adaptation for inauthenticity.

So when later traditions tell us *not* to identify with a solid self, they aren't saying "you don't exist." (The deeper teachings go further—but that's a different framework.)

They aren't telling us to abandon the work we've done. They're saying: *don't confuse a useful shape with a permanent one.*

That insight alone could have saved centuries of unnecessary spiritual violence—toward oneself and others.

The sacral chakra is where a sense of self begins to take form. Not yet a story about who I am, and not the absolute “I AM” of spiritual teaching, but something more modest and more fragile: the felt experience of being *someone*. Someone separate, unique, and mortal.

This self is being manifested into existence by brand-new, never-before-seen DNA, new circumstances, new relationships, and new constraints. It is creative, responsive, and fluid. Like water, it shapes itself around what contains it.

Each human being is a single, unclassifiable phenomenon, and we are authoring a new being into existence every single day we live.

Here, consciousness begins to explore itself from the inside. Sensation becomes interesting. Pleasure becomes motivating. Emotion becomes informative. A person notices that some experiences bring aliveness while others numb, contract, or otherwise dampen this feeling of being I.

The questions at this level are about *our experience*.

What feels good to me? What draws me into a flow state—where effort softens and time seems to slow down? What pulls me beyond thoughts about mere survival and into enjoyment, creativity, connection?

At the same time, another lesson appears: expression has consequences.

Authenticity is not *free*.

A child learns, often without words, that some expressions are welcomed, and others disrupt attachment. Our parents teach us this through being disappointed in us, shaming us, punishing us, ignoring us. Some emotions we express bring closeness; others bring withdrawal. Some desires are mirrored back; others are corrected, redirected, or discouraged.

Ongoing push and pull creates a sculpted self.

The emerging self adapts—not because it is weak, or false, but because relationship matters.

This is where the cost of authenticity is first negotiated.

Not: *Shall I be myself?*

Rather: *Is it safe to be myself here?*

Personality forms here not as pathology, but as compromise.

This shaping is not inherently damaging. It is how a social being survives.

The sacral chakra doesn't answer the question *Who am I, really?*

It gathers the raw material for answering that question when, and if, certainty falls away at some point in life.

Solar Plexus Chakra — Fire

Power, Influence, Construction and Destruction

The third chakra is represented as fire.

Fire is a transformer. It takes raw material and turns it into heat—energy that can create, build, warm, illuminate darkness, or reduce things to ash.

This is the true **power center** of the human being. Will. Direction. Desire. The capacity to act on the world rather than simply respond to it. Here, consciousness begins to ask a different kind of question: What can I *do*?

If the sacral chakra asks permission, the solar plexus chakra says, “Here I Act.”

How can I improve, advance, or otherwise influence the situation I find myself in? How can I make the present moment more comfortable—or, if that isn’t possible, how can I affect my position in the future?

Fire seeks leverage. It wants to strengthen what works and correct what doesn’t. It drives the impulse to become more capable, more skilled, more intelligent. It seeks recognition—not as vanity, but as confirmation that effort matters and action has impact.

At this stage, the self experiments with power. It learns how to be noticed, how to be rewarded, and how to reduce the vulnerability of self-consciousness—humiliation and embarrassment—through competence and achievement.

Because no one else is exactly like us, belonging is never guaranteed; it has to be negotiated.

Belonging—or acceptance by a group—often becomes the condition under which permission to act is granted.

Most of us begin with a quiet assumption that we are not quite good enough. We look to our environment for reflection—warmth, acceptance, recognition—until there is enough evidence that the cost of acting is worth paying.

Fire itself is morally neutral. It can be used for *construction or destruction*.

Children do not intuitively know which expressions of power are constructive and which are corrosive—not because they are deficient, but because this kind of knowledge is collective. It is learned first within the family, then shaped by the wider social field, the culture, and ultimately the planet itself.

How, when, where, and why we use power is not fixed.

It is constructed over time, through action and consequence, as we create ourselves again and again. Entire civilizations rise and fall around this question, often mistaking it for a technical problem when it is, at its core, a developmental and ethical one.

This planet is the arena for that experiment—the place where humanity learns, imperfectly, what it means to wield power in relationship.

Teaching the next generation in this arena is the most difficult and the most necessary part of parenting, and of governing whole civilizations: how to wield power without burning what sustains you.

The unresolved question at this level is not whether power works—it clearly does—but what happens when power becomes the primary way a person secures safety and belonging.

A person can function entirely from the lower triangle. Many do. Some CEOs, totalitarian leaders, the villains in our movies and myths, and many historical “monsters” are often deeply rooted, highly adaptive, and extraordinarily powerful. They are not weak. They are not confused. They are *effective*.

And still, something essential remains unanswered.

Power alone cannot answer the question of how to live without turning one's life against life itself.

That question sits at the center of the heart chakra, where power meets care and responsibility.

I'll explore that territory in the next installment.