

Part Three — The Upper Triangle

The Ultimate Work of Ethical Adulthood

The title of this final section is meant to be provocative. Many people devote enormous energy to opening the throat, the third eye, or pursuing enlightenment itself, while leaving unfinished the developmental work of the lower chakras—the very foundation required for that opening to be stable.

The work of the upper chakras—voice, vision, and consciousness—demands something rarely acknowledged in spiritual communities: a foundation of ethical adulthood in the material world.

To engage these centers meaningfully, a person must be able to function as a responsible participant in ordinary life. They must be capable of sustaining themselves — without chronic dependency, by honoring commitments, tending to their health, and navigating relationships with a basic level of reliability and care. This does not always require conventional success or conformity, but it does require coherence between values and behavior. We can't sit around and declare how spiritual we are becoming when we are addicted to substances, can't keep our word, allow our basic hygiene to falter, or be in a continual state of confusion and suffering in our relationships.

When the lower chakras remain underdeveloped or disorganized, work on the upper centers becomes distorted. Voice turns into performance rather than truth-telling. Vision becomes fantasy or certainty rather than discernment. Consciousness becomes escape rather than intimacy with reality.

For example, voice can become performance on social media. Vision can become certainty around conspiracy theories, alternative theories

about energy and things science has disproven, a steadfast desire to follow channelers, psychics, and the like. Fantasies surrounding one's feeling of being very special, and certainties surrounding what is clearly not well understood—this is vision that lacks discernment.

Higher consciousness becomes a way to disconnect from the reality of living in the world, with all its problems to be solved and challenges to be met.

The upper triangle does not liberate a person from responsibility; it amplifies the current shape of the way they are already showing up in the world.

Without ethical grounding, that amplification appears as unstable at best and harmful at worst.

For this reason, the upper chakras are not an escape from the work of becoming a person of one's word. They are its culmination.

We show up the way we say we will show up, or we cannot be trusted to tell the truth about anything at all.

Vishuddha — Purification and Space/Voice and Responsibility

In classical systems, the throat chakra is called Vishuddha, a word often translated as purification. This translation is easily misunderstood.

By my reading, purification here does not mean moral cleansing, self-improvement, or becoming spiritually "clean." It does not refer to eliminating desires, emotions, or our unique personality. It refers to something far more practical and far more demanding: the removal of distortion.

To purify, in this sense, is to reduce interference.

It is to clear the channel so that what passes through it is not excessively bent by fear, hunger for approval, defensiveness, or the need to control outcomes.

Vishuddha is not about polishing the voice. It is about freeing it from compulsions that do not belong to the moment at hand.

The element associated with the throat chakra is space. Not empty space, but functional space — the openness that allows movement, resonance, and pause.

Space is what makes sound possible. Without space, there is pressure. Without space, vibration collapses into noise. Developmentally, space appears when the self no longer needs to fill every silence, justify every position, or speak in order to secure its own existence. The presence of space in the throat allows speech to emerge when it is needed — and just as importantly, allows silence to remain intact when it is not.

Purification, then, is not the act of saying more true things. It is the capacity to say fewer unnecessary ones.

As the heart establishes care and conscience, the throat becomes the place where that orientation is tested. Can truth move through without being recruited for advantage? Can expression occur without self-inflation? Can silence be tolerated without anxiety?

Vishuddha develops when space is trusted. Only then can voice function as an instrument of responsibility rather than a tool for reaction.

If the heart is the fulcrum of ethical adulthood, the throat is where that orientation becomes manifest. It becomes visible in writing and audible as speech.

The throat chakra governs voice, expression, and communication — but not in the way it is often described. This is not the center of self-expression, authenticity-as-performance, or the right to be heard at all costs. Developmentally, the throat is not about saying whatever one feels. It is about the capacity to speak — and to remain silent — while in right relationship with reality.

Once the heart comes online, something fundamental changes: speech is no longer neutral. Words carry consequence. Voice becomes an instrument that can clarify or distort, heal or harm, connect or dominate. The question is no longer "Can I speak?" but "What does this moment call for me to say — if anything at all?"

The lower triangle uses voice to secure safety, status, and advantage. It argues, persuades, performs, defends, explains, and asserts. None of this is wrong; it is effective and functional. But when voice remains organized solely around survival and identity, it inevitably becomes strategic. Speech is shaped to win, to protect, or to control outcomes.

I assert that the heart interrupts that logic. The heart teaches that care, relationship, and conscience each have a place in the equation. And with that interruption, voice must reorganize.

The throat chakra develops as the capacity to let truth take precedence over self-protection.

To let restraint take precedence over displays of importance. It is the ability to speak without inflating the self, to listen without preparing a rebuttal, and to allow silence without experiencing it as erasure.

This is where integrity becomes legible.

A developed throat does not speak more often. It speaks more accurately. It knows the difference between truth and performance, between disclosure and dumping, between naming reality and recruiting agreement. It understands that not every insight needs to be shared, not every emotion needs to be voiced, and not every truth needs to be spoken immediately — or publicly.

What follows is not a guide to finding your voice, but to becoming accountable for it.

A brief word about those who speak or write for a living in matters of spirituality— and about those who dominate conversation in an area of expertise in everyday life.

A highly active throat is not the same as a developed throat. People who speak constantly are often responding to intolerance of space, not freedom within it. Silence feels dangerous. Pauses feel like disappearance. Speech becomes a way to regulate anxiety, assert existence, or stay ahead of discomfort.

A developed throat does not need to prove its presence through volume or depth. It trusts space enough to let words arrive only when they belong.

There is another pattern worth naming, though it requires restraint. Some figures appear to have an extraordinarily open throat: vast output, endless speech, prolific teaching, constant transmission. From the outside, this can look like clarity, illumination, or spiritual authority. We really tend to focus on these types of people, because they draw attention to themselves in effective ways.

But volume alone tells us nothing about purification. An unfiltered channel can carry distortion just as efficiently as truth. A wide passageway is not necessarily a clear one.

This doesn't mean that we assign blanket disapproval. We use discernment about what we are hearing—the flip side of the throat is being able to discern the truth about what we are hearing. A difficult question arises at this stage of development: must the vessel be pure for the teaching to be valid?

Humans tend to swing to extremes. One extreme says, "If the message is valuable, the messenger doesn't matter." The other says, "If the messenger is flawed, the message must be rejected." Both positions are psychologically comforting because they eliminate the burden of ongoing judgment. Ethical adulthood does not permit either shortcut.

It is possible to learn something true from a person whose life is disordered, compromised, or even corrupt. Reality is not so fragile that truth disappears when spoken by imperfect mouths. But it is equally true that repeated exposure to distortion — especially when accompanied by charisma, authority, or institutional power — can gradually erode discernment if we stop evaluating what we hear.

The mature stance is neither devotion nor wholesale rejection. It is selective permeability: allowing what is true to pass through, refusing what is not, and never outsourcing responsibility for one's judgment to the teacher, the lineage, or the institution.

(These are lessons that are difficult to learn. We rarely get the opportunity to join a good cult, and then get the news the cult is not good after all. It's much easier to just start off with Jesus, for instance, who is a flawless teacher and cannot become corrupted. That kind of certainty can feel like real relief in this world. Except this: what Jesus taught was that certainty is not actually as available as it looks. But I digress.)

It is not only possible but likely that insight or altered states of consciousness can bypass ethical filtration.

When this happens, teachings are not integrated through responsibility. Meaning pours out faster than it can be metabolized. The result may look like openness, but functions more like leakage. We see this when an individual speaks so much as to produce a mountain of material in a lifetime, or speaks so much as to fill rooms with speeches that if added up would amount to thousands and thousands of hours of material.

Not every prolific teacher fits this pattern, but the pattern is recognizable. In these cases, the throat is not purified — it is overrun. (Perhaps this is why Jesus wrote nothing down, nor did he give lectures all that much. Clear throat chakra.)

The final part of purification is the determination that one is finished with lying. Distorting the truth, even slightly, becomes unavailable to the clear seeing of this developmental stage.

Each distortion we present as truth appears inconsequential when viewed in isolation. But over time, these distortions accumulate in our psyche. We literally become confused when hearing lies and truth together, and we do not believe we can reliably discern which is which anymore. We outsource our ability to navigate reality. And reality then becomes something to be managed rather than merely met and dealt with honestly.

And if caught in a web of lies of our own making, we must now remember what was said to whom, maintain coherence across contradictions, and protect the structure of the lie. We will be exhausted by this. And this can be where the biggest mistakes of one's life show up.

These lessons are always painful, and it is only the realization that one was a) hooked into believing a lie and took action without

discernment or b) responsible for a lie that distorted or damaged a life, that one realizes the excruciating truth: telling the truth and discerning the truth are part and parcel of the same energy center.

Finally, a word about ethical relationships. The throat is where rupture and repair occur. Harm is rarely caused by inner states alone; it is caused by what is said, not said, misrepresented, or withheld. Repair, likewise, does not happen silently. It requires naming, listening, clarifying, and, often, apologizing.

Ethical adulthood depends on this capacity. Without it, relationships fracture and never mend. With it, even serious harm can be addressed, integrated, and transformed. The throat is not where we avoid conflict — it is where we learn to stay present within it.

When voice becomes reliable, perception can begin to clarify. Only then does the work of vision truly begin.

Ajna — Vision and Clear Seeing

In many traditional teachings, the Ajna chakra — often called the "third eye" — is associated with intuition, psychic perception, or unusual ways of knowing. Some traditions describe special abilities, sometimes called siddhis, that may appear as a person's attention becomes more focused and steady. Whether these abilities exist, and how they work, is still debated and not something we can measure in a shared way across cultures.

More importantly, unusual perception is not the same thing as maturity. A person might have strong intuition, vivid inner imagery, or moments of deep insight and still struggle to make wise decisions, maintain honest relationships, or take responsibility for their actions. For this reason, extraordinary experiences are not reliable signs of

development — development in the way this paper tries to describe: the emergence of mature, ethical adulthood.

From a developmental perspective, Ajna is about something simpler and more practical: learning to see clearly. If the throat asks us to speak truthfully, Ajna asks us to perceive truthfully — the gradual reduction of self-deception that allows perception to align more closely with reality.

Clear seeing means noticing what is actually happening inside your own mind — your fears, beliefs, habits, and emotional reactions — without immediately assuming they are true.

It means recognizing when you are reacting from old conditioning rather than responding to the present moment. Over time, this awareness also extends outward. You begin to see people, situations, and systems more realistically: what is working, what is not, what is honest, and what is not.

This kind of vision is not dramatic. It usually does not feel mystical. It feels quiet. But it changes how a person lives. When perception becomes clearer, it becomes harder to lie to yourself, harder to pretend not to know when something is harmful, and harder to justify actions that go against what you understand to be true.

Ajna, then, is not mainly about supernatural sight. It is about the growing ability to look at reality — both inner and outer — without needing it to match your preferences. As this capacity develops, behavior naturally begins to shift. Decisions become less reactive. Responsibility increases. Ethical adulthood deepens, not because someone tells you what is right, but because you can see more clearly what your actions create.

Karma becomes not a mystical or tit-for-tat accounting of life, but a deep understanding of how things actually work. When the direction of our attention quietly becomes the direction of a life, we become far more careful about what we attend to — and how we attend to it.

When perception becomes less distorted, the sense of self built around defending those distortions begins to loosen. The question is no longer "What do I see?" but "Who is the one who needs to be at the center of what is seen?"

This is where the work of Crown begins.

Crown Chakra: The End of Psychological Centrality

Let's zoom out before we enter the destination that is the final chakra I'll address. There are different chakra systems, some have different numbers, but the 7-chakra system works well for me for this endeavor. Let's look at the developmental arc for this framework so far:

LOWER TRIANGLE – BECOME A FUNCTIONAL HUMAN

- survive
- form identity
- develop agency and power

HEART – CARE ENTERS THE SYSTEM

- conscience
- responsibility to others
- ethical adulthood begins

THROAT – TRANSMISSION BECOMES ACCOUNTABLE

- truthfulness
- repair
- responsibility for impact

AJNA — PERCEPTION BECOMES CLEARER

- reduction of self-deception
- tolerance for uncertainty
- insight grounded in reality

Crown, then, cannot logically be:

- fireworks
- transcendence
- enlightenment as achievement
- "leaving the world"

It becomes something far quieter and more radical:
The end of psychological centrality.

Not the disappearance of the self, but the quiet collapse of the belief that the self is the organizing center of reality.

When Crown unfolds developmentally rather than mythically, a few things begin to shift.

The compulsion to control meaning relaxes. Life is no longer experienced primarily as something happening to me. Experience is allowed to be larger than personal narratives. Action still occurs, responsibility still remains, but the sense that "I am the one holding the universe together" begins to soften.

Another way to say it: if Ajna is seeing clearly, Crown is no longer needing to be the one who owns the seeing.

This is why, in a developmental model, Crown often looks very ordinary from the outside. People still work, teach, raise children, pay taxes, argue, apologize, create art, and make mistakes. The difference is internal — less grasping, less self-inflation, less defensive certainty,

and a growing comfort with the fact that reality does not revolve around one's identity project.

It is not union as mystical drama, but the recognition that separation was never as absolute as the ego required it to be.

Crown development can feel like a release of pressure: no longer trying to perfect the self, no longer trying to control the world, no longer trying to secure permanent certainty. Instead, life is characterized more by living responsibly, acting with care, perceiving clearly, and allowing existence to be larger than the story of "Me."

That is how I view the work of developing the chakras as a yoga teacher.

My deepest thanks to my husband, Michael, Eckhart Tolle, Adyashanti, and my parents for the inspiration to write this essay.

Peace.