

## Manipura Chakra

Manipura Chakra is generally represented as yellow, ten-petalled lotus situated at the belly. 'Mani' means 'jewel' and 'pura' implies a city (think of Jodhpur, Gorakhpur, Jaipur, ...). Thus 'Manipura' could be interpreted as 'the city of jewels.' The Kubjikamatantra text (9/10<sup>th</sup> century) describes it as being situated at the navel, though other (later) texts may place it at the solar plexus. Sometimes Manipura is called 'nabhi' chakra – 'nabhi' meaning 'navel'. In any case, we can certainly attribute to Manipura chakra the whole of the abdominal region, with the navel at the centre.

It is associated with the element of fire, and fire is associated with the energy of transformation. It is within the abdominal region that our digestive tract processes our food, extracting nutrients to sustain us and rejecting that which we don't need. The transformation of food into energy needs the heat of the body, involving natural alchemy.

The sense of sight is associated with this chakra, and the eyes are said to be illuminated by the fire in the belly. Certainly our health is reflected in the eyes: bright-eyed, we are eager, energetic and creative; dull-eyed we are listless and weak. As at least 70% of our immune system is situated in the digestive tract, the pursuit of a healthy, nourishing diet will stimulate our life-force and light up our eyes with inner fire.

From the oesophagus to the anus, the digestive tract also hosts the enteric nervous system – a network of neurons which connect with both the brain in our skull via the vagus nerve and with the friendly bacteria which comprise our 'gut flora.' We are aware of the neurotransmitters in our gut when we talk of 'having a gut feeling' or 'having butterflies in the stomach'; but the stomach does not only report to our brain what we feel on an instinctive level – we can actually change our reactions to the world around us through what we eat. A poor diet of processed junk food, refined sugar and flour etc. will result not only in indigestion but also depression, mood swings and social anxiety.<sup>1</sup> New research reveals a strong psycho-physical connection between our digestive tract and our brain.

Manipura Chakra is associated with our standing in the empirical world. It is here that the creativity generated in Svadhithana chakra becomes manifest. Our self-reliance, personal power and autonomy are rooted here – as well as that which prevents us from manifesting our creativity. If we want to take our place in society, certain compromises must be made. Civic

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-fallible-mind/201701/the-pit-in-your-stomach-is-actually-your-second-brain> (accessed 1.7.'20)

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duty, rather than personal desire, takes precedence. Personal sacrifices need be made for the common good; sometimes this is advantageous, sometimes not. If we repress vital parts of our psyche in order to pursue a prestigious public role we may grow in social stature and wealth but may also become severed from whom we truly are. Neglected aspects ourselves can accumulate and smoulder in darkness, sometimes erupting as bursts of anger and depression.

This chakra is a tricky one to transcend; many (most) people never go beyond an awareness of their public role and how the world perceives them. This can of course go two ways: if one has been brought up to believe that one can do anything, then confidence and even over-confidence and arrogance can ensue. Conversely, it takes a very powerful strength of mind, body and spirit to overcome the psychological effects of having been neglected, put down or abused as a child. Psychological downsides range from abject drudgery to thoughtless delusions of unwarranted superiority.

Ignorance of our creative, dynamic inner self can lead to over-identification with the tangible fruits of our labours such as wealth and all that it can buy. This lopsided approach allows for the emergence of self-destructive habits such as drug addiction, alcoholism, anorexia, over-eating, unhealthy eating etc.. It may be that through the practice of yoga, meditation and conscious nutrition we can develop insight into who we truly are, and so build bridges between the inner and outer selves. It is up to us to channel and manifest our talents in a way that serves both our own spiritual growth and the public good. When we blame others for our own shortcomings we will never find our own power: this chakra is about taking responsibility – both within and without.

The Samgitaratnakara states that at Manipura chakra we may experience 'deep sleep, desire, envy, slander, shame, fear, compassion, stupor, impurity (and) anxiety, and it is the abode of the (prana called) sun.'<sup>2</sup>

The yantra, or geometric symbol, associated with this chakra is a downward-facing triangle, creating a firm foundation and the potential for upward dynamism. The animal often depicted here is a ram, whose forthright and downright insensitive characteristics exemplify the qualities of this chakra. When we need to break down an impossible barrier, a battering ram might be useful; but there may be other means ... meditation upon the cultivation of such qualities as sensitivity, altruism and generosity can help us break down the barriers around our own closed-mind-sets, allowing us to find creative solutions which will enhance our skills of communication and reduce anxiety.

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<sup>2</sup> Mallinson, James & Singleton, Mark (2017) Roots of Yoga, Penguin Books, p.207

## Practice

All practices which open the abdominal area are useful to create more physical space for digestion to work well, and Supta Baddha Konasana is particularly useful and can be done after eating. Back-bends will help create space between the tightly-packed organs of the abdomen, and twists will encourage more efficient peristalsis – the pumping action which sends the food through the digestive tract.

From the Vedas onwards we find references to how the `firesticks' of the pranic energy in the chest and the apanic energy in the pelvis rub together to form the fire at Samana – the prana present in the abdominal region. All pranayama will assist this process, and the techniques of mudra and bandha listed in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika are all geared towards capturing the prana in the abdominal region and directing it up the spine; the place of delivery is at the navel.

## How can we balance the Manipura Chakra?

People of a rajasic (fiery, active) nature have to beware of over-stimulating the fiery energy at Manipura when practising back-bends and twists: over-enthusiastic practice can lead to fiery outbreaks in mind and body. Often it is anger which bursts forth – and anger can create a fall-out which is very difficult to clear. For those of a fiery constitution, simply observing the rise and fall of the navel whilst breathing naturally and easily will go a long way towards balancing this chakra, and all back-bends need to be approached slowly and meditatively.

Tamasic people however – though they might be very happy to simply watch the rise and fall of the navel - will find their energy levels stimulated when they practice back-bends, twists and specific pranayamas. Working with this chakra demands that we know ourselves. It might be that we don't like what we find out – but nonetheless, a sincere examination will be very rewarding.

The following postures are generally cited as being useful for `activating' this chakra:

- Bhujangasana (Cobra)
- Salabhasana (Locust)
- Dhanurasana (Bow)
- Ustrasana (Camel)
- Dvi Pada Pittham (Bridge)

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- Supta Baddha Konasana (Supine butterfly)
- Chakrasana/ Urdhva Dhanurasana (Crab)

Basic breathing is invaluable, as it brings us to a state of 'Svarodyaya Vijnana' – insight into our own body's constitution. This is echoed by Patanjali in the third chapter, when he recommends Samyama (the conflation of Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi) on Manipura Chakra:

'By samyama on the navel plexus, knowledge of the body's constitution is obtained.'<sup>3</sup>

The Shiva Samhita states that contemplation of Manipura Chakra 'conquers disease and death' and, moreover, acquires the ability to 'enter another's body, as well as to make gold, discover medical remedies, and locate hidden treasures.'<sup>4</sup>

It's probably best to disregard the practice of gate-crashing someone else's body (known as Utkranti) and the revelation of hidden treasure could be synonymous with discovering our own hitherto unrecognised talents. Self-knowledge is always invaluable.

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<sup>3</sup> Satchidananda, Swami (Translator) (1990) The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Integral Yoga Publications

<sup>4</sup> Feuerstein, Georg (1990) The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Yoga, Unwin Hyman Ltd.